

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not complete your reaping to the corner of your field. (19:9)

Before one may consider his crops to be his own, he must first discharge his obligations to others. *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, observes that, even at the closing moment of an entire growing season – after he has put in his time and effort, cultivated, planted, seeing to it that his crops have grown well and are ready for reaping – the produce still does not belong to him until he leaves *peah*, the corner of his field to the poor. They, too, must eat. This is how they sustain themselves. The obvious question is: Why not give them a check? One can estimate the value of a corner of his field and send his donation or give the check to a poor man whom he knows.

Horav Aharon Bakst, zl (Rav of Shavel, Lithuania), explains this with a practical analogy. A mother becomes upset with her son. As a result, she sends him dinner through his brother. Obviously, being rejected by his mother and having to receive his meal via his brother adds to his pain. Likewise, the poor man is already challenged by his lack of material assets. Owning land, having an address, is part of one's identity. This man's identity has been impaired due to his economic straits. Why make matters worse by giving him a *tzedakah* check? Let him have a sense of independence by gathering his few crops from "his" corner of the field.

Alternatively, *Horav Leib Bakst, zl* (Rosh Yeshivah Detroit), cites the *Alter, zl, m'Slabodka*, who explains *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, "Love your fellow as yourself" in a novel manner. By nature, people show increased sensitivity (and even love) toward someone who is dealing with adversity – be it illness, economic issues, family challenges. This man is not *kamocha*, like him, so it is commendable to reach out to him. When it involves someone of my own social/financial strata, however, the rules suddenly change. I have no interest in "loving" him. This attitude undermines the mandate of *kamocha*, like yourself. Just because he is – indeed, especially because he is – like yourself, you must show love to him. Condescending love is not love. It is ego enhancement. Thus, the Torah instructs us to leave *peah* to the poor man. Do not get involved with the giving. Get out of the picture. Your presence demeans the act of giving.

Who (from my generation) does not remember *Reb Chaim Gelb, zl*, the one-man *chesed* institution? A fixture at every wedding, he went collecting pennies to dollars to support the many poor people and institutions on his ever-growing list. He was a baker in Williamsburg, who gave away every penny that he did not need to others who did. He was a powerhouse of goodwill, fiercely devoted to those whose circumstances were unfortunate. He was sensitive, not only to those whom he benefitted, but to the benefactors as well. If he felt that one was giving too much, or that he needed the money for himself, he refused to accept it. He certainly did not shame anyone into giving.

A prominent caterer would regularly contribute to *Reb Chaim's* causes. The size of his contribution, which was generous, always stayed the same. When he got married, he met *Reb*

Chaim who wished him a hearty *mazel tov*. In return, the man wrote out his usual check. *Reb* Chaim asked, "Now that you are married (with greater expenses), do you think that you can afford so much?" Only after the caterer reassured *Reb* Chaim that he could afford it, did *Reb* Chaim accept his check. He also understood that people can suddenly become passionate about giving and give more than they could afford. He always made certain that the giver was up to giving before he accepted his support.

His sensitivity to the feelings of the poor was legend. *Reb* Chaim's home was an open house to the poor people who knew that the Gelbs would provide food and lodging whenever they needed it. (His wife Henna was an active participant and partner in his every endeavor. Sadly, she passed away at a young age). Over the years, many of these unfortunates became like members of the family. They were present more often than not, and everyone engaged them in conversation as if they belonged there (which they did). No one ever viewed them as indigents waiting for a meal. *Reb* Chaim and Henna treated them like any other good friends of the family.

It was only understandable that when the Gelb's daughter got married their extended "family" be on the guest list. When the family made the seating arrangements, they did not seat these people with the many regular guests, to whom they were strangers and with whom they might not feel comfortable. (Imagine being asked, "What do you do for a living? What business are you in?") Instead, they placed them at the head table with the *chassan/kallah* and other members of the family, with whom they would feel at home. This way, they could enjoy the wedding and not feel self-conscious. To *Reb* Chaim, no distinction existed between Jews. We are all family.