

Chapter Six

Disguised as a Loan**Where Will They Get Dollars to Repay?**

The Rambam writes, “When a poor man does not want to accept charity, then one should deceive him and give it to him as a loan” (*Matnos Aniym* 7:39).

This lofty way of *chessed* was one that Reb Shmuel excelled in. The idea to establish a *gemach* filled his heart with joy. He could perform *chessed* with the poor in a way that would veil his true objective of giving. Instead of directly giving sums of money, he could lend it. If they would be able to, they would return it, and if not, they simply would not.

The *gemach*, based in his home, lent out large sums of money even to people who he did not know. He never asked for guarantors or security. His sharp and experienced intuition was enough for him to discern if the petitioner was a swindler and a fraud or if he was genuinely needy. If the latter was the case, then he could trust the person without guarantors, because the objective was to give.

During that time, the dollar was much stronger than the shekel, and the shekel’s value was constantly declining. The *gemach* operated with shekels, so that the borrower could benefit from the reduced value of the shekel.

As inflation in Israel raged out of control, and the value of the

shekel declined sharply every day, he was advised to lend dollars instead of shekels.

“And do my borrowers have money to buy dollars with which to repay the loan?” he asked.

Borrowing with No Intention to Repay

Rabbi Berish Labin, the executive director of Vizhnitz Institutions (5737–5750/1977–1990) related:

One day, a Yid came and asked for a loan. He wanted a huge sum of money, 20,000 liras. I knew very well that he could not repay the loan. When I realized that Reb Shmuel was planning to lend him the sum, I whispered to him, “I don’t think this man will repay the loan.”

“It makes no difference to me if he returns it or not,” Reb Shmuel whispered in return. He knew the truth — the man would not return it, but he gave it anyway, because ultimately, the *gemach* was just a dignified way of giving.

Hundreds of Thousands of Liras — with No Intention of Being Repaid

Rabbi Yona Fuchs related:

An older *bachur* who lived in the Neve Achiezer neighborhood asked Reb Shmuel for a loan of several hundred liras for an airline ticket. Reb Shmuel gave it to him graciously, and even added some pocket money!

Some time later, my father, who was involved in the matter, asked Reb Shmuel, “When will that *bachur* give you back the money he owes?”

Reb Shmuel did not look concerned. “People owe me hundreds of thousands of liras that I do not expect to be repaid,” he said.

What Did He Do When Someone Didn’t Pay?

No borrower was harassed or pursued to repay a debt. When some-



Reb Shmuel, speaking

one did not pay, Reb Shmuel was happy that he was able to fulfill the mitzvah of *tzedakah* with dignity.

“Reb Shmuel had a package of checks that had no coverage from people who owed money to the *gemach*, but he didn’t do anything with them,” Reb Benzion Weiler related.

Reb Yaakov Werdikovsky further related:

“I was once in his office, and I could not open the drawer because it was so full of checks from the *gemach* that could not be covered.”

***Tzedakah* Disguised as a Loan**

Harav Aryeh Tobias, a member of the Badatz of Kiryat Vizhnitz, related what he heard from his father-in-law, Harav Mordechai Zalman Vizhnitzer, Rosh Kollel of Antiniya:

Whenever there was financial trouble, Rabbi Dov Welcher, the director of the *kollel*, knew to whom to turn — Reb Shmuel Daskal.

Of course, after a few financial crises, he was embarrassed to again ask Reb Shmuel for a donation to the *kollel*.

One day, Rabbi Welcher contacted me, explaining that he was at a loss for ideas. "What can we do? We have not paid stipends in months! Reb Shmuel has already made up for the shortfall several times. Can we always ask the same person?"

I suggested that he approach Reb Shmuel and ask for a loan for the *kollel* until we would be able to obtain money from another source.

"This time, I came to ask for a loan," Rabbi Welcher told Reb Shmuel. "We need 10,000 liras."

"If that's the case, then it's much easier to give," Reb Shmuel replied. He willingly gave the loan, and Rabbi Welcher felt at ease.

We immediately began to look for donors to help us pay back the loan. We invested a lot of effort and finally amassed the sum needed. "I have the money to pay back the debt," Rabbi Welcher informed Reb Shmuel.

"Debt? I never gave you a loan. My intention was that it be *tzedakah*," Reb Shmuel replied.

I Didn't Give You a Loan!

A Vizhnitzer *chassid* from London shared his personal story with one of Reb Shmuel's sons-in-law, Reb Yitzchak Zeideh, the executive director of Vizhnitz Institutions in Bnei Brak:

When I came to visit Israel, I brought with me a sum of money that I would need for my stay, but I miscalculated and didn't bring enough. The idea entered my mind that I could ask your father-in-law for a loan.

I approached Reb Shmuel, "In a few days, my friend will be coming from London. Can you lend me money until then? It would really help me out." He took \$2,000 out of his pocket and gave it to me.

A few days passed, and the friend from England arrived. "I have the money to repay the loan," I told Reb Shmuel over the phone.

Reb Shmuel took me by surprise when he said, "I didn't give you a loan." I was stunned.

Reb Shmuel knew that I was having financial trouble, and the gift

that he gave me rejuvenated me, especially since at the time I'd received the money, I thought it was going to be a loan.

A Loan without Asking

A similar story happened to Reb Chaim, who lived in America. He told it to Reb Shmuel's son-in-law, Reb Moshe Yosef Rosner:

One day, I met your father-in-law at the Bourse, and he noticed that I was downcast.

"What happened?" he asked.

"A Yid gave me \$3,000 to bring from America to Israel. I have misplaced the money and I'm very agitated about it," I told him.

"Don't worry," he soothed me. "In the end, the lost money will be found."

When I returned to my lodgings, I was surprised to discover an envelope with \$3,000. On the envelope was written, "a loan until the money is found."

Tzedakah at Nichum Aveilim

A relative told Reb Shmuel's son-in-law, Reb Moshe Yosef Rosner:

A family in the Neve Achiezer neighborhood was sitting *shivah* for their sister, a little girl who had suffered through a severe illness. A pall of sadness hung over the house.

Reb Shmuel knew that the father of the family had been frequently absent from work to help care for his sick daughter.

When he came to be *menachem avel*, he turned to the bereaved father and said, "I want to speak to you privately." They went off to a side room, and after they spoke, the father returned to where the rest of the family was sitting, and he looked relieved and noticeably calmer.

After some time, that man revealed to me what the discussion had been. Reb Shmuel had gently told him, "You're probably left with plenty of debt because of your daughter's illness. I have four thousand dollars for you to cover your expenses."

It was a colossal sum. “I don’t want to rely on the handouts of other people,” the father replied.

“Oh, it’s not *tzedakah*,” Reb Shmuel said. “I’m giving you the money as a loan. When you can return it, you will; if you are *chalilah* not able to, then I wholeheartedly forgive you.”

All at once, a heavy stone rolled off the father’s heart. The debts that had been weighing on his mind were suddenly no longer!

These are the practical ways how Reb Shmuel implemented the words of the Rambam, “One should deceive him and give it to him as a loan.”

Sometimes, it was necessary to cloak the giving in another way, as described in later chapters.