

Chapter Five

Empathizing with the Recipient

Maskil El Dal

It's human nature to find it difficult to see out of one's narrow worldview and take another person's needs into consideration; it's even harder to really feel the intensity of another's pain. Someone who merits this level has reached the essence of a "*maskil el dal*," understanding and feeling with a poor person.

Reb Shmuel's greatest pleasure was to give to another person while maintaining the dignity of the recipient so that he shouldn't feel degraded by being needy. Reb Shmuel himself was unable to accept a favor from another person. Since the thought of being needy was the hardest and most painful concept for him, he was able to sense the discomfort of the recipient, and made every effort to give the feeling that the recipient was the giver — because the recipient was giving him the *zechus* of doing a mitzvah.

Anyone Who Didn't Know Him Wouldn't Believe It

Reb Leib Ber Shimonowitz from Kiryat Vizhnitz nostalgically recalled:

Reb Shmuel reached exceptionally rare levels in the merit of his ability to feel with another person.

He felt the pain of the poor people even more acutely than they

themselves felt it. When someone turned to him for help, there was no need to speak and explain or plead. He immediately connected to the person, and understood what he was lacking.

Similar to his remarkable skill and talent to estimate the hidden value of a diamond, Reb Shmuel was blessed with special intuition to sense what was concealed in the heart of a petitioner: shame, neediness, a desire to cover up the reality, pain, distress, or anything similar.

I cannot possibly think of a way to convey the concept of “Reb Shmuel Daskal!” Anyone who didn’t know him would not be able to believe that such a person existed.



Reb Shmuel

What Is the Secret?

Harav Eliezer Mayerowitz, a Rav in Kiryat Vizhnitz, related:

A young girl knocked at Reb Shmuel’s door. Her father had asked Reb Shmuel for a loan, and Reb Shmuel replied that he should send a child to pick up the money. The father sent his daughter, but did not tell her the nature of the errand.

After some time, the man asked Reb Shmuel for a loan again, and after the latter agreed, he sent his daughter to get the envelope. This happened several more times.

The girl was very curious, what was the secret? What was the reason for the constant interaction between her father and Reb Shmuel Daskal?

Once, when Reb Shmuel gave her the envelope, he told her, “*B’ezeras Hashem, slowly, slowly, I’ll return it all...*” Her heart soared as she thought, *My father lent money to Reb Shmuel Daskal and he’s returning it in installments!*

Many years later, she found out how considerate Reb Shmuel had been of her feelings. He didn't consider it beneath his dignity that someone should think that he, Reb Shmuel Daskal, needed to borrow money from her father.

Natural Intuition

Reb Yona Fuchs of Kiryat Vizhnitz related:

Reb Shmuel would immediately, with his natural sense, pick up on whether the person in front of him was needy. One day, he was standing and speaking to me in his house on Rechov Saadya Gaon.

Suddenly, a woman arrived and burst into heavy weeping, crying about her grim financial situation. Reb Shmuel stuck his hand into his pocket, pulled out a wad of cash, removed a large percentage of the bills, and without counting, handed them over to the woman. It must have been a huge sum; only a few bills remained in the bundle.

When she left, I asked him, "How did you give her such a big sum? Do you really believe her stories?"

"I sensed that she was speaking from the heart," was his sensitive reply.

Apologizing to the Petitioner

Harav Kasriel Fried, a *maggid shiur* in Yeshivas Vizhnitz, related:

A man left Reb Shmuel's home with a hurt look on his face. He had just asked for a donation, and as was his habit, Reb Shmuel had given him a large sum. But for some reason, the man was offended because he had not received the amount he had expected. He had returned the money and left the house.

Instead of Reb Shmuel becoming offended at the insult, he felt very bad. He sympathized with the feelings of the needy person and thought that maybe he actually didn't give him an appropriate sum.

Reb Shmuel didn't hesitate. He ran out of the house, chased after the man, and doubled his donation.

Reb Shlomo Levin, executive director of Karlin Institutions, who lived near Reb Shmuel's home, related:

Often, I saw Reb Shmuel apologizing to poor people; perhaps he hadn't given them enough!

Tears in the Stairwell

The stairwell of Reb Shmuel's home on Rechov Saadya Gaon was a site where many tears were discreetly shed. It also witnessed many a tearful face light up, and become infused with new hope for another chance in life.

Sometimes, there were additional witnesses to the life stories that unfolded in the stairwell. The director of Selah (Seminar Lelimudei Hayahadut), Rabbi Yechezkel Shain, a neighbor on the same block, once noticed an unfamiliar Yid standing on the stairs and sobbing.

"What happened?" Rabbi Shain asked.

The man wiped his tears and related that his wife had passed away and he needed a lot of money to purchase a *matzeivah*, but he was poverty stricken and could not afford the crushing expense. He'd come to Reb Shmuel and asked for help. Reb Shmuel unhesitatingly covered the entire cost of the *matzeivah*, and moreover, was the first person to offer him encouragement after his personal calamity.

"I'm crying tears of joy and tears of admiration. I do not know what to think..." The man's tears just kept flowing...



The house on Rechov Saadya Gaon

I Envy Reb Mendel

Often, when a Yid did not repay a loan, not only did Reb Shmuel not get angry at him, he understood that the borrower must surely be in distress and perhaps he needed another loan. He drew his inspira-

tion from the Rebbe, the Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz, who would speak about one of the *chassidim* of the Tzemach Tzaddik of Vizhnitz:

In the mid-1800s, Rav Mendel Komanshter owned a successful and thriving retail store, which netted him generous profits. The owners of smaller stores would come to buy from him on credit, and Reb Mendel recorded the amounts that each one owed.

Among the buyers were also poor Jews who could barely eke out their daily bread and were unable to pay their debts. They were ashamed to return to the store and tried to avoid Reb Mendel.

Reb Mendel came up with an innovative idea. Around Yom Tov time, when all the *chassidim* met in the Rebbe's court, he would turn to a customer and chide him, "I was thinking about you, my friend! You took merchandise from my store on credit and did not yet have a chance to pay for it. And now you're going to buy from a different merchant so I'll be losing you as a customer? Rather than switching, you can continue buying more merchandise from me, and when things are looking better for you, you'll pay what you owe."

The Yid would feel a deep sense of relief. He'd feel comfortable shopping by Reb Mendel, and even felt like he was doing the store owner a favor by not purchasing from a different merchant. If another period of time had passed and the man still could not pay, Reb Mendel would address him with feigned anger. "You still haven't paid, and therefore, you have to bring me a note signed by family members or relatives!"

The man would hurry and bring the note, and felt at ease. He had signed a promissory note like a businessman, he was not just taking *tzedakah!* *B'ezras Hashem*, one day he would have the means to repay the entire debt. In this way, Reb Mendel collected a considerable pile of notes from people who were unable to repay their debts.



The *matzeivah* of the chassid Reb Mendel Komanshter in the cemetery in Shotz

Then came Erev Pesach.

“Each year, as the *matzos mitzvah* baked in the oven, Reb Mendel simply burned the packet of notes. I envy Reb Mendel, who merits to eat a *kezayis* of such matzah,” the Tzemach Tzaddik would say.

“Reb Shmuel followed the ways of Reb Mendel,” Reb Leib Ber Shimonowitz of Kiryat Vizhnitz explained. “There were three pillars of *chessed* in Vizhnitz over the years. Reb Mendel Komanshter, Reb Yudel Eber Rosenberg, and Reb Shmuel Daskal,” he concluded.

No Need to Avoid Me

Harav Asher Frankel related this remarkable story:

Reb Shmuel had aspirations like the *chassidim* of yore.

A *rosh kollel* once asked Reb Shmuel for a loan for the *kollel*. However, when the loan came due, he did not have the means to repay it.

After some time, the *rosh kollel* noticed Reb Shmuel at a friend’s wedding. He slipped away, feeling overcome with shame. *I didn’t return the loan and I hope Reb Shmuel won’t notice me and demand the money back*, he thought to himself.

But Reb Shmuel did notice the man and realized his efforts to avoid him. He approached the *rosh kollel* and asked “And what do you do when the time comes to repay a loan and you don’t have the money?”

“What do I do now?” the man thought in panic. “Why did I cause pain to a dear Yid like Reb Shmuel Daskal? Is it not a *chillul Hashem* for a person like me not to repay a debt on time?”

These thoughts flashed through his mind, but it took a mere moment for the whole situation to be turned around. Reb Shmuel finished his words with a smile and good cheer. “If you can’t repay the loan, you ask for another loan!”

The *rosh kollel* was so dumbfounded, he did not know how to react. His admiration grew when Reb Shmuel granted him another loan, which helped him set the *kollel* on firmer financial footing. He learned that not only was it impossible to avoid Reb Shmuel — it was also not necessary!

Baruch, Forget About It

Rabbi Baruch Welcher, the deputy director of the Vizhnitz Institutions (5739–5751/1979–1991), related:

Reb Shmuel lent a person \$100,000, and I signed on the loan as a guarantor. Regretfully, the borrower encountered difficulties and was



Reb Shmuel standing behind the Vizhnitzer Rebbe,
with Reb Baruch Welcher

unable to pay. I was at a loss since I did not have the means to repay the loan. I thought of asking Reb Shmuel to forego the money, but I was ashamed. How could I ask someone to forfeit such a staggering amount?

After that, I tried my best not to meet him. I wasn't yet the deputy director of Vizhnitz Institutions. I lived on Rechov HaGra in Bnei Brak and only met Reb Shmuel on rare occasions. I made sure never to be alone with him.

But finally, he caught up with me. He approached me and took me to the side. My heart began to pound. What could I tell him? He turned to me with a warm smile, took out the document that I had signed, and in front of my eyes, tore it up. Then he said to me, "Baruch, forget about it!"

He didn't wait for me to embarrass myself by asking forgiveness.

He felt what was in my heart, and with his unparalleled greatness and wisdom, he canceled the debt.

It's Not My Money

Reb Yitzchak Ungar, a musical composer in Vizhnitz, related:

An orphaned *bachur* lived in our neighborhood. Having no means of support, he had to turn to Reb Shmuel and borrow money for his wedding expenses.

Reb Shmuel lent him \$500 (a huge sum in those days). Some time later, the young man came to return the money. "I'm not taking it," Reb Shmuel declared. He explained, "Look, the money wasn't mine. I work in exporting diamonds abroad, an industry that the State of Israel greatly encourages. The manufacturers who export merchandise bring revenue for the state and contribute towards the employment of workers in Israel. Therefore, with every delivery, they receive from the authorities a sum of money as a grant. This money is not mine. It is designated for distribution."

The young *chassan* was relieved at the explanation.

In this way, Reb Shmuel was able to ease the path for a needy person and to give him the feeling that he was not taking *tzedakah*, but rather simply receiving money that was designated solely for distribution.

Another Person's Pleasure Was His Enjoyment

Reb Mendel Einhorn of Neve Achiezer related:

I asked Reb Shmuel to lend me 1,000 liras because I wanted to purchase a car.

"Which car?" Reb Shmuel inquired.

"A Susita," I named the cheapest and simplest model at the time.

"You're asking for a loan for a horse and buggy?" Reb Shmuel asked, surprised. "If you're already doing it, do it right and buy a good car! I'll give you the loan."

Reb Shmuel wanted the best for me, more than what I dared want for myself, and I had no choice but to purchase a good, late model car.

The Giver Is the Recipient

Reb Shmuel exuded the sense of it being a privilege to give, and it went from the depths of his heart straight to the hearts of the recipients.

Harav Mordechai Mann, Rosh Yeshivas Beis Hillel, related:

I occasionally went to Reb Shmuel for money to support the yeshivah. Each time anew, I was astonished by the warm emotions that he displayed to me, at his joy in giving. He made it seem as if he was the recipient, as if I was granting him the privilege to give! I had never encountered such a thing in my life.

Many people expressed similar sentiments. Reb Shmuel acted like a recipient, not a giver.



The cornerstone laying for Yeshivas Bais Hillel in Kiryat Vizhnitz, Bnei Brak. Speaking is the Rosh Yeshivah, Harav Hillel Vitkind. To his left is Harav Simcha Zissel Broide, Rosh Yeshivas Chevron. To his right: Harav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevezh; Harav Aharon Katz, Rosh Yeshivas Lomza Petach Tikva; an unidentified Rav; and the Yeshuos Moshe of Vizhnitz. Sitting across from them: Harav Elazar Menachem Shach, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevezh, and Harav Chaim Shaul Karelitz.

He Withstood the Test of Wealth

Harav Menachem Mendel Mendelson, the Rav of Komemiyus, related:



Reb Shmuel withstood the test of wealth perfectly; there was almost no one like him. He did not make calculations, he just gave generously, with dignity and love. What was so special about him, beyond the huge sums of money that he gave, was that he invested all his energy and talents into helping people.

I Will Grow Up to Be Like Him!

Near the place where one of Reb Shmuel's daughters-in-law worked was a toy store. Often, she would marvel when she saw the owner of the store giving toys to poor people at lower prices. He seemed to derive a great deal of pleasure from giving.

The store owner once told her, "As a child, I attended boarding school at the Batei Avos institutions near Ponevezh, with other children who came from indigent families. Opposite the school lived a wealthy diamond dealer and his name was Reb Shmuel Daskal."

Mrs. Daskal remained quiet. She was very curious to hear what the man had to say about her father-in-law.

He continued. "Often, when he saw the children from the institution, he'd greet them with a broad, warm smile, and he'd give them ice pops and other treats. In addition to the sweets, he also gave them of his time and attention, with obvious affection and fondness.

"We felt that he was giving us his heart, we sensed that he cared about us. His warm smile and loving and caressing gaze were worth much more to us than the ice pops! Moreover, when we needed money for something specific, we always knew that Reb Shmuel was the address. He would listen to what we had on our minds like a compassionate father, and generously gave us what we lacked.

"His kindness touched the depths of my heart. I was amazed by the greatness of his soul, how he was able to focus on the fine points of a child's wishes and how to make him happy. I was captivated by his personality and I told myself that if Hashem would help me merit to establish my own home and have a comfortable *parnassah* — I would also become a philanthropist!"

A Large Loan Based on Intuition

Rabbi Yehoshua Cohen, a *mashgiach* in Yeshivas Vizhnitz, related:

I was once returning in a shared taxi van from Yerushalayim to Bnei Brak. Two people were sitting in front of me and I heard them talking about Reb Shmuel Daskal. My curiosity mounted and I mustered up the courage to ask, “How do you know Reb Shmuel?”

“I was a lone *bachur* in Yeshivas Ponevezh, with no support from my parents,” one of the men began his moving story. “When I got engaged, despite being overjoyed, I was at a loss because of the financial pressure. I had committed to giving 60,000 liras. I’d never before collected donations, and I wanted to get one large loan and be able to pay it off slowly, but every *gemach* only offered loans of very small amounts.

“One day, a friend said to me, ‘Near Ponevezh there is a *feine Yid*, Reb Shmuel Daskal. Share your troubles with him; he’ll realize that you’re honest and he’ll give you a big loan.’

“How can I ask from a person I don’t even know?” I retorted.

“He has very strong intuition. If he feels that the person standing before him is honest, he’ll be willing to lend large sums,’ my friend replied.

“Having no other feasible choice, I decided to try. I tremulously knocked at the door, and it was opened by a Jew with a broad smile and a warm ‘How can I help you?’

“I told him my personal story, and shared my great pain and emotional pressures. Finally, I named the sum that I needed. I davened that he’d lend me 5,000.

“Reb Shmuel heard the sum and remained silent as he took out



Ponevezh Yeshivah

a checkbook and began to write. When he finished, he gave me a signed check and asked, 'Is this enough?'

"The sum on the check was 30,000 liras! I was speechless. 'How many guarantors do you need?' I asked.

"'No need,' Reb Shmuel replied. 'You're the best guarantor.'

"I emerged from his house in a state of shock. Since then, the concept 'Reb Shmuel Daskal' has been deeply ingrained in my heart. He put me on my feet.

"And now you are asking where I know him from?" the man concluded his story.

A Loan to a Disabled Veteran

An army veteran who had been injured and disabled in one of Israel's wars yearned to own a car, but he could not afford to buy one.

"I heard about your father-in-law," this man told one of Reb Shmuel's sons-in-law, Reb Moshe Yosef Rosner. "I decided to take the chance and call him even though I didn't know him. I told him about my situation and how much I earn each month.

"Reb Shmuel didn't need any additional explanations and gave me a large loan to be able to purchase a car.

"I was amazed and touched. He sensed that I was telling the truth."

That was Reb Shmuel's personification, extremely attentive to the feelings of others, while displaying rare and remarkable sensitivity. He would combine his giving with emotional warmth and love for other people. The way he gave made an indelible impression on the recipients, and they didn't forget it for decades thereafter. It is from the testimonies of these people that this book has been created.