

“Money Matters”

Is it an obligation to lend money to another Jew, or is it merely an optional act of chesed?

The mitzvah of lending money to another Jew in need is a mitzvah chiyuvis, an obligatory mitzvah, similar to any other mitzvah in the Torah. One who has money that he could lend, and refuses a direct request to lend another Jew money, transgresses the mitzvah of im kesef talveh es ami, which Chazal interpret as an obligation on the lender.

One is exempt from the obligation to lend money only when the lender truly believes that he will not be repaid, either because he does not trust the borrower to pay back or because he does not believe it possible that the borrower will have the means with which to pay him back. Still, if he could assure himself of repayment by obtaining collateral from the borrower, he is required to do so and may not refuse the latter's direct request for a loan.

If a lender feels that he cannot lend money to a potential borrower because he does not trust him, may he avoid insulting him by telling him that he has no funds available?

In such a case, he may respond that he has no money to lend. The real meaning of his response is that he has no money to lend to him, which is a true statement and not considered a lie at all.

The same holds true when someone that you do not trust asks to borrow a car or any other item that you do not want to lend to him. You may say that the car is not available or you may use any other excuse which will not offend the person asking for the item. (*Daniel Neustadt, torah.org. For final rulings, consult your Rav.*)