

SICHA POEM

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Re'eh, Sicha 1

— By Rabbi Mottel Friedman, Coral Springs, FL

When a Jewish slave's term comes to an end, his master is commanded
That a severance gift, some extra money, to the slave should be handed
This mitzvah is found in our parsha, where the pasuk does say:
"You shall surely provide him with gifts" before you send your slave away

The Chinuch writes that even though today this mitzvah does not apply
We should act in the manner this mitzvah shows us, and make a rule whereby
Somebody whom we employed, when their employment is about to end
We should give them severance gifts, some extra money to spend

The Minchas Chinuch asks a question, he says Rambam clearly believes
That not every person who is a slave gets a gift when he leaves
It goes to a person who was a slave because the court forced him to be
But not to someone who became a slave voluntarily

Now if this law was established only out of concern for the slave
Or to teach the employer appreciation and show him how to behave
Then it wouldn't make a difference how the slavery came to be
Whether he chose to be a slave or the courts did it forcibly

But because there is a difference and there is a distinction we see
This implies it's not based on logic but it's a scriptural decree
It therefore applies only to the slave sold by the court
And not to a voluntary slave or worker of any other sort

The question is: Rambam holds this Torah decree gift applies only here
 While the Chinuch holds this logical gift is for employees everywhere
 Why would the Chinuch take a stance unlike Rambam's view
 When in general arguing with Rambam was something the Chinuch didn't do?

The explanation, says the Rebbe, lies in the severance pay
 And whether we call it payment for labor or it's a charity giveaway
 For if it's pay it's already unique since the slave's already paid his full share
 To say he should be paid a little more is a Torah chidush that applies only here

But if we look at the severance pay as a type of ethical charity
 Then this mitzvah applies to all types of workers and will not at all be a rarity
 The only worker to not get this gift is the one that Torah specifies
 And that's the slave who sold himself, to all others this gift applies

In Sefer Hamitzvos this law is placed right after the mitzvah of charity
 Which shows us that Rambam holds that this gift is mandated ethically
 And so the voluntary slave is the only exception, all others are gifted happily
 And now we see with clarity how the Chinuch and Rambam agree

On a deeper level a slave and his master serve as a metaphor
 For a teacher and student and it suggests that a teacher must do more
 Not only teach what he's obligated, instead raise his student to a "higher shelf"
 Elevating him to reach the level of perception and insight of the teacher himself

The same applies to when we meet Jews who don't know a lot
 We have a responsibility to make sure they're taught
 All they need to know but also gift them a yearning
 And try to elevate them to our own levels of learning

A practical lesson for employers can be gleaned from the above
 That charity gifts be given - as an act of love
 All employees and workers, the Rebbe recommends
 Should receive some charitable gift when their employment ends
