

PARSHIOT ACHAREI-KEDOSHIM, 2015, 5775  
“Respect For The Working People”

The Torah juxtaposes three Mitzvot which hardly seem connected. In 19:13-we have the Mitzvah of (a) “*LO TALIN PE’ULAT SACHIR*”, [You shall not withhold a workers wages with you until the morning]. Immediately following this Mitzvah, in 19:14- we read, (b)“*LO TEKALEL CHERESH*” followed by (c) “*VELIFNEI IVEIR LO TITEIN MICH’SHAL*” [You should not curse the deaf and you should not place a stumbling block in front of the blind]. What possible connection is there between these three?

The Baal Haturim (Rabbi Yaakov be Asher, 1270-1340, Germany) offers a profound commentary to connect the three. If an employer has the funds to pay his worker at the end of the day but withholds the money, he is guilty of two sins, (a)LO Talin and (c) Lifnei Iveir. For it is human nature that a worker who needs the money to feed his family, will, out of frustration, curse his employer, in violation of (b)“Lo Tekalel”. But it is the employer who caused the worker to curse, so the employer violates (c) and (a). In addition, the Torah repeats this idea in Sefer Devarim (24:14-15) by stating, “Do not cheat the wages of a poor person...on its day pay his wages”.

Chazal (our Sages) saw an employer’s obligation toward a worker as a very serious matter and derived that an employer who is not careful about payment can violate as many as five negative commandments.(Bava Metzia 111a). Not only in terms of payment but the Torah was also concerned that we do not detract from a worker’s rights. The matter is all the more so when the worker’s economic status is low and he makes no more than minimum wages. This applies not only to the wages of waiters, babysitters and supermarket cashiers. This applies also to worker’s in educational institutions, including Torah education institutions. Not always do they receive all the benefits that are coming to them by law, whether it be social benefits or timely payments.

Our parasha teaches that it is not enough to be careful about Kashrut of the food that the institutions feed their students and about Tzniut (modesty) in dress and in action. They should be even more careful not to cheat workers out of what they deserve, whoever and wherever they work.

We hope that the religious community will lead the country and serve as a model for proper attitude and respect for the working people.