
A decorative flourish consisting of a horizontal line with a central diamond-shaped ornament.

KI TEITZEI

A decorative flourish consisting of a horizontal line with a central diamond-shaped ornament.

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By Rabbi Shalom M. Paltiel

Torah's Labor Laws



1. Day Laborer:

“Give him his wages on his day; do not let the sun set over it.” (Ki Teitzei, 24:15)

“Do not withhold a hired worker’s wages... until morning.” (Leviticus 19:13)



2. Fixed-Term Worker:

“A worker’s wages are due only at the completion of his term of labor.” (Talmud)



3. Contractor:

“Payment due only upon completion of contracted project.”



4. Servant:

“The master is obligated to provide food, drink & shelter equivalent to his own.” (Halachic Codes)

Torah's Labor Laws



5. Harvest Worker:

“When you enter your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as you desire. When you enter your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pick.” (Ki Teitzei 23:25-26)

“Do not muzzle an ox while it is threshing.” (Ki Teitzei 25:4)



6. Partner:

“One who gives eggs to a chicken farmer for the chickens to sit on them to hatch & to raise the chicks, with profits divided between them, must also pay for his work & provide him sustenance.” (Halachic Codes)

❖ “He tells His words to Jacob, His statutes
and His judgments to Israel.” (Psalms, 147:19)

❖ “God observes the mitzvot He commands
the Jewish people to observe.” (Midrash)



REBBE'S QUESTION:

How can God postpone the reward for Mitzvot
even one day – seemingly violating
His “Day Laborer” Law?

❖ “Your employer is trustworthy to pay you reward of your labor.” (Avot 2:16)

❖ “Today is when mitzvot are to be done.” (Deut. 7:11)

❖ “Tomorrow, in the World to Come, their reward will be received.” (Rashi)



Approach #1:

FIXED-TERM WORKER

Jew's lifetime is one long period of employment in God's service.
Payment comes at the end: in the afterlife, in the **World to Come** (Gan Eden).

BUT: "WORLD TO COME" is debated:

Rambam (Maimonides)	Ramban (Nachmanides); Kabbalah & Chassidism concur
Paradise – Gan Eden (soul without body)	Era of Moshiach & Resurrection (soul with body)
Payment immediately follows this lifetime	Payment delayed until Moshiach & Resurrection?!

Approach #2: CONTRACTOR



“Creation’s ultimate purpose: G-d desired a dwelling in lowest realm. This is accomplished through our deeds & service throughout exile.” (Tanya, Chapter 36)

We are CONTRACTORS.

- Main payment when job is completed (Era of Moshiach & Resurrection)
- Fringe benefits in the afterlife (Gan Eden).

INTERIM REWARDS

What about Torah's promises of reward in the here & now?

“Material benefits promised in Torah are not the **ultimate reward** for Torah & mitzvot. Rather, G-d promised us that if we fulfill them He will remove all obstacles preventing us from fulfilling them & will grant us all the good to reinforce our ability to observe them, so that we're free to devote ourselves to Torah & Mitzvot, so that we merit the life of the **World to Come.**”

(Rambam, Laws of Teshuva)

- Seems material blessings are not rewards, only facilitators of life of Mitzvot.
- But they are often referred to as rewards for our good behavior.

Rebbe's Question:

Which parallel Labor Law “obligates” God to provide our MATERIAL needs?

God's "Labor-Law" obligation to provide our MATERIAL needs

APPROACH A: SERVANTS



BUT: Servants aren't REWARDED.
It is master's obligation to provide.

APPROACH B: HARVEST WORKER



BUT: No obligation to feed them—
only to ALLOW them to eat!

Plus: Obligation applies to animals too!

God's "Labor-Law" obligation to provide our MATERIAL needs

REBBE'S FINAL APPROACH: PARTNER



- We are God's partners in making world His home
- Our 'payment' isn't a side reward—it is venture's success
- Our work is to ACTUALIZE the world's POTENTIAL
- Parallels a Talmudic law:

“One who gives eggs to a chicken farmer for the chickens to sit on them to hatch & to raise the chicks, with profits divided between them, **must also pay for his work & provide him sustenance.**”

FULL REWARDS PROGRAM: REVIEW



1. Primary reward: Era of Moshiach & Resurrection — Contractor/Partner



2. Fringe benefit: Afterlife — Fixed-Term Worker



3. Needs provided comfortably — Servant



4. Permission to enjoy life's blessings — Harvest Worker



6. Material payment for work — Partner