

You may eat it everywhere, you and your household, for it is a wage for you in exchange for your service. (18:31)

The *Levi* is instructed to tithe from his *maaser*, tithe, and give this *terumas maaser* to the *Kohen*. Once the tithe has been separated and given to the *Kohen*, the *Levi* is free to use it at will, wherever he so pleases. It is no longer holy and may be eaten even in a ritually contaminated state. The Torah appears to underscore the fact that it is *cheilef avodasechem*; in exchange for your service. This means that the *maaser* that the *Levi* received is a form of wages for his service to the nation.

Horav Chaim Toito, Shlita, relates the following story, which may be applied to the *Levi's* accepting his wages and, by extension, to all of us who expect reward for our spiritual utility. A king was redecorating the foyer to his palace. It was a large room with four walls that required decoration; otherwise, the room would present a drab appearance. He summoned the four most skilled and creative artists in his realm and commissioned each of them to paint a mural for an individual wall. Thus, he would have not just one beautifully decorated wall – he would have four. He promised each one a king's ransom in gold if he were to be pleased with their presentation. These were no ordinary artists, but the finest to be found in the country. The king could not wait to see the masterpieces each one would design. Three of the artists set to work in earnest, each using his skills and creativity to paint what he felt was a mural of such beauty that it belonged in the palace of the king. Three worked – one did not. When asked why he was doing nothing, his reply was, "Do not worry. I will present the finest, most impressive image."

The anticipated day of the presentation arrived. The excitement mounted as each of the four arrived at the palace with a large wooden crate custom built specifically to transport his mural. Three of the artists, together with their assistants, immediately went to work setting up their murals on the designated walls. It was obvious that these three artists had gone over the top. Their artwork was magnificent, a pleasure and an inspiration to behold. Everyone now waited with bated breath to see what the fourth artist, who, for all intents and purposes, had not exerted himself to the level as his colleagues had done. The fourth artist came forward, pulled the covering off of his artwork, and, to the surprise of everyone, presented an ingenious piece of work. This was not artwork. It was a massive mirror, covering the entire wall, which – due to its position – reflected the three other paintings. Thus, when someone looked at the mirror, he saw not one painting, but three paintings reflected together. His was a brilliant coup, because, while the other three exerted themselves and expended much effort and toil to produce an aesthetic masterpiece, he, too, had achieved this goal without exerting himself.

As the king walked into the foyer, the "oohs" and "aahs" were evident among his guests. Everyone was impressed by the celebrated artists' work. The king instructed the four artists to return the following week to be reimbursed for their brilliant achievements. The next week, all four men came to the palace. The king presented each artist with a large envelope. The first three

artists opened their

envelopes to find a large amount of cash neatly arranged within. They need not work for the rest of their lives. The king had provided for their retirement. The fourth artist was bowled over when he opened his envelope and, instead of wads of cash, he found a mirror! The king looked at his surprise and said, "Your colleagues toiled to produce their magnificent artwork, while you produced a mirror to reflect their handiwork. Therefore, I gave you a mirror that would reflect the cash that they received!"

It is no different in the field of Torah and *mitzvah* endeavor. Hashem sought to inculcate us with a powerful verity: Without personal toil and effort, one's achievement will not garner the same reward as one who triumphs over fatigue, yet struggles with a labor of love to carry out Hashem's commands joyfully. Our rewards are similar to the wages a laborer receives for his work. Mimicking the service of others – whether it be how we *daven*, putting on a display of intense devotion, the way we walk, our body movements and the attention we seek when we act just like a real *tzaddik* – might be clever replicas of the real thing, but, then, so will be our reward: an exact replica of the real thing.