

You shall not subjugate him to hard labor. (25:43)

It goes without saying that we are a nation of *rachamanim bnei rachamanim*, compassionate sons of compassionate (fathers). We do not need to be exhorted not to take advantage of the weak and disadvantaged. While it is true that the individual who sold himself as a slave, to a certain extent, deserves the indignities that come with being subjugated to a master – such lording over a brother is limited. This man either was a thief or

he was unable (or did not want) to earn a decent living, so he either sold himself or *bais din* sold him as a slave. Clearly, his level of self-esteem is lacking. Nonetheless, we may not add to the disgrace he is experiencing. Although the laws concerning *eved Ivri*, the Hebrew bondsman, are no longer applicable (because we do not purchase slaves), the *Sefer HaChinuch* emphasizes that the spirit of the law is certainly in vogue. If the poor are members of his household (people working for him), he should not take advantage of them. He may be wealthy while they have nothing, which sets the scenario for a person who views wealth as a status symbol. As a result, he thinks he is better than others, allowing him to exploit the poor man and mistreat him.

While most people would never maliciously lord over and demean another Jew just because he works for them, or he has the misfortune of being poor, some people sadly require this for their self-esteem. Their desire for personal gain and acquisition of power drives them to take advantage of those who are in vulnerable situations. It would serve such a person well to read and reiterate the words of the *Sefer HaChinuch*: “He should place upon his heart that wealth and poverty are parts of a wheel that spins in the world, and they are from G-d. He gives it to the one who is straight (and just) in His eyes as long as He wants – but not one minute longer.” In other words, he who takes advantage of others, because he possesses the power to do so, should remember that power comes from Hashem and it can just as easily be taken away from the undeserving.

It is not sufficient to not take advantage of others, but one must actually reach out and offer support – both physical and emotional – to those who are down. This applies to all members of all age groups. The vulnerable, such as those dealing with age-related issues, economic hardship and illness often experience fear and anxiety concerning their challenges. As a result, they suffer from (self-imposed) social isolation and physical limitation, resulting in loneliness. They fear being dependent on others; they are anxious concerning their economic welfare, and the social stigma that invariably results from being “different.” While not everyone is equipped to deal with the challenges confronting these individuals (which are more than we care to acknowledge), spending time talking with them, showing that we care, can go a long way.

Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, was ill and confined to his home in Bayit V’Gan. One day, the *Gerrer Rebbe, zl*, the *Bais Yisrael*, visited him. When the *Rebbe* entered *Rav Abramsky’s* room, he noticed the *Dayan* (London) immersed in learning *parashas ha’shavua*. The *Rebbe* immediately commented, “Now I know that you are not feeling well, for, otherwise, you would be perusing the *Rambam*, as is your practice.” *Rav Abramsky* replied, “What should I do? I am stuck on a question concerning a *pasuk* in the *parshah*, and I have been delving for a while to

resolve it.” He continued, “The Torah writes (*Devarim* 15:11), *Ki lo yechdal evyon... Al kein Anochi metzavcha leimor... psoach tiftach...* ‘For destitute people will not cease to exist...therefore I command you, saying, You shall surely open (your hand to your brother).’ I am troubled with the inclusion of the word *leimor*, saying, in the *pasuk*. It is unnecessary and should not be included in the *pasuk*.” (*Rashi* comments, *leimor*, ‘I am giving you good advice. Nonetheless, the word seems superfluous.’)

The *Bais Yisrael* replied, “A *Chassidic* adage explains this *pasuk*: When you are *poseiach tiftach*, opening up your hand to give *tzedakah* to one in need; *ki lo yechdal haevyon*; ‘For the destitute people will not cease – Hashem says: *Leimor*, saying, ‘You should say to the destitute person (and hearten him with these words) that he should not worry about his present economic straits because it is a wheel that spins in the world. One day the *evyon* will open up Your hand to help others.’” One should not think that his present hardship will accompany him throughout life. He is poor today. But, like a wheel that goes around, his poverty will move on, and wealth will take its place. I think the most important part of this thought is *leimor* – talk to the vulnerable person. Do not just give him a check and move on. Sit down with him and show that you care. This is often more beneficial than the few dollars that you give. *Leimor* – talk to him.