

Can Someone Accept a Reward for Returning an Aveidah?

Rav Baruch Fried

Question: Reuven found an *aveidah* and, as he was getting ready to put up signs, he noticed a sign on the bulletin board that said that someone lost the exact item he had found. The sign promised a reward to the one who would return it.

Reuven contacted the person, who provided *simanim* to prove the item was his. After Reuven returns it to him, the man offers him the reward. Is Reuven allowed to accept it?

Answer: There is a rule of “*mah ani b’chinam af atah b’chinam.*” One is not allowed to accept payment for doing a mitzvah.

He definitely cannot say that he is only going to give back the item if he is paid for it. If the one who lost it is offering the money, however, there is a dispute in the *acharonim* whether he is allowed to accept it. The Machaneh Efraim proves from the Rosh that he is not allowed to accept money for returning the item, while the Even Ha’ezer infers from the Rambam that he may take the reward.

Rav Moshe Sternbuch suggests that one should state clearly that he is returning the item for free and not expecting payment. If the reward is offered anyway, he may take it. So, it is advisable to tell the one who lost the item that you are returning it for the mitzvah and that you don’t charge for doing a mitzvah. If he says that he wants to give you the reward anyway, you are permitted to accept it.