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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת משפטים

וְהָגִישׁוּ אֶל הַדֹּלֶת אוֹ אֶל הַמְּזוּזָה וְרָצַע אֶדְנִיּוֹ אֶת אָזְנוֹ בַּמְרָצַע וַעֲבָדוּ לְעַלְמִים. (שמות כא, ו)

And he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost, and his master shall bore through his ear with the awl, and he shall serve him forever. (Shemos 21:6)

This week's *parshah* discusses the various monetary laws, starting with the rules regarding the *eved ivri*. If an *eved ivri* does not want to be set free after six years, his master should bore a hole through his ear as a symbol of his continued servitude. Rashi explains that this act of boring the earlobe represents the servant's rejection of freedom and desire to remain in servitude. The ear that heard at Sinai the prohibition not to steal yet did so regardless, deserves to be bored.

The Meforshim raise the question of why we do not give the servant this message at the time of sale, which would seem more appropriate. Shouldn't the servant go through this procedure at the beginning of his servitude to emphasize to him the mistake he made by stealing? Why do we wait until six years after the crime to remind him of the severity of his original sin?

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* resolves this question based on a Yalkut Shimoni. The *pessukim* (Yeshayah 40) describe Hashem comforting Klal Yisroel and forgiving them for their sins. The Midrash states that the Yidden will turn to Hashem with remorse and bemoan that when they observe the valleys where they served *avodah zorah*, they are filled with shame. To which Hashem responds - כָּל גֵּיא יִנָּשָׂא, *every valley shall be raised*. Hashem, wishing to console Klal Yisroel, will remove any remembrance of sin and remove the sinner's embarrassment. We see from the Midrash the extent of the embarrassment of a sinner when grasping the magnitude of his failing, and how this shame can only be removed by physically changing the appearance of the world.

In the Rambam, we find another aspect of the shame of the sinner and his wish to disassociate himself from his disgraceful path. He writes in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (2:4): One of the ways of repentance is to change one's name. This acts as if to say "I am a different person now, not the one who acted in such a despicable way." We learn from the Rambam how intense a person's shame over his past misdeeds should be and how the only way to remove these feelings is by distancing himself from his former behaviour and adopting for himself a new identity.

With this, the Rosh Yeshiva answers the original question. A man who was sold to servitude and is living with a non-Jewish maidservant and children has a constant reminder of what brought about this situation - his thievery. His entire surroundings - from awakening in his master's home, serving his master all day and being married to a maidservant with children born into slavery – should serve as a stark reminder of his original sin. His life should be a living nightmare, with every minute of his existence shouting at him "THIEF!", and if he is happy to continue with this voluntarily, he obviously does not comprehend the greatness of his sin.

The original act of stealing of the *eved ivri* does not necessarily indicate a lack of understanding of the severity of his sin. People may sometimes give in to temptation, and they may now regret their actions but still need to be sold to pay back their debt. Therefore, at that stage, there is not yet a need for him to have his ear pierced as a reminder.

However, a servant who is content with his lowly position and does not feel ashamed of his way of life needs a powerful lesson to understand the gravity of his wrongdoing. Six years of a shameful existence, with his whole being labelling him as a thief, should have made an impact on him. If he still prefers his master to freedom after enduring such a life, he is in a bad state. A person who is content to continue living in such a situation without recognizing the immense shame he should be feeling, needs to have his ears pierced, acting as a blunt and painful wake-up call to the severity of his sin.

Rashi explains that for a servant who sold himself due to poverty, the following reasoning applies: If his ear heard Hashem at Sinai say - יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים - *כי לי בני ישראל עבדים*, for the Children of Yisroel are slaves unto Me, and he goes and acquires another master for himself, then his ear deserves to be bored. This too can be understood as above. A servant who has already endured six years of servitude under a mortal master and is not mortified and humiliated by the fact that he has placed himself under a human being rather than under the direction of Hashem requires a forceful lesson about the lowliness of his situation.¹

May our illustrious status and identity as עֲבָדֵי ה' motivate us to live our lives in a dignified and elevated manner. This will ensure that our lives, free of shame and humiliation resulting from substandard behaviour, will be completely pleasing to Hashem for fulfilling His will.

This Devar Torah is adapted from ספר וענפיה ארזי אל עה"ת and is presented by the Gateshead Yeshiva Alumni Association. To receive by email, please register your interest by sending an email to parshasheet@gyalumni.org.

¹ Seemingly, here the difficulty posed earlier is not relevant. The person in question sold himself out of sheer desperation caused by his poverty, and thus he is not guilty of any wrongdoing. However, if he decides to continue in this unfavourable situation even after improving his financial condition, he will need to be reminded of the severity of this situation.