

IN THE BUSINESS OF CHALLENGES

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha, Mishpatim, is replete with different laws. The Ramban (21:1) explains that the laws mentioned after the Aseres Hadivros, the Ten Commandments, are, in fact, elucidations of those commandments. Our parsha, in delineating many of the monetary laws, is expounding on the last commandment, do not desire other's belongings.

"Ki sikneh eved ivri"(21:2), when one acquires a Jewish slave. Many ask why 'eved ivri', Jewish slaves, were chosen to begin this parsha of our laws? The Ramban (21:2) asserts that this mitzvah relates to many fundamental concepts in Judaism. As we were enslaved in Mitzraim and were then released, we, in turn, are commanded to free our slaves after six years. There is, therefore, an allusion to yetzias Mitzraim. Additionally, the six years of work, followed by the seventh whereupon we don't work, is in accordance with the cycles of shabbos, shmitah and yovel.

Rav Simcha Zissel zt"l from Kelm also deals with this same question. Let me preface his words with something that happened last night. I was discussing a certain potential student with the menahel of a seminary in Yerushalayim. He wasn't sure if he'd accept her because he saw her as being quite a challenge. When I mentioned some present students there, who, I felt, were similar in nature to this girl, he told me that they too are big challenges, the likes of which he'd want to avoid next year. My response was that challenges are why we're in this 'business'!

Imagine a father who has a number of children who are fine and one who's a thief. The father's main concern is to straighten out that child. When discussing his children with advisors and professionals, the first issue he'll deal with is that child and his problem. His major efforts and involvements will be focused on helping that child and those who help that child.

Rav Simcha Zissel explains that the pasuk states (Devarim 14:1) "You are sons of Hashem!". Of course, the parsha should begin with 'eved ivri', the proper dealing with that errant son! The father will give the greatest help to those who work with that son. Hashem sends along the greatest siyyata dishmaya with those 'challenges'! That's why we're in this 'business', and that's the way to succeed in this 'business'!

Rav Simcha then compares the Torah's way of dealing with a thief to the secular legal system. In our society, a person who's caught stealing is thrown into prison. There, with the fine, upstanding role models he finds himself surrounded with, he learns to improve his 'skills', so as to not get caught a second time. He is supplied with state of the art weight rooms where he hones his body - elderly

women with pocketbooks, please beware! Society has temporarily ridded itself of a hazard, but the thief himself has not been improved by the process. Besides serving as a deterrent, he has not gained anything from his prison time.

According to Torah law, a thief who can't pay back that which he stole, is sold as a slave. The money for the sale goes directly to those he stole from, teaching responsibility for his actions. He is sold to a family who will serve as proper role models as to how a person should act. He sees a father earning an honest living and providing for his family in a respectable fashion. These are values he will incorporate into his own life at the end of his servitude.

The family of a person sent to prison suffer many hardships. In punishing the thief, they are also punished, bereft of someone to provide for them. This often leads to other family members, out of desperation, following in the footsteps of the father.

The pasuk states that, "if he is married, then after six years his wife will go out with him". Being that she has not been enslaved, what is meant by her 'going out'? Rashi explains that this pasuk teaches us that the master must supply food for the slave's wife and children during the duration of his slavery. The wife 'going out' means the ending of the masters obligation to her. The Torah provides for the needs of the wife and family.

Upon release from prison, a person usually finds himself in the same situation which led to his stealing in the first place. Even with good intentions, it's hard to stay straight with empty pockets.

The Torah deals with eved ivri again in Sefer Devarim (15:14), introducing the concept of "ha'anakah", gifts. The master is commanded to supply the slave with gifts when his time of servitude has been completed. The three opinions mentioned in gemara Kidushin in regard to the value of this grant are fifteen sela, thirty sela and fifty sela. To get some sort of a bearing how much this is worth, the Kesuvah of a woman is two hundred zuz, equaling fifty sela! The Torah thus guarantees that this eved will have the means for a fresh start toward a different type of life.

The Ohr HaChaim (21:4) shows how this parsha is also dealing with a totally different realm. We know that man is a dual being. We are essentially a spiritual being, a part of Hashem Himself, joined together with a physical body, a 'guf'. The purpose of the 'guf' is to serve the neshama, because only through the 'guf' can the neshama perform various mitzvos.

"Ki sikneh eved ivri...". When you, the neshama, a part of the true Master, acquire a servant that is 'ivri'. The word, 'ivri', is from the root 'ovar', meaning transient. The neshama acquires a 'guf' for its stint in olam hazah. There is a set, predestined time, ordained for this 'servitude', after which there is a 'release'.

"If he is the husband of a wife, the wife will go out with him (21:3)." The 'husband of a wife', refers to the way that the 'guf' (husband) serves the wife (neshama). If the guf is totally devoted, that all of its dealings and interests in this world, are completely dedicated to the advancement of the neshama,

as a husband is to his wife, (all chossonim and husbands please note!), then "the wife will go out, but, with him". Meaning, that even when the neshama leaves, the 'guf' will have been purified to the degree that this union of the physical and spiritual will not be contradictory. The two remain bonded, even after the transition to the next world. Tzadikim, even in their death, are considered alive.

"If the 'eved' proclaims his love for his master, wife, and children, refusing to go free... he will serve him forever (until yovel)." If the person has such a strong desire to serve Hashem (his master), to extend and expand his spirituality (his wife), to devote himself to mitzvos (his children, the progeny of this union), that he has no desire to leave this world, then "he will serve Him forever". Hashem will choose him to be one of those who have the closest bond to Him for all eternity. Not in this limited finite world as he had blindly desired, but rather in the infinite spiritual palace of the world to come!

May we merit to delve into the multidimensional levels of the Torah and ourselves, dedicating our abilities and our lives to the true Master.

Good shabbos.

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