

Parshat Mishpatim: Ear and Erie

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

Parshat Mishpatim discusses the *Eved Ivri* (Jewish slave) who is enjoined to serve his master for six years. However, if he decides to stay after his time is up, the master brings the servant to the court, and then brings him to the doorpost and bores a hole in his ear, and he shall serve him forever [until the Jubilee year]. Why is the ear pierced and why at the door? Why is it done at the end of the servitude, rather than at the beginning?

Rashi notes that *Bnei Yisroel's* first sign as an act of impending freedom was painting their doorposts with the Pascal blood, signaling death to pass over their homes and symbolizing their imminent freedom. Fifty days later, this was followed by their ears hearing the command, "Thou shalt not steal," at Sinai. When the *Eved Ivri* chooses to remain a slave to a human master, he is rejecting God as his true Master even after he has paid off his crime.

Aish Tamid asks, our entire bodies were present at Sinai; why is the ear being singled out? Additionally, the command not to steal, refers to kidnapping. How can stealing items necessitating be related to kidnapping? As we know, hearing can mean simply "going in our ear and out the other." We are meant to internalize the message writes Rabbi Frand. This message applies even more today. Rabbi Leff points out, the outer ear is meant to channel the sounds inward to the inner ears until the message reaches our brain that then channels it to our heart as well. The outer ear failed in its duty to bring the message of God as Master to him personally, and therefore the

ear becomes the symbol.

Shaarei Derech points out that payment for causing someone to be deaf is higher than for injuring any other organ, for it is the ear that brings us human understanding. But we must also protect the ear from hearing improper messages, while still allowing positive messages to enter.

We acknowledge that humans are flawed and will transgress, even perhaps steal. Being sentenced to indenture provides a path back to full, responsible humanity. But when his term of servitude is complete and the man rejects his freedom to serve Hashem and chooses to serve another human instead, he is not just flawed, he is rejecting the sovereignty of His Supreme Master; he is rejecting the message his ears heard at Sinai.

Rabbi Milevsky quoting Rav Hutner notes, the ear is the most passive of all organs, and is therefore the symbol of the passive life of a slave. To be a slave is to accept all one's needs without responsibility for oneself. He lacks freedom on an emotional level even before becoming a slave physically. Other senses give out as well as receive. Only the ears receives without giving. Only the ears must internalize and then use the rest of one's being to transform what one hears into outward action. But he who chooses to remain a slave to a human master rejects his responsibility as a Jew, obeying not the Master, but his human master. The hole in his ear indicates this flaw in perception. The doorpost furthers this symbolism, writes the Klei Yakar. The door is open, the slave is free to leave, but

he remains passive and refuses to move toward freedom. The Hebrew slave is taken to the doorpost, to the *mezuzah* which contains the *Shema* and the passage that Hashem is commanding us today, but the slave is removing it from his heart to serve an earthly master. He has closed his ear to the eternal sound of Hashem's voice.

"Thou shalt not steal" refers to kidnapping but Rabbi Schwab explains, that while the slave's servitude began as restitution for stealing goods, by choosing to remain in service to a human master, he is "kidnapping" his soul from serving Hashem. We are all in the position of an *eved ivri*, suggests the *Tiv Hatorah*. We are meant to be spiritual beings, but we sell ourselves into the physicality of this world. Rabbi Svei, citing Rabbi Chaskel Lichtenstein, explains that a slave has no identity of his own. To be Hashem's servant is likewise to subsume one's personal desires to His will.

The *Shvilei Pinchas* notes, in general, one cannot hear two voices at the same time. However, if one is totally focused on a particular message, one may extrapolate one voice. This is the key to our response at Sinai of, "We will do and we will hear." Doing refers to action, what we must do in the business of our daily lives. But even then, our ears must be attuned to the voice of God within us. When we experience the sweetness of *Torah*, we become capable of hearing that voice even amid the cacophony of the material world around us.



Impediments to Closeness with Hashem

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

"My son guard the commandments of your father and don't abandon the instruction of your mother." In a healthy family, the father creates the structure, and beyond that structure is the *Torah*. It says in *Eishes Chayil*, "The *Torah* of *chesed* is on the mother's tongue." A father must carry the respect of his family. That means the example he sets by the way he lives is that the *Torah* is paramount. He is responsible to listen to the command of his master and from that perspective, the children listen to him as the one who is a servant of that master. In the same vein, this attitude has to flow down to the mother who in turn must show respect. The mother's relationship to *Torah* affects the children deeply. She understands arguably better than the father, that the *Torah* is the nefesh of the person. Malbim says that she is the one who by example will give over the foundations of *emunah* to her children.

There are two things that draw us close to Hashem- *mitzvot* and *emunah*. In the Zohar, the 613 *mitzvot* are called 613 strategies. The strategy is having a relationship with Hashem

where you are attached to him and that comes from *emunah*. *Emunah* is the highest of all efforts. The *emunah* a mother carries, gives life and force to the spiritual atmosphere of the home. "Tie them to your heart always and put them as a necklace around your neck."

Emunah relates to a person's heart and emotional life. The senses take in reality, the mind interprets it and then the heart feels. What you feel will determine who you will be and what you will do. The heart is the captain of the ship, and the heart is where *emunah* lies. *Emunah* is transmitted through the mother.

The *mitzvot* are compared to a necklace with different beads around the neck. Each bead is precious, as is each *mitzvah*, and each bead complements the other. The neck is the place that bonds your mind to your heart and that is what the *mitzvot* do. They give your thoughts expression, which in the end will affect your heart. A Jew should live with the *mitzvot* as his constant companion and it should inform every action he takes. "The *mitzva* is a candle and the *Torah* is light." The Baal HaTanya says that

the flame of *Torah* is called *Shechina*. If you live with an awareness of Hashem, the *mitzva* is like your candle. A candle is made of physical matter that is tangible. The *mitzvot* are meant to be expressed through your relationship with the physical world.

Torah is light which is far less tangible. The very first thing Hashem created was a very great light which gave people sensitivity to a spiritual reality. The *Torah* is what creates this sensitivity, but in order to bring it into your life, you need, *tochachat mussar*-the rebuke of ethics. *Rashi* says this means that when you see your heart taking you in one direction, you are able to pull yourself to another direction. You're willing to be in that state of correcting yourself without self-idealization so you can get past the justifications of the *yetzer hara*. This way of living will keep you away from the forces of evil which is compared to an evil woman who has a smooth tongue. The *yetzer hara* sounds like your defense lawyer, your loving wife. Beware and don't fall into his entrapments.

The Weightiest Mitzvah of Them All

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Rabbi Justin Treger

I've been learning with an incredible group of people, every week for the last 10 years and they've grown tremendously in their *Yiddishkeit*. One year we took them to Israel for a week of intense *Torah* learning. We went again two years later, and we took them to meet with Rav Moshe Shternbuch. One of the guys said, "Two years ago we asked you, what *mitzvot* we should take on as we were just starting out. You told us to keep *Shabbat* and family purity and we're doing that. What *mitzvah* should we take on next now?" I sat there with bated breath waiting to see what the Rav would say and without blinking an eyelid he said, "*Tzedakah*, that defines a *yid*."

The Rambam in Hilchos Matnas Aniyim says we are obligated to be careful with the *mitzva* of *tzedakah* more than any other positive *mitzva* in the *Torah* because it's a sign that we are one of the offspring of Avraham Avinu. He quote the verse that *Klal Yisrael* will rule this

world, truth will permeate, and the redemption will come in the merit of *tzedakah*. *Tzedakah* is something very special and distinctive. The Gemara in Bava Basra quotes Rav Asi that *tzedakah* is equivalent to all the *mitzvot*, as it says in Nechemaya where the prophet encourages *Klal Yisrael* to give *tzedakah* to the *Bet Hamikdash*, "We will place upon ourselves *mitzvot*." The Gemara emphasizes that it says *mitzvot* in the plural form because it's equivalent in value to all the *mitzvot*.

The Gemara tells a story about Rav Pappa who was going up a staircase when he stumbled and nearly fell. He reacted by exclaiming, "Am I now liable like those who are *mechalel Shabbat* or worship idols?" Rav Pappa understood that he nearly experienced *sekilah*- the death penalty of stoning where a person is hurled from a high place. Rav Chiya suggested to Rav Pappa that perhaps he had turned away a poor person and not given *tzedakah* as it says in the Beraisa- Rav Yehoshua ben Korcha says, "Anyone who

turns a blind eye from *tzedakah* is as if he worshipped idols." The word *blial* is used to refer to a person who worships idols. So too, the *pasuk* uses it for someone who turns a blind eye to *tzedakah*.

It's impossible to escape the fact that *tzedakah* is a central *mitzva* in the *Torah* that defines a Jew and is equivalent in value to all the *mitzvot*. I'd like to suggest you do the following: Take out a paper and pen and write down where you stand today in the *mitzva* of *tzedakah*. How much are you committed to give? Do a calculation of last year and ask yourself- Have I reached my target? If you haven't, work out where you're short and start allocating it out. Finally look at the percentage you're prepared to give and ask yourself- Do I realize how important this *mitzva* is? The cap is 20 percent, write down how you will push your percentage up going forward and may the merit of this great *mitzvah* bring bracha and *hatzlacha* in all your endeavors.