

The Hebrew Slave (2024)

For years I have had a particular question in this week's Parsha and this year I may have found a good answer. How is it that the same God that forbids intermarriage, allows a Jewish master to give his Jewish servant a Gentile woman to have children with? Soon I will discuss the answer but first we need to understand a bit more about the Hebrew Slave. Why is the Hebrew Slave the first commandment that we read about after the giving of the Torah? Rav Kahane writes in Perush Hamaccabee

When commenting on the Haftorah (Jeremiah 34:13-20). That is to say, you did not keep the mitzvah of the Hebrew slave, in which My power and My might and My mastery over the world are symbolized, and for the sake of which I took Israel down to Egypt – and I informed Avraham of My intentions when the fire passed between the parts of the calf in the Covenant between the Parts (Bereshit 15:4-21). But you transgressed My covenant, which is a hillul Hashem, because this mitzvah is the pinnacle of Kiddush Hashem. Perush HaMaccabee (1:22)

Hashem took a holy people that represented Him in all of His goodness and brought them to Egypt where they were degraded into worthless slaves, beaten and tortured including the mass murder of Hebrew boys in the Nile. Then He performed great wonders and destroyed Egypt and brought them out as a free people. The Hebrew Nation became a symbol of hope and freedom and truth for the entire world. No doubt that when we the people who represent this hope and salvation, mistreated the Jewish slave, we brought upon ourselves tragedy and exile.

Imagine at Har Sinai, a generation that fell so low that only twenty percent remained, and these twenty percent were then redeemed and raised up to the greatest heights ever known by man? Imagine the questions they had of how the mighty have fallen and how the fallen have risen? I imagine there are some similar questions being asked today after we have seen so many korbanot.

The Hebrew slave also teaches us and warns us of the process that leads to becoming a slave. Either one can no longer pay and make restitution for his crimes so he is sold into slavery, or by his own free choice he sells himself to pay his debts. This may allude to our Nation as well. We willfully choose another master or our teshuva is not enough to pay the debts that we keep incurring so we are given over to another master.

We say in the Shma each day. *'I am the Lord, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your God'* (Bamidbar 15:41) The lesson is that instead of serving Pharaoh and being enslaved, Hashem redeemed us, in order to **serve Him**, which results in freedom. When asked 'what does a slave dream of', most people will answer 'freedom'. In Israel, however, many people will answer the true definition of a slave which is 'he dreams of **being the master**'. The true slave mentality is one who wants no restrictions and seeks to rule over others. This is a downward spiral that unleashes the darkest forces upon us. A servant to a king, however, is like a king, and is a free person despite his surroundings.

Rav Kahane often said that the nations act reflexively of the Jewish people. The degree to which we rebel against Hashem is the degree to which we take on cruel new masters that we constantly seek to appease. The degree to which we serve Hashem is the degree to which we are increasingly protected and glorified in the world by the defeat of our enemies. One of the reflexive examples my friend Michael pointed out on Shabbat was regarding Hamas. For nine months we protested against the democratically elected conservative government and threatened not to serve in the army unless this government was overthrown.

Our enemies understood that we were at war with our own traditions and threatening mutiny unless we further eroded our Jewish and religious identity. And so, they attacked expecting weakness and rebellion. What they did not expect was the revival of the Jewish soul which unfortunately comes sometimes after terrible disasters.

A friend said to me despairingly this week how he noticed someone walking down the street wearing tzitzit and no kippa. I told him not to look at this in a negative light. Many unobservant soldiers went to war and because of the massive donations of tzitzit, began wearing them for extra protection. Now some may have returned and although they never have worn a kippah, now they are wearing tzitzit. The Jewish people are an enigma. No people is as courageous and selfless and unified in troubled times, but can also be stubborn and blind and faithless in the face of miracles no other nation experiences.

The Talmud discusses the various valuations of servants and then asks what is the value of a free man? It answers that there is none (Bava Kama 84). This seems to imply that when one's life is in service to His Creator, to others and the greater good, his life takes on more value. When one is free from obligations and seeks to be the master, that reckless self-serving life begins to lose more and more value. As we fall from the high standard of morality that is demanded of the Jew, through assimilation and perversions and rebellions from our own holy soul, that soul sometimes becomes tarnished irreparably.

There is a concept of collective punishment that the Talmud discusses regarding Mamzerim (bastards).

Rebi Chanina said: Once every 60 or 70 years The Holy One, Blessed is He, brings something to the world to destroy the mamzerim and takes the kosher people with them so as to not publicize their sins . . . This teaches you that even when The Holy One, Blessed is He, brings evil to the world, He does it with wisdom. (Yerushalmi, Yevamos 49b)

Rav Pinchas Winston questions why every 60 or 70 years specifically? He answers: 'if you think about it, less than this would be too much for Creation to bear, and more than this, few people would be around to emotionally remember what has happened previously in order to be able to warn others about what might be coming up. It is the Holocaust survivors today who are concerned about the direction of events, because they have seen what results from that, while those who were born after the war live with the illusion that as bad as things are, it will always get better before it gets worse.

It is not for us to understand the judgments meted out to each individual. Every person who was murdered because he was a Jew or died fighting to save Jews is certainly in the highest realms of Heaven with our great tzaddikim.

The secret things belong to Hashem our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. (Devarim 29:28)

What is revealed to us 'publicly' are the laws that our Father has given us to safeguard us and protect us from evil forces from outside and from within. If we leave the gates of the zoo unlocked, we are to blame for the innocent victims of savagery. If we drive away the one who protects us and barter our land and people for the protection of a supposed ally, we are to blame.

We are a people whose soul is like an engine that is larger than others. We can fall quickly to the lowest depths and just as quickly rise to the greatest heights like Yoseph being pulled from the dungeon to be seated as a Prince over Egypt. At this point I can explain the answer to my original question regarding the seemingly negative command that allows a Jewish slave to give his holy seed to create Gentile children.

As I strolled on the Har Habayit I asked this question to Rav Twersky and he mentioned something very interesting. He said that maybe there is a connection with the mamzer. A mamzer who is the product of an adulteress relationship, can only marry another mamzer. If they marry a Jewish woman this causes a disaster, for all of the offspring will become mamzerim. The status of a mamzer is eternal. It is transmitted forever. There is only one way out; a small loophole.

One can steal, or sell himself into slavery. Be given a non-Jewish wife, and then if the master frees the children of the non-Jewish wife, they become fully Jewish converts without any contamination from the mamzer father. Just as the kippa-less tzitzit wearer was considered positive and not negative, the allowance to marry a Jewish slave to a Gentile woman may also be a positive mechanism. Although Hashem is patient, He has given us a book of law upon which the world is judged and maintained. There are consequences to our failings and our provocations. On the other hand, He is our loving Father and will find any and every way to try and open a door of return. Even a mamzer the grandson of a mamzer has a way back in to climb back to the highest of heights.

In the news the Caplan Group has announced they will begin their protests again against the government. It seems instead of looking in the mirror they have learned nothing from what has transpired since Oct 7. I pray that the rest of our Nation has learned its lessons and has matured and been awoken from the delusions of the past

Let there be a very poor showing when the Caplan protesters go out again to provoke. Let the slaves who wish to be masters and sell our Jewish destiny have no buyers. Let those who truly wish to be free drive out our enemies that had occupied our Land and restore it to whom it belongs. Let the world scream and yell, while the Almighty protects us with a pillar of light. Let

us respond that we are but servants and have been commanded to settle this Land. Let us value ourselves and our destiny as the Jewish people. Then we will be truly free. For a servant to a King is like a king.

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