

**"And your brother becomes impoverished with him and he is sold to an alien who resides with you ... after he has been sold he shall have a redemption, one of his brothers shall redeem him. or his uncle or his cousin shall redeem him ... or if his own means become sufficient, he shall be redeemed."  
(25:47-49)**

Regardless of his poverty, it was inappropriate for a Jew to sell himself to a non-Jew. The *Torah* nonetheless places the task of redeeming him upon his family. Indeed, in the *Talmud Kiddushin 21a*, *Chazal* state that there is a specific order for assuming this responsibility. A closer blood relation takes precedence and is obligated to see to it that his "brother" is redeemed. Thus, the brother precedes the uncle, who in turn, precedes the cousin. It is only after the close relatives are deemed either unable or unsuccessful that the responsibility falls upon the shoulders of the distant relatives. The commentators are, therefore, perplexed by the fact that the individual himself is mentioned last, as being obligated to redeem himself only after all else has failed. Is there anybody closer to the one in need than he, himself? If we are to follow the order of kinship, we should require the one who is in need to become self-reliant. Why does the *Torah* place him last on the list of potential redeemers?

Their response is a lesson in human nature upon which we should personally reflect. One who is in an extremely distressful situation such as subjugation to another human being, illness, or financial stress, is the primary person who can help himself. He knows the pain; he lives with the concern; he faces the uncertainty of what the next day might bring. He, and only he, can make the ultimate difference in pulling himself out of the depths of depression and subservience.

True, it does not always work that way. As *Chazal* state, "One who is incarcerated can not free himself from prison." This means that one frequently needs assistance from the outside in order to effect his own redemption. In many situations, however, the critical role of those "outside" is to inspire and encourage the one who is suffering to fight back for himself. He must remain resolute in face of distress, using all of his inner fortitude to battle fear with courage, adversity with hope, and illness with faith in the Almighty. Those in the field of medicine who deal with the chronically ill attest to the fact that modern medicine will not succeed unless the patient has belief in the cure and demonstrates the desire to fight his illness. If the patient has given up hope for a cure, if he has lost his drive to combat the disease, then medical technology will have a two-fold struggle in effecting a cure for him.

The role of the relative in a situation where the poor man has fallen prey to depression and sold himself is to give encouragement and lend support, so that he will seek redemption himself. This is the *Torah's* imperative: the relatives are to see to it that ultimately he will seek his own redemption.

This is why, the closer one is, the greater his impact upon the one who sold himself. He who resists participating in the struggle will not succeed even when others are fighting for him.