

And his master shall bore through his ear with the awl, and he shall serve him forever. (21:6)

The *Torah* does express respect for the Jew who spurns his freedom and chooses to remain an *eved*. His conscription to another Jew is an act of self-degradation. His decision to continue in servitude involves a ceremony in which his ear is bored with an awl. The *Torah* says he is to remain a servant “forever.” In this context, the word “forever” means until *Yovel*, the jubilee/fiftieth year. This is the end of a cycle, a time at which properties that changed hands during this cycle revert back to their original owners. At this time, all Jewish servants are freed.

Horav Dov Eliezrov, Shlita, suggests that the concept of “*l’olam*,” forever, applies from the perspective that he is stereotyped as an *eved* forever. He cites the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Avadim* 3:8, who is of the opinion that the servant never reverts to his original status. He is, regrettably, viewed as an *eved* for the rest of his life. He debased himself by becoming an *eved*. He continued in his debasement by extending his tenure as a servant. He has degraded his nobility as a Jew who accepted the *Torah* at *Har Sinai*. He stole money and was forced into servitude. He added insult to injury by extending his servitude voluntarily. He took the crown of royalty that befits every Jew and denigrated it. Can he ever remove this stain from himself?

We would do well to think about this lesson. When we sin, we taint ourselves. When we act inappropriately, we blemish ourselves. A good reputation is hard to attain. It is even more difficult to achieve the second time around. For the individual whose self-image is at an all-time low, whose self-esteem is a concept of the past, the *Torah* advises him to think about his family and the effect which his actions have on them. Unfortunately, such people are so obsessed with their own self-defeat that they leave little room in their hearts for sensitivity towards anyone else.