

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

Why does the Torah command the master to bore the Hebrew slave's ear, rather than any other organ of the body? *Rashi* quotes *Chazal* who teach that, "The ear – that heard at *Har Sinai* (when the Torah was given), 'For *Bnei Yisrael* are My servants,' and this person (*eved Ivri*) acquired a (new) master for himself – should be bored with the awl... They are My servants and not servants to servants." The *Rosh* observes that the *gematria*, numerical equivalent, of *martzea*, awl, is 400. *Klal Yisrael* was to be enslaved by the Egyptians for 400 years. Hashem shortened their time by 190 years. Yet, this man (who had been an indentured servant for six years) seeks to extend his servitude. Let his ear be bored.

Avdus, servitude, is defined as the abrogation of one's personal will in deference to a master. The servant/slave has no personal will. It is all about his master. *Chazal* (*Pirkei Avos* 2:4) state: *Bateil retzoncha mipnei retzono*, "Nullify your will before His." A Jew's will is to serve Hashem, to do whatever the Almighty asks of him. A Jew does not have his own will exclusive from Hashem's will.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates the story of the *Ohr Sameach's meshamesh bakodesh*, personal attendant, a *gabbai*, sexton, who was totally devoted to his *Rebbe*. Whatever the *Ohr Sameach* would ask of him, he would carry out to the personal satisfaction of his *Rebbe*. One day, the *Ohr Sameach* asked him to perform a specific mission for him. The man felt that it was not worth doing. (In other words, he disagreed with his *Rebbe* concerning the efficacy and value of this activity.) The *Ohr Sameach* reiterated his request. He wanted it done, regardless of his aide's misgivings. The aide replied that executing this mission involved difficulty in carrying it out. The *Ohr Sameach* calmly said, "I want it to be done – regardless of the possible difficulty and questionable efficacy." The aide was adamant in his position. He was immovable. (Clearly the *Ohr Sameach* had not ordered him to do it; otherwise, it would have been insolent not to listen.)

Understandably upset, the *Ohr Sameach* asked, "Why is it that you never listen to me?" Shocked, his aide countered, "Why does the *Rebbe* say 'never'? I always carry out the *Rebbe's* wishes to the fullest extent. This is the first time that I feel it will not work." The *Ohr Sameach* explained, "Every time that you have conformed with my request, you have done so only because you have agreed with me. In other words, you were not listening to me; you were listening to yourself! You proved this by not doing what I asked you to do today. It was not to your liking, so you demurred."

One who serves a master does not have the option of deciding to do what is agreeable to him or what he fancies. He does not have the luxury of making decisions; he only executes the decisions of his master. Likewise, we have no room in our religion for selective observance. We do not pick and choose *mitzvos* according to our liking, convenience or sensibilities. There are 613 *mitzvos*. This number is not random.