

Each of you shall return to his ancestral heritage, and each of you shall return to his family. (25:10)

Freedom is a precious commodity of which not all people are availed. Thus, when one who had heretofore been a slave to a master, one whose life was essentially not his own, the first thing to enter his mind, the first thing for which he would yearn, would be: freedom; return to his family; his home; his original lifestyle. Yet, the Torah teaches us otherwise: "Each of you shall return to his ancestral heritage." Does property precede family? Does material sustenance come before freedom? *Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl*, explains this from a practical point. People often lose their freedom as the result of a hungry family and a lack of financial source of sustenance to support it. Under such circumstances, a person can be driven over the edge to do the unthinkable. The *eved Ivri*, Hebrew bondsman, did just that. Pressed with overwhelming debt and no avenue of income; children who were starving and no source of food from which to feed them, no roof over his head; he opted for a life on the other side of the law. Once he was caught, he was compelled to return the money that he had stolen. Alas, it was gone. He was not stealing so that he could deposit money into a savings account. He stole for food. It was now gone. Since he had no funds with which to make restitution, he was forced to sell himself as a slave.

Now, the *eved* is free to return, but to what? A life of hunger, bitterness, with no place to call home. It is not as if he earned extra money these past few years that he had been a slave. He arrived with nothing but debt. He leaves (hopefully) having paid up his debt. Certainly, he did not earn any extra money. He enters poor and exits poor. At least until now, he had a roof over his head and a few dollars which will probably not go very far. Is this the meaning of freedom? If this is freedom, he would rather remain a slave than go through the maelstrom of poverty again.

This is why the Torah emphasizes his return to his ancestral heritage. The mere fact that he has an address to which he can return gives him an identity. He may be poor, but, at least, he has a roof over his head. Thus, the Torah focuses on what has greater meaning to the returning slave. Freedom with no place to settle will only make the person more self-conscious and miserable, thus undermining whatever freedom he has gained