

But if the bondsman shall say, “I love my master... I shall not go free... then his master shall bring him to the court and shall bring him to the door or to the door post, and his master shall bore through his ear with the awl, and he shall serve him forever. (21:5,6)

The Torah takes a dim view of an *eved Ivri*, Hebrew bondsman's, desire to continue his servitude. His ear is bored with an awl as he stands near the doorpost. Why the ear? The ear (together with the rest of the body) stood at *Har Sinai* and heard Hashem declare, “*Lo signov*, Do not steal.” Yet, the man went ahead and stole. He had a list of excuses to justify his behavior. But, at the end of the day, he was a *ganov*, thief, and must pay for his actions. He had no money – otherwise, why would he steal? He was broke; his family starving; what should he do? So, he was sold as an *eved* to pay back his theft. That was then. This is now. He had already spent six years of payback. He could now go free. Rather than view his circumstances of the last six years as being adverse, he seemed to have developed a liking for his master. It is not a difficult life. He was treated well – almost as a member of the family. Why should he leave?

The Torah is not happy with him. He should not enjoy slavery – especially if it was to reimburse his debts. He is now frowned upon by the Torah. Why? Is it so wrong to like his master? Perhaps, if he would have been a happier person he would not have resorted to stealing. He now has a greater sense of self-esteem, or, he just likes the comfort and stability of three meals a day, decent clothes, a roof over his head. Is this a reason to have his ear bored?

In his inimitable manner, **Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita**, addresses this question and responds pragmatically. The lesson for each and every one of us is invaluable. In *Pirkei Avos* 3:1, Akavya *ben* Mehallem articulates his well-known dictum for protecting oneself from sins. *Histakeil b'sheloshah devarim*, “Consider three things and you will not come into the (hands) grip of sin: Know from whence you came; where you are going and before Whom you will give justification and reckoning.” What is the meaning of not falling into the grip of sin? Is this different than not sinning? **Horav Elya Lopian, zl**, explains that Akavya *ben* Mehallem is not giving us a guarantee against sin. He is not ensuring us that by looking at these three concepts we will never sin. He is not saying this, because it is not foolproof. Considering these three rules will not be a guarantee against the act of sinning. But – one who considers them will not fall into the grip of sin. Sin will not have a stranglehold on him that will compel him to sin again. One who takes these three images to mind will perhaps sin, but he will not be a slave to sin. He will sin, but he will not become a sinner.

Rav Galinsky adds flavor to this exposition with a personal anecdote. As a slave laborer for the Russians during World War II, *Rav* Galinsky, together with thousands of other prisoners of war, many of them *yeshivah* students, were transported by train to the North and beyond, to Siberia. The train was outfitted for carrying livestock and mail – not people. Understandably, the usual

creature comforts required for a human being to function were not included among the train's amenities. The noise was overwhelming as the train rattled on through the night. Adding to the noise was the constant moaning and groaning of a wounded Polish soldier who would not stop complaining about how thirsty he was. As weary and bone-tired as he was, *Rav Galinsky* could not sleep through the constant, "I am so thirsty," that kept reverberating through the night.

Rav Galinsky arose from his place on the floor, went over and took an old cup, poured some water into it and brought it to the Polish soldier. Finally – there would be some quiet on the train. He was wrong, for no sooner had the man quenched his thirst, that he began groaning, "Oh, what a terrible thirst I had." The *Rav* derived a powerful lesson from this. A person who is not *tarud b'yitzro*, engrossed as a slave to his evil inclination, once he has quenched his thirst – or carried out his sinful act, it is over and done with. Why continue thinking about it? Why hash it over and over? Simply face the reality: "I was thirsty, I drank; now, I am fine. Likewise, I had an evil inclination to sin; I carried out my passion. Case closed, I am moving on with my life." A person, however, who is in the grip of sin cannot break through the tentacles which envelop him. Thus, even after he has satisfied his desires, he is thinking about the "next time."

This is the abysmal situation in which the *eved Ivri* finds himself. He needed money, so he foolishly stole. He then spent the money and now cannot pay it back. He sinned; he was a fool. Now, he must pay by becoming a slave. Six years go by and now he is free. What does this dolt do? Rather than join the rest of the world as a free man, this hare brain wants to continue his degradation. When he is questioned regarding his ability to use his G-d-given brain, he responds, "So what! I enjoy slavery. You think that I am a little bit soft in the brain. So, I can live with it. I am not concerned with what you think." Is this such a terrible reaction to life? If he does not care, why should we? Why put a hole in his ear?

The difference, explains *Rav Galinsky*, is between performing a sin, and becoming a full-fledged sinner. The first time the fellow erred, he deferred to his momentary needs, acted foolishly, and stole. The second time he is what we may call a habitual sinner. Once he sins twice, it is no longer a sin. It becomes a way of life! He has adopted a new culture – one in which stealing is permissible.

The fellow that wants to extend his servitude manifests such an attitude. He has accepted his newly-found lifestyle. So, he will be an *eved*. Is it so bad? Three meals a day; roof over his head. What can be so bad about that? He is in the mud and refuses to extricate himself. This, unfortunately is the story behind every "loser." He begins to accept his self-imposed predicament. Rather than look for ways to break out, he acquiesces and expounds the virtue of this lifestyle. Perhaps, blemishing his ear will serve as a wake-up call.