

If you buy a Jewish bondsman...If a man will sell his daughter as a bondswoman...one who strikes a man who dies, shall surely be put to death. (21:2,7,12)

The sequence of laws that mark the beginning of *Parashas Mishpatim* begs elucidation. There must be a good reason that the *Torah* chose the laws of *eved Ivri* to open the *parsha*. Furthermore, what relationship exists between *eved Ivri* and murder? *Horav Nissan Alpert, zl*, notes that the underlying theme of this *parsha* is *kavod ha'brios*, the dignity of man. This theme is reinforced throughout the *parsha*. In fact, the punishments that are to be meted out are in accordance with the sin of degrading another human being's rights. This is the best way to correct the damage, to repair the hurt that was incurred.

Indeed, *Horav S.R.Hirsch, zl*, explains that the *Torah* begins the section of laws with *eved Ivri* in order to teach us the importance of *kavod ha'brios*. The *eved Ivri* is none other than one who was *nimkar b'geneivaso*, sold to pay the debts incurred through stealing. The *Torah* teaches us the dignity of man by first showing us how to take care of a *gonif*, a robber. A thief is also a human being, albeit one who is bent upon self-destruction. Yet, we must care about him and be sensitive to his needs. We may add that society in general may have played a role in his downfall. Perhaps, if we would have been cognizant of his circumstances, we would have been able to prevent his downfall.

This is the lesson of the *eved Ivri*: Concern about others, sensitivity to their feelings and needs, and respect for the dignity of man. The degeneration begins with a lack of respect which leads to indifference in the area of *kavod ha'brios*. The ultimate result can be murder. When we do not value a human being, when we treat a human being like an animal, then it is no wonder a member of this society could become a person who would kill to satisfy his needs. Some of the most heinous transgressions originate with a simple infraction and develop into a grave sin.