

"And his master shall bore through his ear with an awl." (21:6)

The *Torah* is critical of the *eved Ivri*, Jewish slave, who chooses to stay on after the usual six years of servitude. When one is granted freedom he should take advantage of the opportunity. A Jew submits to only one master - Hashem. According to the *Torah*, when an *eved Ivri* chooses to extend his period of slavery, his master bores his ear with an awl - near a doorpost. In the *Talmud Kiddushin 22b*, *Chazal* explain why a doorpost and an ear symbolize the servant's disdain for freedom. The doorway represents freedom, since it was the doorposts upon which the Jews smeared the blood of the *Korban Pesach* prior to their release from Egyptian slavery. The "ear" heard at *Har Sinai*, "Do not steal." Yet, this person stole and, since he had no money to pay back his debt, he was reduced to slavery. Now that he is rejecting the opportunity to go free, his master pierces his ear.

This idea applies specifically to a Jew who is *nimkar b'gneivaso*, sold to pay his debt. Another type of *eved Ivri*, a *mocher atzmo*, is one who sells himself. What did his "ear" do wrong that it must be pierced? *Chazal* explain that this ear should have "listened" when Hashem said,, "For to Me will *Bnei Yisrael* be slaves." This means that one remains subservient only to Hashem, not to a human being. We may question *Chazal's* need to cite two reasons for the "ear" ceremony. Is not the prohibition of taking another master in addition to Hashem sufficient to explain the ritual for both forms of *eved Ivri*? Why do *Chazal* mention another reason for the servitude of the thief?

Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, infers a profound lesson from this *Midrash*. When an individual seeks to correct a moral/spiritual failing within his personality, he must go to the source of the problem. Where did it all begin? What was the initial flaw which caused his downfall? If the reason for his desire to remain a slave originates from an insecurity, if he feels a need to be dependent upon someone else, then he must address that issue. If he is overwhelmed by his inability to cope with his desire to steal, if he simply cannot control his passion to take another person's money, then he must address that problem. We cannot simply gloss over pathological deficiencies because it is more convenient to overlook them. If the source of one's sin is not acknowledged, the "teshuvah," repentance, will be ineffective.

Horav Bloch applies this idea to interpret the phrase that we say in the *Viddui*, confession, "But we and our fathers have sinned." Why is it necessary to cite the sins of our ancestors when we are enumerating our sins? Do we mitigate our transgressions by including those of our fathers'? The purpose, claims *Horav* Bloch, is to indicate the source of our sins: Where and when did it originate? By getting to the foundation, we avail ourselves of the opportunity to purge the evil we have "inherited." While it may not be complimentary to our ancestors, our *teshuvah* remains incomplete if the root of our error is not destroyed.