

## And he said, “Cursed is Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers.” (9:25)

Cham committed an unspeakable act against his father, Noach, and, in turn, Noach cursed his fourth son, Canaan. *Rashi* explains that Noach intimated to Cham, “You caused me to be unable to have a fourth son who would serve me. May your fourth son be cursed by serving the offspring of these greater ones: Shem and Yafes (for now they will have to care for me). The term *eved avadim*, a slave of slaves, requires clarification. After all, a slave is a slave. What difference does it make who his master is?

*Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl*, explains that Noach cursed Canaan to be an *eved Canaani*, who has no personal identity, whose progeny have no relationship with him, other than DNA. The *eved Canaani* is (so to speak) the lowest form of slave – disconnected, belonging to his master, with no possessions of his own. The *Rav* distinguishes between various levels of servitude. A Jew who is *mocher atzmo*, sells himself, to a Jewish master, his master may not give him a *shifchah Canaanis*, non-Jewish maidservant, for a wife (according to the *Chachamim, Kiddushin 14b*). Furthermore, even when one is *machruhu bais din*, sold by the Jewish court (to earn money to repay what he stole), whose master may give him a *shifchah Canaanis* as a wife, the children stay on as *avadim Canaanim* after he leaves. His own children, which he shares with his Jewish wife, are his. In other words, an *eved Canaani* is a man who is *halachically* and socially disconnected. This detachment from society is the result of Noach’s curse to Cham, who, by his degenerate behavior demonstrated that he had neither respect for – nor relationship with – his father. His retribution is that he has no link whatsoever with his offspring.

Having said this, had Noach cursed Cham (instead of Canaan), then Cham might have had a feeling that bound him to his family. Once they were his children (prior to his sin), a relationship existed, which, on their part, would not be severed. This is what troubled Noach. He would not have any more sons, while Cham still enjoyed his connection with his immediate children. By cursing Canaan, however, Noach severed the ties that Canaan had with his forebears, leaving him stranded (so to speak) without past and without future. As a result, Canaan would have emotional ties neither with his father nor his grandfather. Cham had feelings for Canaan, but Canaan did not reciprocate. Thus, the love Cham sought from his grandson/offspring was no longer existent, which was a fitting curse for what he had done.