

After teaching many laws about redeeming real property and relatives in servitude, the Torah ends with a point that – until now – has only been implied.

**כִּי־לִי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים עֲבָדֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר־הוֹצֵאתִי אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:**

“It is because to me the Bnei Yisroel are servants; they are my servants, that I brought them out from the Land of Mitzrayim. I am Hashem, your Lord” (Vayikra 25:55).

Bnei Yisroel are not “free” to do what they want. They must live by Hashem’s rules and Laws because they are servants to Him. What is the special message of the explicit statement being placed here? This statement should have been said much earlier, by the initial Laws given on Har Sinai, the Aseres Hadibros. “I am Hashem your Lord who took you out of the Land of Mitzrayim.” (Shemos 20:2). It should have said “You are to Me, servants, you shall follow My Laws.” However, the Torah waits until now to say this. Why? Also, why did this entire parsha (subject matter) commence with “And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai.” (Vayikra 25:1).

Gemara Baba Kamma 116a and Baba Metzia 10a say *this passuk teaches us that an employee is at will and he can quite whenever he wants. Even if he makes a commitment to the employer, he can still leave at his own will as he is Hashem’s servant, not the employer’s.* This is also a Mishna in Baba Metzia 6:2.

Gemara Yerushalmi Kiddushin 1:2 says *a person who volunteers himself to stay in his master’s servitude gets his ear pierced. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai says it is because he heard “You shall have no other Lord but me” (Shemos 20:3) on Har Sinai and he is not heeding that. Another explanation is that he heard – also on Har Sinai – that “Bnei Yisroel are my servants” (Vaykra 25:55) and he is not heeding it.* Gemara Kedushin 22b also cites this saying *you heard this passuk (Vayikra 25:55) on Har Sinai. Rabbi Shimon bar Rebbi says the doorpost is used because Hashem passed the houses that had the blood on the doorposts when He redeemed Bnei Yisroel from Mitzrayim.*

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai seems to be learning that this was heard by all Bnei Yisroel as part of the Dibros that Hashem spoke out and the Bnei Yisroel heard. He also can mean that hearing it from Moshe who heard it on Har Sinai is the same thing as hearing it from Hashem on Har Sinai. I also point out that our parsha here (subject matter) is not about a person selling himself to volunteer servitude. These verses are about someone who is in debt not someone repaying a theft or crime. This servant doesn't have the option to stay with his master because he is not a slave. "For they are my servants who I redeemed from the Land of Mitzrayim. They may not sell themselves into servitude." (Vayikra 25:42).

Rashi says *Hashem is saying they are my slaves as I have an earlier deed of purchase – when I took them out of Mitzrayim.*

Ibin Ezra says *inform the resident of the Land or a stranger to the Land that if you purchase one of Bnei Yisroel that they are already servants to Hashem.* He seems to imply that is why there are broad rules of redemption also listed in this parsha. (See Vayikra 25:47-50).

Chizkuni points out *it already said Ibid 25:42 that "they are My servants."* That was after talking about one Yisroel gaining another Yisroel as a servant. Servants cannot own servants. Our verse, *ibid 25:55, is after teaching the Laws if a stranger or resident alien obtains a Yisroel as a servant due to debt. One would think that the servant being a servant to Hashem but the resident alien not being a servant to Hashem would prevent redemption. Hashem teaches, they were My servants first. You cannot own My servants.*

Daas Zekeinim says *they are servants to Hashem as opposed to Esav. Also, there already is a command not to make foreign idols. The Torah repeats 'I am Hashem your Lord' here because it is a promise from Hashem to redeem Bnei Yisroel from exile and foreign bondage. By keeping the Laws not to make foreign idols that will merit the redemption from foreign servitude.*

Daas Zekeinim seems to be talking homiletically about years after exile and not practically as during the times when Yisroel were sovereigns of their own land. That is

why he speaks of not being slaves to Esav, i.e. foreign nations, and about redemption from exile.

Ohr Chaim says *the Torah repeats "they are my servants" to teach that Bnei Yisroel are worthy and holy enough to be Hashem's servants. 'I took them out of the Land of Mitzrayim' comes to teach that they are obligated to keep My Laws.*

The Torah commences the subject matter of subjecting other, either through employment or through loans, with the fact that these Laws were taught on Har Sinai. It ends it with reminding Bnei Yisroel—and all those that live in Eretz Yisroel under a Yisroel kingship—that Bnei Yisroel are Hashem's servants, first and foremost.

The rules about employment and owning servants and helping those in need through loans or employment are all *because Bnei Yisroel are all servants to Me*. The rich person giving the loan or giving employment to another for the satisfaction of a debt is also a servant to Hashem. One servant cannot own another servant or treat another harshly. Further, *they are my servants*. The first one talks about the debtor. He is a servant of Hashem so treat him well. Also, *they are my servants* refers to the creditors. They are also my servants so they cannot treat their fellow servant badly. Redemption must be an easy process and the servitude must not be harsh. Further, for the resident alien or foreigner they must also realize that Bnei Yisroel are already servants that HaShem took out of the Land of Mitzrayim. Hashem is the redeemer so Hashem governs how they are to be treated.

The passuk repeats "I am Hashem" even though it is already been implied by *who took them out of the Land of Mitzrayim* because the Torah is teaching this is the same Law and rules spoken on Har Sinai when Hashem said, "I am Hashem." The utterance of "I am Hashem" includes all Laws derived out of the same concept: I took Bnei Yisroel out of bondage, I am their Master, I control their fate, they are my servants. Even if a foreign power takes over and expels Bnei Yisroel from their own land—exile—Hashem still controls the fate of Bnei Yisroel. *They are my servants*. Then and forever.

Bnei Yisroel became Hashem's nation in two parts. First, when He took them out of the Land of Mitzrayim. The second part – the final stamp – was when Hashem gave them His Law on Har Sinai. A servant cannot be a servant without rules. The relationship finalized when Hashem gave the Torah to Bnei Yisroel, at Har Sinai. These Laws – of our parsha – were given on Har Sinai because Bnei Yisroel are Hashem's servants. The two parts of the relationship are again revealed here.

Gemara Baba Basra 10a says, *Turnus Rufus said to Rabbi Akiva: It is charity which condemns you, the Jewish people, to Gehenna because you give it. I will illustrate this to you with a parable. It is comparable to a king of flesh and blood who was angry with his slave and put him in prison and ordered that he should not be fed or given to drink. One person went ahead and fed him and gave him to drink. If the king heard about this, would he not be angry with that person? And you, after all, are called slaves, as it is stated: "For the Bnei Yisroel are slaves to Me" (Vayikra 25:55). If Hashem decreed that a certain person should be impoverished, one who gives him charity defies the will of Hashem. Rabbi Akiva said to Turnus Rufus: I will illustrate the opposite to you with a different parable. It is comparable to a king of flesh and blood who was angry with his son and put him in prison and ordered that he should not be fed or given to drink. One person went ahead and fed him and gave him to drink. If the king heard about this once his anger abated, would he not react by sending that person a gift? And we are called sons, as it is written: "You are sons of Hashem, your Lord" (Devorim 14:1).*

Rabbi Akiva did not need to go onto that verse. He could have simply explained: we are all servants. It is not a *free* person that is giving the sustenance. It is one servant helping another. The king cannot be mad about that. Also, and importantly, the real parable is this: the king may have put the person in prison but it may have been to test the charity of his other subjects. He wants others to have mercy on that person and to feed him. People cannot know the Will of Hashem. It is, therefore, up to man to help his fellow in need.

Finally, Hashem is talking to foreign nations as well. *It is because Bnei Yisroel are my servants. They are my servants that I took from the Land of Mitzrayim.* I.e. they were in bondage

to Pharaoh and I redeemed them and took them to myself as servants – this is the proper rule of conquerors, they adopt and now own spoils of war, including slaves, from their conquered lands. *I am Hashem your Lord.* Even if I did not take you out of Mitzrayim or redeem you – foreign nation – I am still your Lord. I am the Lord of the entire world. Certainly, in Eretz Yisroel, but also throughout the world, I am the Lord, and you shall obey Me. These are My servants and you are not to subjugate them. Those nations that do subjugate them are to get their just desserts.