



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 11 | Mishpatim | Sicha 1 | Kitzur

Verse:

Regarding a Hebrew slave who declares that he does not wish to be freed in the seventh year, The Torah states: His master shall pierce his ear with an awl. (Shmos 21:6)

Rashi:

Rashi comments: “This refers to his right ear. Or perhaps this refers to his left ear? The Torah uses the word ‘ear’ here, and it uses the word ‘ear’ in another passage, in order to make the following analogy: It says here ‘His master shall pierce his ear with an awl,’ and it says regarding one afflicted with *tzara’as*, ‘the cartilage of his right ear.’ Just as there, the Torah refers to his right ear, so here too it is the right ear.” And why was the ear chosen to be pierced rather than any other organ of the body? Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said, ‘The ear that heard on Mount Sinai, “You shall not steal,” and yet he went and stole -- let it be pierced! Or in the case of he who sold himself into slavery, The ear that heard on Mount Sinai, “For unto me the children of Israel are servants,” and yet he went and acquired a master for himself -- let it be pierced!’ Rabbi Shimon would expound this verse like a *chomer* (string of pearls and a pouch of perfume.): ‘In what respect are door and doorpost different from all other objects in the house that they should be singled out for this purpose? Hashem said: The door and the doorpost that were witnesses in Egypt when I passed over the lintel and the two doorposts, and when I said, “for unto Me the children of Israel are servants” -- servants to Me but not servants of servants, and yet this man went and acquired a master for himself -- let him be pierced in their presence!’”

Rashi's underlying question:

In general, Rashi does not offer reasons for the commandments unless there is a difficulty in the verse which compels him to do so. In this verse, the question is, why do we pierce the right ear and not the left ear? Seemingly the Torah seeks to impose a lenient punishment on the slave (because his sin is not severe. He presumably stole, or sold himself, out of desperation, and he desires to remain in bondage because of his natural love to his wife and children). If that is indeed the case then the left ear (which is less prominent) should be pierced! Therefore, as a result of Rashi's interpretation that "ear" refers to the right ear, Rashi explains (in the same comment): "And why was the ear chosen to be pierced..." Rashi explains that the reason the ear is pierced is because the ear heard at Sinai ("You shall not steal", "For unto me the children of Israel are servants"). Therefore the right ear, which is more prominent, is pierced.

Question on Rashi's Commentary

If the reason the slave's ear is pierced is because of the sin of theft and because he chose to sell himself as slave, why is the slave's ear not pierced as soon as he stole or as soon as he sold himself?

Explanation:

When the person stole (and did not have money to repay) or when he sold himself because of his poverty, he is coerced because of his desperation (and therefore not liable for punishment). He also cannot be held responsible for not wanting to go free after the sixth year, because naturally he is emotionally connected to his wife and children (who remain in the home of the master). Rather, his ear is pierced because of the sin of stealing or because he sold himself six years earlier. Because if he stole only because of his desperation then as soon as he would have a chance to flee from slavery, which reminds him of the theft, he would do so. His desire to remain a slave indicates that the sin of theft is not severe to him. Similarly, if he sold himself only because of his financial distress he would also seek to be freed as soon as he had the opportunity. His desire to remain a slave indicates that he is not concerned about the obligation to be a servant to G-d.

The Continuation of Rashi:

To add explanation regarding the reason for the piercing, Rashi quotes the teaching of Rabbi Shimon who "expounded on the verse like a *chomer* (string of pearls and a pouch

of perfume)”. Rabbi Shimon’s interpretation adds insight into the entire verse (not only on the question of why the door was chosen). His interpretation demonstrates that all the details of this *mitzvah* correspond to the specifics of the sin (consistent with Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai’s interpretation, mentioned earlier in Rashi).

The Name of the Author:

Rashi quotes the author by name only when the name adds insight into the commentary. In our case, the “sharp student” will ask: fulfilling the *mitzvah* to marry will naturally cause one to love his wife and children, (and therefore, one could argue, that the slave should be exempt for wanting to remain). Also, the *Torah* predicts that there will always be a poor in the land, (and therefore, one would argue, the slave should be exempt for stealing to alleviate his poverty). Seeing the name Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai, clarifies this. Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai’s essence was Torah. (“He learned for forty years and taught for forty years”, and he influenced the Romans to spare the city of Yavneh and its scholars). The name Raban Yochanan Ben Zakkai clarifies that the Torah itself, knowing the challenges, commanded that we should not steal and be servants to Hashem and not to people. (Therefore the slave is in fact liable).

The Wine of Torah:

Some people are occupied in material matters during the six days of the week to the extent that even when *Shabbos* arrives they don’t want to liberate themselves from their love and devotion to the material. The lesson we learn from Rashi is that we are servants of Hashem, and therefore even during the six days of the week we must not be subjugated enslaved to the material. On the contrary, we should use the material to help us be a servant to Hashem.