

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter V: Chavei Sarah (Gen. 23:1-25:18)

Essay 8: Why Abraham sent Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac, and the statement in Yoma that Eliezer knew Torah and taught it to others.

פסוק וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל-עֲבָדוֹ זָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ הַמְשֵׁל בְּכָל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ וְכוּ'. יֵשׁ מִקְשִׁים מְאִי אֶתָּא קָרָא לְאֲשֶׁמוּעֵינָן הַמּוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ. דְּמֵאֵי נִפְקָא מֵינַה אִם מוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ? וּמָה? וְתַן וּמָה יוֹסִיף בְּזָה? וְלִדְיָדָן עוֹד קָשָׁה אַף עַל זָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ, דְּמֵאֵי נִפְקָא מֵינַה נְמִי בְּזָה?

Let us consider the **verse[s]**, “**Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had command of all that he owned**, ‘Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by the L-rd, the G-d of Heaven and the G-d of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac.’ ” (Gen. 24:2–4). **It’s worth questioning what Scripture is coming to teach us with the words, “who had command of all that he owned.” What difference does it make if he “had command of all that he owned”? How do we profit or gain from this?**¹ **Another question is why Scripture calls him “the senior servant of his household”; what difference does this make?**

וַיֵּשׁ לְאִמְרַי שְׁהַפְסוּק אֵי צְטָרִיךְ לְתַרְזֵן לְמָה אַבְרָהָם שָׁלַח אֶת עֲבָדוֹ לִיקַח אִשָּׁה לְיִצְחָק, וְהֵלֵא הָעֲבָדִים הַשּׁוֹדִים עַל כָּל הָאִיסוּרִין וּמְכַל שְׁכֹן עַל הָעֲרִיּוֹת? שְׁכֹן מְצִינּוּ שְׁנָשִׁים וְעֲבָדִים אֵין מְזַמְנִין מִשּׁוּם פְּרִיצוּתָא דְעֲבָדֵי. וְלִנְהָ אָמַר הַכָּתוּב זָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ, כְּדֵאִתָּא בְּפָרָק ג' דְּיוֹמָא, אֲלֵיעֶזֶר זָקֵן וַיּוֹשֶׁב בְּיִשְׁבֵּיהָ הָיָה, שְׁנַאֲמַר וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל-עֲבָדוֹ זָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ. הוּא דְמַשְׁק אֲלֵיעֶזֶר, שְׂדוּלָה וּמִשְׁקָה מְתוּרַת רַבּוֹ לְאַחֲרִים ע"כ. וְאִם הָיָה מְלַמֵּד לְאַחֲרִים וְזָקֵן, פְּשִׁטָּא וְדֵאֵי שְׁלֵא הָיָה פְּרוּץ בְּעֲרִיּוֹת.

It’s worth stating that the verse needs to solve why Abraham sent his servant to take a wife for Isaac, for weren’t servants suspected of all forbidden activities and foremostly unchaste behavior? For example, **we find that women and servants don’t join together to form a *zimun*** (a group of at least three for saying a blessing after a meal) **due to the rabbis’ concern that they had a tendency of engaging in promiscuity** (Berachot 45b). **For this reason, Scripture reads, “the senior servant of his house,” as it is brought in the third chapter of Yoma (28b), “Eliezer, servant of Abraham, was an elder and sat in yeshiva, as it is stated: ‘Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had command of all that he owned.’ Rabbi Elazar said: He was proficient in the Torah of his master. ‘He is Damascus (*Dammesek*) Eliezer’ (Gen. 15:2). Rabbi Elazar said: [The word *Dammesek* is a contraction of] he who draws (*doleh*) and**

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¹ Cf. Ps. 120:3: “What can you profit, what can you gain, O deceitful tongue?”

gives drink (*mashke*) to others from his master's Torah." If he taught others and was an elder, it is obvious and certain that he was not engaged in unchaste behavior.

אלא דקשה איך אפשר שאליעזר יהיה מלמד לאחרים תורת רבו ותופס ישיבה, והא קיימא לן שאסור לאדם ללמד את עבדו תורה. ובנדאי שאברהם, שקיים אפילו עירובי תבשילין, לא עשה איסור זה.

Rather, it's difficult how Eliezer could possibly teach his master's Torah to others and how he was entitled to yeshiva, as it's known that it is forbidden for a man to teach Torah to his servant.² Certainly Abraham, who "fulfilled even the mitzvah of the joining of cooked foods" (Yoma 28b),³ wouldn't engage in this prohibition of teaching Torah to a servant. I.e., Abraham's fulfillment of the joining of cooked foods shows that he was concerned not only about Biblical law but even about rabbinic law.

אמנם גרסינן בפרק ב' דכתובות (דף כ"ח) ואלו נאמנין להעיד בגדלן וכו'. ושהיה איש פלוני יוצא מבית הספר לטבול ולאכול בתרומה.

In fact, we read in a Mishnah in the second chapter of Ketubot (page 28a): "These are deemed credible to testify as adults with regard to what they saw when they were minors. A person is deemed credible to say: that so-and-so would leave school to immerse in order to partake of *terumah*," and therefore he is a priest.⁴

ודילמא עבד פהן הוא מסייע ליה לר' יהושע בן לוי, דאמר ר' יהושע בן לוי, אסור לאדם שילמד את עבדו תורה. ולא? והתנאי: לנה הימנו רבו, או שעשאו רבו אפוטרופוס, או שהניח תפילין בפני רבו, או שקרא שלשה פסוקים בבית הכנסת, הרי זה לא יצא לחירות? התם דאיקר עבד מדעתו. פי קאמרין דקא נהיג ביה מנהג בני.

The Gemara asks:

Perhaps he is only the servant of a priest, who is also allowed to eat *terumah*? [The Mishnah] supports Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: It is prohibited for a person to teach his servant Torah. I.e., if the Mishnah considers a student eating *terumah* as proof that the student is a priest, it must not think that a servant could be a student. The Gemara asks: Is Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi correct that one may **not teach his servant Torah?**

² Mishneh Torah, Sefer Kinyan, Servants, 8:18: "It's forbidden for a man to teach his servant Torah, but if he teaches him, he [still] doesn't go free."

³ As quoted in Essay 6 for this parsha, "Rav said, 'Abraham our Patriarch fulfilled the entire Torah before it was given'" (Yoma 28b). The same page gives as an example a rabbinic law, the *eruv tavshilin*, a mixture of cooked foods. It is ordinarily forbidden on a holiday to do any act in preparation for the following day, even if the following day is the Sabbath (upon which it is forbidden to cook). However, the sages created a halachic device, the *eruv tavshilin*, by which food is cooked or baked and set aside on the day before the holiday, allowing one to cook food on that holiday for use on the Sabbath that immediately follows it.

⁴ Terumah is a tithe on produce that can be eaten by a priest, his family, and his servants.

But isn't it taught in a *Baraita*: A servant whose master borrowed from him,⁵ or whose master made him steward over his property,⁶ or who donned Tefillin in his master's presence,⁷ or who read three verses from the Torah scroll in the synagogue,⁸ does not necessarily emerge to freedom?⁹ I.e., these abilities or privileges don't prove that a person is a free man, and if a servant is able to read the Torah in synagogue, how did he learn how to do this other than being taught by his master, either directly or at school? The Gemara answers that **there in the *Baraita* **the servant read** in the synagogue **at his own initiative**, and by this initiative he could have also taught himself to read the Torah. In contrast, **when we say** it is forbidden to teach Torah to a servant, we refer to it being forbidden **where [the master] treats [the servant] with treatment typical of his children**, and sends him to school.¹⁰ So testimony that a student eats *terumah* is proof that he is not a servant, and is in fact a priest.**

- (Ketubot 28a-28b)

וּפְרִיֵשׁ רִשׁוֹ"י הָרִי זֶה לֹא יֵצֵא לְחֵירוֹת, וְלֹא אֶמְרִינּוּ אִי לֹא דְשַׁחְרְרִיָּה לֹא הֵנָּה יִזְנֶף מִיָּמֶיהָ וְלֹא קָא שְׂבִיק לִיהָ לְנֶהֱוֹג מְנַהֵג בֵּן חוֹרִין, וְשִׁמְעִינוּ מִיָּמֶה דְיֵשׁ עֶבֶד שְׁלוּמֵד תּוֹרָה עַכ"ל.

Regarding the words, “does not necessarily emerge to freedom,” Rashi explains: “It doesn’t say that if he hadn’t freed him that he wouldn’t borrow from him. Also, he wouldn’t necessarily prevent him from behaving as a free man. We hear from this that there is such a thing as a servant that learns Torah.”

וּלְפִי פִירוֹשׁ רִשׁוֹ"י, דְקָאֵמֵר שְׁמַעִינוּ מִיָּמֶה דְיֵשׁ עֶבֶד שְׁלוּמֵד תּוֹרָה, בְּרֵאָה דְהִמְקִשָּׁן סְלֵקָא דְעֵתוֹ: דְמִתְנַתִּין דְקָתְנִי וְשִׁהֵיָּה אִישׁ פְּלוּגִי יוֹצֵא מִבֵּית הַסֶּפֶר לְטָבוֹל וְכוּ', לֹא חִיִּישִׁינוּ שְׁיִהֵיָּה עֶבֶד, לְפִי שְׂאִין עֶבֶד לּוֹמֵד תּוֹרָה, וּמְסִינֵע לִיהָ לֵר' הַוֹּשֵׁע בֶּן לֹוִי. מִשּׁוּם דְמִשְׁמַע לִיהָ שְׁהִטְעַם שְׁאָסוּר לְהִרְבּ לְלַמֵּד לְעֶבֶדוֹ, הִיָּינוּ מִשּׁוּם דְאִין עֶבֶד לּוֹמֵד? וְאִחֵר כֶּה קִשְׂיָא לִיהָ מְבַרְיָתָא דְתַנְיָ אוֹ שְׁקֵרָא שְׁלִישָׁה פְּסוּקִים, דְשִׁמַּע מִיָּמֶה דְיֵשׁ עֶבֶד לּוֹמֵד כְּפִירוֹשׁ רִשׁוֹ"י.

According to Rashi’s explanation, “We hear from this that there is such a thing as a servant that learns Torah,” it appears that [the following] entered the mind of the questioner

⁵ One would ordinarily think that a master can take his servant’s property without asking permission, but the *Baraita* shows this isn’t necessarily true.

⁶ This shows a high degree of trust not ordinarily shown to a servant.

⁷ A servant is obliged to observe only the mitzvot incumbent upon women: i.e., the negative mitzvot and those positive mitzvot that are not time-bound. One would think that a servant wouldn’t don Tefillin (a time-bound mitzvah), especially in the presence of his master, but the *Baraita* shows this isn’t necessarily true.

⁸ Some in the synagogue might be insulted if a servant is called up to the Torah.

⁹ The word *eved* (עֶבֶד) is variously translated as servant, slave, or bondsman. Some English translations differentiate between a Hebrew slave (whom they refer to as a servant or bondsman) and a non-Hebrew slave (whom they refer to as a slave). This translator has used the word servant, as Jewish law requires that even non-Hebrew slaves be treated well.

¹⁰ As stated in footnote 2, the Rambam rules that a master cannot teach Torah to his servant. The RaN disagrees, saying there’s no prohibition against teaching Torah to a servant, only against treating him as a son. The concern is that people will incorrectly believe the servant is a free man and then will arrange a marriage with him. The Radbaz and the Bach (Yoreh De’ah 267:60), say that one shouldn’t teach Torah to a servant, just as one shouldn’t teach Torah to a woman (see the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer in Sotah 3:4).

(i.e., Rashi). **Our Mishnah taught that there was a certain man who left school to immerse etc., but there's no need to fear that he could be a servant, because a servant doesn't learn Torah, and this supports Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. As [the Gemara] teaches the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi that it is forbidden for a master to teach his servant, Rashi wondered if this is because a servant shouldn't learn at all, from any source? But afterward the *Baraita* taught, "or who read three verses from the Torah scroll in the synagogue," which suggests that a servant is allowed to learn. The conclusion reached is that it is learned from this *Baraita* that there is such a thing as a servant who learns, as per Rashi's explanation.**

וְקוּשָׁה דְּאֵם בֶּן אַמַּי ר' יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי לֹא קָאָמַר אֲלֵא אֲסוּר לְאַדָּם שְׂלֵמֵד אֶת עֲבָדוֹ תוֹרָה? עֲדִיפָא מִיֵּנָה הָנִי לִיָּה לְאַשְׁמוּעִינָן שְׂאָסוּר לְעֶבֶד לְלַמּוֹד תוֹרָה, וּמִמֵּילָא הָנָה שְׁמַעִינָן אִיסוּר לְרַבּוֹ וְלְאַחֵרִים נְמִי. דְּבִנְדָאֵי לֹא סָפוּ לִיָּה אִיסוּרָא לְעֶבֶד.

If it's true that a servant shouldn't learn at all, then why did Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi only say that it is forbidden for a man to teach his servant Torah? It would have been preferable if he had informed us explicitly that it is forbidden for a servant to learn Torah, which would have made known a prohibition for both a master and also for others to teach the servant. Certainly, one doesn't feed prohibited foods to a servant, so one wouldn't teach Torah to a servant if it were forbidden for the servant to learn Torah at all.

אִי נְמִי, הָיָה לוֹ לֹמַר סְתָם אֲסוּר לְלַמּוֹד תוֹרָה לְעֶבֶד. אֲלֵא וְדָאֵי מְדַנְקֵט ר' יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי אִיסוּרָא דְּנֻקָא בְּהַרְבַּ, שְׁמַע מִיֵּנָה שְׁהַעֲבָד אִם יִרְצָה לְלַמּוֹד, אִין מוֹחִין בְּיָדוֹ. וְאִם בֶּן, אַף בְּלֹא הַבְּרִייתָא דְּקַתְנִי, אוֹ שְׁקָרָא שְׁלִישָׁה פְּסוּקִים בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת, מִשְׁמַע דְּיֵשׁ עֶבֶד לֹמַד תוֹרָה מְדָר' יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי גּוֹפִיָּה. וְהַדְרָא קוּשְׁיִין לְדוּכְתָּה: אַמַּי לֹא תִיִּישִׁינָן הָכָא שְׁיִהְיָה עֶבֶד אֲפִילוּ שְׁיִוְצָא מִבֵּית הַסְּפָר? וּמֵאִי קָאָמַר מְסִייעַ לִיָּה לְר' יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי?

Alternatively, he could have merely said, "It's forbidden for a servant to learn Torah," i.e., forbidden for everyone to teach him. Rather, from the fact that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi specifically gave the example of saying that a servant's master is forbidden to teach him, perhaps we can learn that if the servant wants to learn on his own, [the master] does not prevent him. But if so, then even without the *Baraita* that taught, "or who read three verses from the Torah scroll in the synagogue," we could learn from Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi himself that there is such a thing as a servant who learns Torah. Thus, we return to our original question: since a servant can learn Torah on his own, and even be taught by people other than his master, then why don't we fear that the one seen leaving school is a servant? Also, how does this Mishnah support the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi?

וְצָרִיךְ לומר שְׁהַמְקָשׁוֹן סָבְרָא אַחֲרֵת הַיְתָה לוֹ, וְכֵמוֹ שֶׁכֶּתֵב הַלְחָם יְהוּדָה בְּהַלְכוֹת עֲבָדִים, דְּהַעֲבֵד פְּנֵעָנִי מִסְתַּמָּא אֵינּוּ בְּקִי בַתּוֹרָה שְׁלֵנוּ, דְּהָא פְּנֵעָנִי הוּא וְאֵינּוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְקֵרוֹת מְקַרָּא וְלִלְמוּד. וְכִי תִימָא דְבִנְיָמִן עֲבָדוּתוֹ דְּנִתְחַסְבֵי קֶצֶת בְּמִצְוֹת, הֵינָהּ לִלְמוּד וּמִבֵּין מַעֲצָמוֹ מִמָּה שְׁרוּאָה וְשׁוּמַע. הָא לִיתָא, דְּכִינּוֹן שְׁהוּא מְשׁוּעָבֵד לְעִבּוּדָת רַבּוֹ, אֵין לוֹ פְּנָאֵי לְלִמּוּד אִם לֹא בְּרִשׁוּת רַבּוֹ. וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי, מִתְחַלְקָה מְסִיעֵע לִיהּ לִר' יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לױ מִמִּתְנִיטִין, דְּלֹא תִיַּשְׁיֵנוּן שְׁמָא עֲבָד הוּא, שְׁהָרִי אָסוּר לְרַב לְלַמֵּד לְעֲבָדוֹ, וְהַעֲבֵד אֵינּוּ יָכוֹל לְלִמּוּד אֱלָא בְּרִשׁוּת רַבּוֹ.

It needs to be said that the questioner has a different opinion, and as the Lechem Yehuda writes on the laws of servants: “that the Canaanite servant simply isn’t an expert in our Torah,” because he is a Canaanite and doesn’t know to read Scripture and to learn. “Perhaps you’ll say that in the time of his service, he was obliged a bit in the mitzvot, and thus that he was learning and understanding on his own from what he saw and heard. But this is not so, because as he was compelled to the service of his master, he wasn’t free to learn without the permission of his master.” (Lechem Yehuda, Laws of Servants, 8:18.)¹¹ Because of this, there is support for the teaching of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, that we shouldn’t fear [that the one seen leaving school] is a servant, both because it is forbidden for a master to teach his servant, and also because the servant isn’t able to learn without the permission of his master.

וּבִתְרַם הַכִּי, אוֹתְבִיָּה מִמָּה שְׁקַרָּא בְּבֵית הַקְּנֻסָּת? דָּאִם פּוֹ, שְׁמַע מִיָּנָה דְּנִשׁ עֲבָד שְׁלִמְד תּוֹרָה, פְּפִירוּשׁ רַשִׁי, דְּהֵינּוּ אֵיךְ יוֹדֵעַ לְקֵרוֹת אִם לֹא שְׁרַבּוֹ לְמִדּוֹ? וְתִירָץ, הַתָּם דְּאֵיקָרִי עֲבָד מִדְּעָתוֹ, שְׁהֵי עֲבָד חֲכָם וְהֵי מִבֵּין בַּתּוֹרָה קוֹדֵם שְׁהֵי עֲבָד. וּבִהַכִּי אָתִי שְׁפִיר מַה שֶׁכֶּתֵב רַשִׁי י"ל.

After this analysis, we return to the question of how he read in synagogue? If per Rashi’s explanation there is such a thing as a servant who learns Torah, then how would he know to read if his master hadn’t taught him? The solution is that it happened from the servant’s initiative, that he was a wise servant and understood the Torah before he became a servant. Then everything written by Rashi, of blessed memory, is fine.

וּמַעֲתָה נְבֵא לְעִנְיָנוּ. הֵנָּה אֱלִיעֶזֶר אֵי אֶפְשָׁר שְׁהֵי יוֹדֵעַ דְּבַר תּוֹרָה קוֹדֵם שְׁהֵי עֲבָד לְאַבְרָהָם, שְׁהָרִי לֹא הָיוּ מִפִּירִים כָּלֵל בַּהֲקַב"ה, כְּמוֹ שְׁפִירֵשׁ רַשִׁי עַל פְּסוּק, ה' אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם, אֲשֶׁר לִקְחֵנִי מִבֵּית אָבִי וְכוּ' וְאֵיךְ לְמַד תּוֹרָה? וְהֵלֵא עֲבָד אֵין לוֹ פְּנָאֵי לְלִמּוּד אִם לֹא יִתֵּן לוֹ רַבּוֹ רִשׁוּת, וְעַל כֵּן צָרִיךְ לומר שְׁאַבְרָהָם נָתַן לוֹ רִשׁוּת.

Now we come to our subject. Regarding Eliezer, it’s impossible that he knew the Word of Torah before he became a servant to Abraham, at a time when people didn’t recognize the Holy One, Blessed be He, as Rashi explained on the verse, “The L-rd, the G-d of heaven, who took me from my father’s house” (Gen. 24:7). In Gen. 24:3, Abraham instructs Eliezer and refers to the Creator as “the G-d of Heaven and the G-d of earth.” But in Gen. 24:7, in referring to his

¹¹ Rabbi Yehuda Ayash (1700–59), Algerian rabbi, *av beit din* of Algiers. Lechem Yehuda (Livorno [Leghorn], vol. 1, 1745; vol. 2, 1758) is a commentary on the Rambam’s Sefer HaMitzvot and on the Mishneh Torah. The reference is to the law previously brought from the Mishneh Torah, Sefer Kinyan, Servants, 8:18: “It’s forbidden for a man to teach his servant Torah, but if he teaches him, he [still] doesn’t go free.”

youth, Abraham only refers to the Creator as “the G-d of Heaven,” as if to say that people did not acknowledge Him at that time, so it’s as though He wasn’t “G-d of earth” then.¹² It is therefore obvious that Eliezer couldn’t have learned Torah in such days of ignorance; **so how did he learn Torah?** He must have learned it after beginning his service to Abraham. **Since a servant doesn’t have permission to learn if his master won’t give him permission, you must say that Abraham gave him permission.**

וְהִדְרָא קוּשְׁיִין לְדוּקְתָא, אִיךָ נִתְּן רְשׁוּת לְעֶבֶד לְלַמּוֹד תּוֹרָה, וְהָא אָסוּר לְאָדָם לְלַמֵּד אֶת עֶבְדוֹ תּוֹרָה, וְנִתְּיֵנָה רְשׁוּת הַגּוֹי כְּאִילוּ לְמַדּוֹ. וּמִכָּל שָׂכֵן, שְׁהֵי מְנִיחַ לוֹ לִישֵׁב בִּישִׁיבָה, כְּמוֹ שְׁנֹרְאָה מִזְקֵן בֵּיתוֹ? וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי, הוֹסִיף הַכֹּתוּב, הַמּוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ, שְׁלֹא הֵיךָ מְשׁוּעָבֵד לְאַבְרָהָם תָּמִיד, אֲלֵא אַבְרָהָם הֵיךָ מְנִיחוֹ בְּרִשְׁוֹתוֹ לְהִתְעַסֵּק כְּשִׁירְצָה כְּמוֹ אַדּוּן. וּבִשְׁבִיל זֶה, הָעֶבֶד מֵעֲצָמוֹ נִתְּחַכֵּם לְעֵתוֹת הַפְּנָאִי.

We return then to the difficulty of how [Abraham] gave permission to his servant to learn Torah, if it is forbidden for a person to teach his servant Torah, and as giving him permission to learn is as if he taught him. Furthermore, how could he place him to sit in yeshiva, as we see “the senior servant of his household,” as explained in Yoma 28b? Because of this difficulty, Scripture adds “who had command of all that he owned.” I.e., [Eliezer] wasn’t serving Abraham non-stop, rather Abraham placed him in a position as though he wanted him to be the master of Abraham’s properties. Because of this, the servant had leisure time, and by himself dealt wisely with his leisure time and made sure to learn Torah.

וּכְלָפִי מֵאֵי דְאֶמְרִינֵן בְּפָרְק ג' דְּיוֹמָא, הַמּוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ, הַמּוֹשֵׁל בְּתוֹרַת רַבּוֹ. נוֹכַח לוֹמַר בְּדִרְבָּי אַחַר, שְׁאֵלֵי עֲזָר לֹא הֵיךָ לוֹמֵד אֲלֵא הֶלְכוֹת שֶׁל עֶבֶד, וְזֶה בְּנֹדָאֵי שְׁמוּתָר לוֹ לְלַמּוֹד, כְּדִי לְעֲשׂוֹת הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁהוּא חַיֵּיב. כְּדָאֶמְרִינֵן בְּפָרְק ז' דְּסִנְהֶדְרִין, דְּאֶפִּילוּ הַנְּכָרִים בְּשִׁבְעַת מִצְוֹת דִּידְהוּ יְכוּלִים לְלַמּוֹד הַתּוֹרָה. וּכְשֶׁהֵיךָ זֶקֶן וְיֹשֵׁב בִּישִׁיבָה, לֹא הֵיךָ מְלַמֵּד אֲלֵא הֶלְכוֹת עֶבְדִּים לְעֶבְדִּים אַחֲרֵים.

According to what it says in the third chapter of Yoma (28b), “who had command of all that he owned,” “Rabbi Elazar said: that means in command of the Torah of his master,” i.e., Eliezer had a certain level of proficiency in the Torah. We’re able to restate it, that Eliezer was only learning the laws [applicable to] a servant, and it was certainly permissible for him to learn this, in order to fulfill the mitzvot in which he was obliged. As it says in the seventh chapter of Sanhedrin (59a), non-Jews, who are only obliged “in their seven mitzvot,” are able to learn the Torah. When [Eliezer] was old and sat in yeshiva, he was only teaching the laws of servants to other servants.

¹² Rashi on Gen. 24:7: “Here he did not say ‘and the G-d of the earth,’ whereas above he said, ‘And I will make thee swear etc. ... [and the G-d of the earth].’ But, in effect, Abraham said to him: Now He is the G-d of Heaven and the G-d of the earth, because I have made him (i.e., His Name) a familiar one in peoples’ mouths: but at the time when He took me from my father’s house, He was G-d of Heaven only and not G-d of the earth, for people did not acknowledge Him, and His Name was not commonly known on earth.”

Rashi’s source is Gen. Rabbah 59:7: “Rabbi Pinchas said: Before I [i.e., Abraham] made the One known to his creatures [humanity], he was “the G-d of Heaven,” but now that I have made G-d known to his creatures, the One is also “G-d of the earth.”

וְדַיִק הַגְּמָרָא לֹמֵר שֶׁהֵיָה דוֹלָה וּמִשְׁקָה מִתּוֹרַת רַבּוֹ לְאַחֵרִים, דְּלָמָּה לִּיהָ לְמִימַר מִתּוֹרַת רַבּוֹ. הֲלֵא הֵיָה דַּי לֹמֵר, דוֹלָה וּמִשְׁקָה הַתּוֹרָה לְאַחֵרִים, אֲלֵא וְדַי שְׂדוּקָא תּוֹרַת רַבּוֹ דְּהֵיִינוּ הִלְכוֹת עֲבָדִים הֵיָה מִלְּמַד. וְדַיִק נְמִי לֹמֵר לְאַחֵרִים, דְּהֵיִינוּ עֲבָדִים אַחֵרִים, כְּלֹמֵר אַחֵרִים שֶׁהֵיָה עֲבָדִים כְּמוֹהוּ.

The Gemara (Yoma 28b) is precise to say that he “draws and gives drink to others from his master’s Torah,” specifically from the Torah of his master. It was not sufficient to say “draws and gives drink to others,” rather it was specifically the Torah of his master that was the source of the laws of servants that he was teaching. It also specifically says “to others,” which was to other servants, as if to say, others who were servants like him.

וְגַם בְּדִרְדָּךְ זֶה אֵיזְטָרִיף קָרָא לֹמֵר, הַמּוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל אִשָּׁר לוֹ, דְּלֹאֲחֵר שֶׁהוּכְרַח הַפְּתוּב מִטַּעַם הַנַּ"ל לֹמֵר, זָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ, שֶׁהֵיָה זָקֵן וַיּוֹשֵׁב בֵּינְשִׁיבָה. וַיֵּשׁ קוֹשְׁיָא אִיף לְמַד הָעֶבֶד תּוֹרָה, לְפִי זֶה סִיָּים, הַמּוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל אִשָּׁר לוֹ, דְּמִשְׁמַעוּ הַמּוֹשֵׁל בְּתוֹרַת רַבּוֹ, כְּלֹמֵר רַק בְּדִינֵי הָעֶבָדִים הֵיָה לֹמֵד וּמְלַמֵּד.

Also, in this way it was necessary for Scripture to say, “who had command of all that he owned.” That is, as mentioned above, Scripture was forced to say “the senior servant of his household,” implying that he was old and sat in yeshiva and therefore wouldn’t be suspected of sexual immorality. This created a difficulty how the servant learned Torah, accordingly [Scripture] concludes, “who had command of all that he owned,” meaning one who had command of the Torah of his master, as if to say [Eliezer] only learned and taught the laws of servants.

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