

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter LIX: Kohelet (Ecclesiastes)

Essay 17. Well-treated slaves

"רֵאִיתִי עֲבָדִים עַל-סוּסִים וְשָׂרִים הֹלְכִים כְּעֲבָדִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ". כְּתָבוּ הַתּוֹסְפוֹת בְּקִידוּשֵׁין (דף כ' כַּל הַקּוּנָה עֲבָד עֲבָרִי כְּקוּנָה אֲדוֹן לְעֵצְמוֹ), דָּאֵם אֵין לוֹ אֶלָּא כַּר אֶחָד בִּיצַד יַעֲשֶׂה, אֵם יִשֵּׁן הוּא עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב אוֹמֵר "כִּי-טוֹב לוֹ עִמָּךְ", אֵם לֹא יִשֵּׁן לֹא הוּא וְלֹא עֲבָדוֹ, יִשׁ בְּנֵה מַמְדַת סְדוּם. הָא עַל כְּרַחוּ צָרִיךְ לִיתְנֹו לְעֲבָדוֹ. וְזֶה הַעֲנָנָן שְׂרָצָה לְרִמּוֹז כְּאֵן שְׁלֵמָה הַמְּלֶכֶךְ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם, רֵאִיתִי שָׂרִים שְׁלֵא הִיָּה לָהֶם רַק סוּס אֶחָד שְׁנֵתְהִיבוּ לִיתְנֹו לְעֲבָדֵיהֶם וְהֵם הִלְכוּ עַל הָאָרֶץ.

“I have seen slaves on horseback, and nobles walking on the ground like slaves” (Eccl. 10:17). **The Tosafists wrote in tractate Kiddushin (page 20a, “One who acquires a Hebrew slave is like one who acquires a master for himself”), that if he only has one cushion, how should he act? If he sleeps on it, he fails to fulfil what Scripture says, “But should he say to you, ‘I do not want to leave you’—for he loves you and your household and he is happy with you . . .”** (Deut. 15:16).

[Abaye explains that the term “with you” in Deut. 15:16 means that the slave must be] with you [i.e., treated as your equal], with regard to food, [and] with you with regard to drink. You should not eat fine bread [while] he eats inferior bread. You [should not] drink old wine [while] he drinks [inferior] new wine. You [should not] sleep on soft sheets [while] he sleeps on the ground. From here the Sages stated: One who acquires a Hebrew slave [is considered] like one who acquires a master for himself.

- Arakhin 30b

If he doesn't sleep on [the cushion] and neither does his servant, there is behavior characteristic of Sodom in this action. He must necessarily give it to his servant.

This is the point that King Solomon, peace be upon him, wished to hint at here, “I have seen ministers who only had one horse, who were obliged to give it to their servants, while they walked upon the ground.”

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