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The Concept of Eved\Servitude: Having Nothing For Yourself, and Existing Only For Hashem

Parshas Mishpatim begins with the laws of “*eved ivri*”, the Jewish slave. If the “*eved ivri*” does not wish to go free, the master must drill his ear, and he becomes a servant forever to the master. Rashi brings from the Gemara that the ears which heard at Har Sinai that the Jewish people are servants of Hashem has allowed himself to get sold to slavery, therefore, these ears are drilled.

When the Jewish people left Egypt, we were redeemed from the house of slavery, from the house of Pharaoh, and we became instead the servants of Hashem. “*They are my servants, and they are not servants of servants.*”

On a deeper note, our status of slavery did not merely receive an upgrade from being servants of Pharaoh to being servants of Hashem; it was a new status entirely and it was not the same kind of servitude. Not only did we become owned by a new Owner; our very servitude changed.

Hashem said about Moshe that he is called “*avdi*”, “My servant”, and he is also called *eved ne’eman*, trustworthy servant, of Hashem. He is the one who redeemed us from the house of slavery so that we could become the servants of Hashem. Moshe received the Torah at Sinai and gave it to Yehoshua; Moshe is the servant of Hashem and he did not receive the Torah for himself. As soon as Moshe received the *Luchos*, Hashem said to him, “*Go, descend*” due to the sin of the Golden Calf; Chazal explain that all of Moshe’s greatness was given to him for the sake of the Jewish people, and since the Jewish people had sinned, Moshe was told to descend from his exalted level. So Moshe is an *eved Hashem*, in the sense that he keeps nothing for himself, for that is an *eved* – one who receives from his Master, who has nothing of his own. He received the Torah only to give it to *Klal Yisrael*. Thus, Moshe received the Torah and gave it to Yehoshua, for this is his entire essence – to receive the Torah in order to give it to *Klal Yisrael*.

Surely he had to attain a certain greatness in order to give over the Torah; the Torah could not merely be given over through a messenger. The Torah had to be passed on to mankind through a great person such as Moshe. Moshe’s greatness was the fact that he had nothing for himself, and he was entirely devoted to *Klal Yisrael*.

Everything Comes To Us By Means of Shefa (Heavenly Emanations) That Pass Through The System of Hishtalshilus (The Heavenly Chain)

When we reflect deeper into how Hashem created the world, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* says, "The Sages say of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, "All of the world is sustained *b'shvil* (for the sake of) Chanina, my son, who subsists on a small measurement of grain" – Reb Chanina ben Dosa is but a '*shvil*' (means). All of Creation is a '*shvil*' – a means, a path, to transfer all of the Heavenly *shefa* to this world.

The Sages describe Creation as entirely a *hishtalshilus* (the Heavenly 'chain'), which acts as a pipeline which Hashem sends all sustenance to the world through. The Torah is called a "*derech*" (path), for it is written, "*Her ways are ways of pleasantness*", because Torah is the "*derech*" which all *shefa* comes from; it is the means by which *shefa* from Heaven passes through *hishtalshelus*, the Heavenly "chain", from realm to realm, until it comes into this lower realm, the world of action.

Just as all *shefa* passes from world to world until it can get to our world, so does this apply in terms of our own *nefesh* (soul). As an example, there was Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov (who are also called the prince, father, and son). The *shefa* first came to Avraham, then it came into Yitzchok, and then into Yaakov. All *shefa*, which is really the light of Hashem, passes through realm to realm, and from soul to soul. That is the way creation is designed, and this is the concept of *hishtalshilus*.

The world *hishtalshilus* is from the word *shelo*, "his". When something belongs to someone, it is *shelo*, "his", because it comes to him due to *hishtalshilus*. Another example is inheritance. When a child inherits the parent, the acquisitions of the parent become passed onto him, and this is really because all of the *shefa* that comes to a child must pass through the father. The parent is a garment of the child's soul, and therefore all *shefa* that comes to a child comes through the father.

The simple examples of *hishtalshilus* are the father-son relationship and the *rebbe-talmid* relationship, but if someone has great *ahavas Yisrael* to others, he is a root of *hishtalshilus* for others. Additionally, if someone possesses a *neshamah klali* (a collective soul), he is also a root of others' souls and he transfers *shefa* to them. There are other ways as well in which *shefa* can pass on to others.

In the inner workings of the Creation, everything is Hashem's light, His *shefa*, which passes through the process of *hishtalshilus*, through various *shevilim* (paths). The root of these *shevilim* is the 12 *shevatim* (tribes). There were 12 different paths that led through the sea after it was split, and each tribe went through its own unique path. Each tribe received its own *shefa*, through its unique *shvil* (path), and that is why each tribe must have its own portion in the Land. The 12 tribes are all unified under their one root, their father Yaakov Avinu, and in that root, they are all one. But in terms of *hishtalshilus*, they branched out into 12 separate paths, upon the exodus from Egypt. Thus there were 12 different paths when they came to the sea.

But these 12 paths were merely a way to get through the sea; they were not a means of owning the sea, for they were only passing by it. The lesson from this is that these 12 different paths were only a means of passing by, and they were not permanent.

Chazal (in the *Sifrei*) teach that a member of Yisrael is called "*ivri*", either because Avraham was called *ivri*, or because they were "*ovrei yamim*", they can pass through the sea. The lesson of this is because the Jewish people pass through 12 different paths in order to receive *shefa*. On a deeper note, all *shefa* comes to the world by means of the Jewish people, and therefore they are all called "*ivrim*", from the word "*maavar*", "passing through", for everything "passes through" them.

The Attitude of 'Owning' The World

This is the way to view this Creation that Hashem has made. There is a superficial way to see the world, and there is an inner way to view creation. The superficial way to see creation is to see the external layer of things: Reuven owns his house and possessions, Shimeon owns his house and

possessions, etc.

Owning something is not just a monetary status, but a perspective that one has, of viewing himself as the actual “owner” of something. When one has a family, he naturally will feel that he owns his family. After all, according to Torah law, a father was allowed to sell his daughter up until a certain age. A married man is called the “*baal*” (husband\owner) over his wife, for he does have certain acquisition over her; he acquires her handiwork, so he is somewhat of an “owner” over her. A father is somewhat of an “owner” over his children, because if they find an object, it belongs to him; he does not completely own them, but he does feel like an owner over them.

On a more inclusive level, a person thinks he is the owner of his money and acquisitions, and this is really because as a person lives on this world, deep down he thinks that everything on this world belongs to him. *Avos D'Rebbi Nosson* states that there is a big world and a small world; the big world is the Creation in front of us, and the small world is man, who is a microcosm of the entire universe. (Externally, man is a small world only when compared to the universe, but on his inner layer, man is really above the entire universe). Therefore, deep down, man thinks that the entire universe is contained in him, and that is the deeper reason of why he thinks that everything can belong to him.

Most people would deny this, and they would be ready to swear that they don't feel this way. But the truth is that in the depths of one's soul, a person thinks that everything must belong to him. T

he Sages teach in *Avos* that one says, “What is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours”, because deep down, a person thinks that everything is “mine”, and that even what is “yours” is really part of “mine”, because he thinks that everything must pass through his own share.

This attitude exists in every person, to different degrees, and the only question is how much it is manifest in each person; with some, this attitude is more obvious. Those who are more refined will only feel that “what is mine, is mine” and not more than that. But those who are less refined will feel that not only “what is mine, what is mine”, but that even what is “yours” must be also be “mine”.

At what point does a person draw the line and become aware of the difference between what is “mine” and what is “yours”? That will depend on how much a person has purified his inner character. At the most extreme level, a person thinks that everything on the world is “mine”.

The Gemara says that there were several kings who ruled the entire world, and the inner understanding of this is that they considered themselves to be owners of the entire world, which is the full realization of a king's power, who “breaks fences, and no one can protest him.”

(This is not referring to King Shlomo, who was given permission to rule over both the higher and lower realms. This is only referring to all other kings who ruled over the entire world, who represent an attitude of thinking that the entire world belonged to them - an attitude that is contained deep in every soul.)

Avdus\Servitude: We Do Not Own Anything, For We Belong To Hashem

In contrast, the completely opposite attitude of the above is the concept of *avdus*, servitude. Hashem declared us as “*My servants*” - and not the servants of servants”. The phrase “*My servants*” refers to the ability in the soul [which enables a person to view himself as completely for Hashem, and to own nothing of his own].

“Ownership” Only Exists In The Lower Perspective

Of course, according to the definitions contained in the laws of *Choshen Mishpat* (the monetary laws

of Torah), we certainly are the owners of our possessions, and if someone ignores these definitions *chas v'shalom*, he is liable for stealing and he will commit other transgressions of the Torah.

But we must also know that “the Torah speaks in the language of people”, which does not mean that the Torah conforms to the thinking and attitudes of people, but because the Torah descends from the higher realms into the lower realms, through the system of *hishtalshilus*; in the higher realms, the Torah applies on a higher level, and it speaks a higher language than this world. In the lower realms, the Torah speaks a lower language; as an example, when the laws of Torah are followed, we merit the blessing of rain, which is only applicable to the physical realm. But the Torah speaks on a lower language only when it descends to the lower realms. The Torah contains the words “Pharaoh”, “Amalek”, and other wicked people, and the books of the Prophets speak about the wicked Nevuchadnezzar, who were all people that represent the most impure forces of evil; this is all because the Torah descends to the lower realms.

Similarly, there is a concept of “*din*”, the actual requirement of *halachah*, and there is the area of “*lifnim mishuras hadin*”, which are beyond the requirements of *halachah*. A person who keeps only the *din*\(*halachah*) but he never goes beyond that, it is keeping to the *din* only because he is found at that level. The *din* itself comes from the higher realms and extends into the lower realms; it will not be the same *din* for different people, because it depends on the level of the person. What is *din* for one person will be *lifnim mishuras hadin* for another person, and what is *lifnim mishuras hadin* for one person is *din* for another person.

The depth of this is because the Torah descends to the lower realms, and therefore it can apply on many levels. On the lowest level, there is “What is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours”, which is “*din*”, and almost all of the laws of *Choshen Mishpat* are based upon this level. But Chazal in *Avos* teach us that there is a higher level: “What is yours is yours, but what is mine is also yours.” Reuven cannot force Shimon to comply to this level if Shimon isn’t on this level, but with regards to himself, if Reuven is capable of this level, that level is “*din*” for him.

To whom does it apply the higher level of “What is mine is also yours?” It is applicable to a person who is aware of the system of *hishtalshilus* in Creation; namely, that the Torah extends from the higher realms and into lower realms.

When one is aware that everything in Creation serves as means for the *shefa* to pass through it, like a pipeline, or like a path (*shvil*), he becomes aware of the very backbone of Creation’s design. Chazal state that the world was created “*b’shvil Yisrael*”, for the sake of the Jewish people, who are called the “beginning”, and the world was created “*b’shvil Torah*”, for the sake of the Torah, which is also called “beginning”. The Jewish people are the beginning, the *shvil*\path which everything passes through in order to sustain the universe.

Seeing The Inner Layer of Creation

When this fact becomes clear to a person (first on an intellectual level), a person will see a different picture when he looks at the world. Just as there is one source of water in a city which provides water to many homes through the many pipes that connect to it, so can we understand, *l’havdil*, that all of Creation consists of many “pipes” that transfer all of the “water”\(*shefa*) from Hashem’s light throughout creation; it is passing through all of many souls in creation. This is a very clear, true picture of how things really look like in creation.

When one becomes aware of this perspective in his mind, he becomes a new being, who sees a different Creation entirely than how others see it; he will no longer see things the way he used to see it. Instead of seeing a world in which there are differing levels of wealth and poverty, of those who

own more and those who own less, of financial disputes that takes place in *Bein Din*, and the areas that are all within the letter of the laws contained in *Choshen Mishpat* – which is only one side of life – a person with the deeper perspective described here will be able to see beyond this.

The *dinei Torah* in *Beis Din* which take place are an integral part of *Klal Yisrael*, and we cannot budge even one iota from any of the laws of *Choshen Mishpat*, *chas v'shalom*; but they are all only part of the external layer of life. There is a more inner layer to this world.

Just as a person has a body and a soul, and the body wears *tefillin* and it also receives *bris milah*, the main part of a person is his soul, and so too, there is an external layer to Creation and an inner layer to Creation, and the main part of Creation is its inner layer. The external layer of Creation is where the *dinei Torah* take place, and these are all true, but they are not the main part of Creation. They are called "*gufei Torah*", the "body of Torah", because they are the external layer of Torah, the outer "body" of Torah, and not the actual *neshamah* "soul" of the Torah. The soul of the Torah shows a person an entirely different perspective towards Creation.

The *gufei Torah* imply that a person can have ownership of this world, that he can own things or declare them ownerless. But the "soul" of the Torah, which is revealed to a person whose light of the *neshamah* has begun to shine, shows a different Creation. It shows a person how everything in Creation are but pipelines that transfer the *shefa* from Hashem, throughout the creation. From that inner perspective, we do not own anything. It comes to us, but we do not own it.

Leaving The Perspective of "Ownership": The Gateway To True Ahavas Yisrael

When one absorbs this perspective, his entire attitude towards life changes. The attitude of "ownership" that he has towards his money and financial assets will be greatly weakened.

Even more so, he will not feel like an 'owner' in other areas as well. With this perspective, it will be much easier for him to avoid stress from his family members. A person only becomes stressed out from family situations when he thinks that he's in charge of them and that he owns them, and therefore he is pained from them when they aren't acknowledging his 'ownership' of them. And a person only has stress from anything that has to do with his money, when he thinks he 'owns' his money.

But if he does not view himself as an 'owner' to his family and all else that he has acquired, he will instead open up the gate of true *ahavas Yisrael*. True *ahavas Yisrael* means to view oneself as a pipeline which transfers Heavenly light to all others, because he is connected to all others. True, he must first love his own family members, and they take precedence before all else; he must first help them before he helps anyone else. But this is only because he is the 'pipeline' to them – and not because he owns them.

Realizing The Implication of Being A "Servant" of Hashem

When one absorbs this perspective deeply - first in his intellect and then internalized in his heart - one can come to true *bittul* (self-nullification).

This is what brings a person to realize what is meant in the words, "*My servants*" - to become a true *eved* (servant) of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. The depth of our *avdus* (servitude) to Hashem is not the Torah and mitzvos we must keep – that is but the result of our *avdus*. The root of the *avdus* is for a person to realize that we are nothing but a pipeline that transfers the *shefa* of Hashem to the rest of Creation. All of Creation serves a pipe to transfer all of the *shefa*, and the *avodah* upon me is to realize that I am a part of that system.

That being the case, one's children and grandchildren should not become the central part of his life that he thinks about all the time. Life is rather about a love for *am Yisrael*, a love for all of Creation, and to reveal the honor of Heaven upon this world. That is where all of the 'pipes' of Creation lead to. All of the paths that led through the sea after it were leading to the revelation of the Creator at the other end.

The more a person becomes aware of this perspective, in heart and mind, and with the more a person lives with this attitude towards life, not just as intellectual knowledge but as an attitude to live life with, a person will live a purified kind of life. He will live in Hashem's world, and not in the world of people.

The Gemara points out a contradiction between two verses: One verse says "*To Hashem, belongs the earth and all that fills it*", which implies that the earth belongs to Hashem and not to people, but there is another verse, "*The heavens belong to Hashem, and the earth was given to man*", which implies that the world was given to man. The Gemara answers that before a person makes a *berachah*, everything is forbidden to him and it belongs to Hashem, but after making a *berachah*, it belongs to him.^[1] But the deeper understanding of this is that when a person makes a genuine *berachah*, his *berachah* becomes a means of transferring the *shefa* of Hashem upon creation, and he is merely a 'pipe' through which it all passes through.

In Conclusion

This is the truth about life, the inner design of Creation which Hashem has made in His wisdom, and anyone who lives with this perspective, by knowing of it clearly in his mind and then internalizing this perspective in his heart, where this knowledge becomes *daas*.

This perspective towards life enables a person to live in a cleansed state; he will be cleansed from various personal interests which blur his spiritual vision and which show him a world owned by people, not a world owned by Hashem. The 'pipes' will then be cleansed, and the light of Hashem will then be able to pass through them, and then it will follow with the complete revelation of "*To Hashem, belongs the earth and all that fills it.*"

^[1] Berachos 35a