



Likkutei Sichos

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Redeem Yourself

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1.

WHY THE ORDER?

Regarding a Jew who sells himself as an indentured servant to a Gentile, the verse states:¹ “He shall have redemption; one of his brothers shall redeem him. Or his uncle or his cousin shall redeem him, or a family relative... or if he obtains the means, he shall be redeemed.” Based on the order in the verse, “one of his brothers... his uncle or his cousin... or a family relative,” we derive a principle that “the closest relative takes precedence.”² This means that the closest relative is first to redeem the servant.

We need to clarify:

- (a) Should a person who was sold obtains the means, it is understood that he has precedence to redeem himself before any of his relatives.³ Since the verse lists the relatives in the order of their precedence concerning redemption, seemingly, it would have made sense to first mention the situation where the individual “obtains the means.” Afterwards, the verse could have continued (in a case the person himself **cannot** afford it), “one of his brothers... or his uncle....” Why⁴ does the Torah discuss the situation, “if he obtains the means,” *after* listing the relatives who can redeem him?
- (b) Since the verse lists several relatives, and in the order that “the *closest* relative takes precedence,” the first relative that the verse should have mentioned is the person’s father. After all, the father is an even closer relative than “his brother.” (As in the law of inheritance,⁵ “the deceased’s father is

¹ {Vayikra 25:48-49.}

² *Toras Kohanim* on this verse; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodim*,” ch. 2, par. 7; see *Kiddushin* 21a (Rashi there, s.v., “*lekarov*”); *Kesef Mishneh* and *Lechem Mishneh* on Rambam.

³ Like the wording of Rambam: “if he **cannot** afford to redeem himself, then his relatives redeem him.”

⁴ Although we could offer the reason (albeit with difficulty) that this is because {the case of the servant having the means to redeem himself} happens **later**, whereas the relatives may be able to redeem him immediately.

⁵ *Bava Basra* 108b (regarding more laws), 115a (*mishnah*); *Mishneh Torah*, beg. of “*Hilchos Nachalos*.”

given precedence {to inherit} over the deceased’s brothers”). In fact, {even more astonishing is that} the verse makes no mention of “his father” at all!⁶

The same question is asked⁷ in the Torah section dealing with the laws of inheritance. The verse lists the precedence of relatives concerning the rights of inheritance:⁸ “When a man dies and he has no son, you shall transfer his estate to his daughter... to his brother... to his father’s brother... to his relative who is closest to him.” No mention is made of “his father” — whose right to inherit **supersedes** the deceased brother’s right, as mentioned. The answer given is that Scripture “speaks in a way that depicts {Hashem’s} blessing. Scripture does not speak of those people who have been tragically ‘cut off’ {by dying childless while the fathers remain alive}.” Meaning, the verse does not speak of a case of a calamity⁹ where a son predeceased his father.

[This answer, however, doesn’t completely resolve the issue also over there. Since **halachic** issues of inheritance are at stake, there should be no room to omit “his father” only because¹⁰ such a scenario {in the words of Ramban} is not in “a way that depicts blessing.”¹¹ Especially, by omitting the father, one may mistakenly think that a father does not inherit.]

In our case, however, Scripture is **not** talking about a situation {where the son dies before his father, viz.} of “those people who have been tragically cut off,”¹² why doesn't the verse state — from the outset — that it is the father who is first to redeem?

⁶ Similarly, we can ask why his “son,” who takes precedence even over his father (*Bava Basra* 108b), is not listed? We can posit that for a son (to provide for and) redeem his father, would be contrary to the norm and the majority of cases, especially if the son didn't sustain his father initially and his father was forced to sell himself.

⁷ Ramban (also quoted in *Bachya*) on *Bamidbar* 27:9; et al.

⁸ *Bamidbar* 27:8-11.

⁹ Also note *Bava Basra* 108a, near the end. {In the original, “*poranius*.” The mishnah there lists those who both inherit and bequeath, starting with the statement, “A father inherits his sons.” The Gemara questions why the mishnah begins with a scenario in which a father inherits from his deceased son, as this is a calamity.}

¹⁰ **Similar** to what is explained in several places (*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5 p. 281; vol. 18, p. 26, et passim.) regarding what the Sages say (*Pesachim* 3a): “Scripture obfuscates... rather than say something crude.”

¹¹ Especially, dying without a son or daughter is itself not in “a way of blessing.”

¹² Similarly, Ramban’s second answer is irrelevant to our case. {Namely, “Perhaps it never actually happened that a father inherited his son among those who entered the Land.”}

2.

A SPIRITUAL DECLINE

We can resolve this question by first noting that according to our Sages,¹³ the sections in this *sedrah* are “in {chronological} order.” The order reflects the potential downward spiral that can ensue for the failure to observe¹⁴ the mitzvah of *sheviis*, G-d forbid (if even just in a detail): Initially {the transgressor will have to} “sell his movable possessions”;¹⁵ then, he will progressively decline until he reaches the low point of selling himself to a Gentile, G-d forbid; and worse yet, {he will sell himself} “to the **eiker** of a Gentile family,”¹⁶ which means “to idolatry itself”.¹⁷ (Meaning, the Jew will be tasked with looking after the idol).¹⁸

Clearly, this descent is not solely material, one which requires him to sell all of his possessions, and ultimately to sell himself (and moreover) to a Gentile. Rather, the descent represents a progressive **spiritual** decline and a low spiritual state.¹⁹

For if a Jew sells himself to a Gentile: (a) It contravenes Torah — one may not sell himself to a Gentile;²⁰ and (b) it places the Jew in a situation that may lead him to rationalize, “since my master acts indecently, serves idolatry... and profanes the Shabbos, **I, too, will be like him.**”²¹ This is certainly true of one who sells himself “to idolatry itself,” since to serve idolatry is the very antithesis

¹³ *Kiddushin* 20a; Rashi on *Vayikra* 26:1.

¹⁴ See Rashi and *Tosafos* on *Kiddushin* 20a. {“A slight transgression” refers to violating the minor prohibition of doing business with produce grown in the sabbatical year.}

¹⁵ {Rashi on *Vayikra* 26:1.}

¹⁶ *Vayikra* 25:47.

¹⁷ *Toras Kohanim* (and Rashi) on this verse; *Kiddushin* 20b.

¹⁸ Rashi on *Vayikra* 25:47; See *Targum Yonason ben Uziel* on this verse; *Erchin* (30b): “This refers to a person who is sold and becomes a servant, tasked with looking after the idol itself.” In *Kiddushin* 20b, in *Tanna D’Vei Rabbi Yitzchak* (and similarly in *Shitah Mekubetzes*, in *Erchin* 30b): “It refers to someone who becomes a priest to idolatry,” but this is also explained to mean “to chop wood” (see *Shitah Mekubetzes* on Rashi in *Erchin* 30b); see below, Sec. 5, fn. 42.

¹⁹ This is evident because he hasn’t repented — he is insensitive to his sin, and he has no thoughts of repentance (see *Kiddushin* 20a and Rashi on *Vayikra* 26:1).

²⁰ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avadim*” ch. 1, par. 3; *Toras Kohanim*, *Behar*, 25:39; *Sifri*, *Devarim* 15:12.

²¹ *Toras Kohanim* and Rashi on *Vayikra* 26:1. It is explained at length in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, p. 177 ff.

of the relationship described in the verse,²² “the Children of Israel are servants to Me.”²³

3.

FORGETTING FATHER

How could a Jew fall so low that he resorts to selling himself “to idolatry itself?” It all starts when he separates himself and forgets about his Father in Heaven, G-d forbid. (Naturally, he also forgets about the love and reverence²⁴ of a son to his Father (in Heaven), etc.). In the words of Scripture:²⁵ “A son honors his father... If I am a Father, where is My honor...?”

In the lexicon of Chassidus: In the Jew who sells himself, the level of **‘father’**, the soul’s level of ***chochmah***,²⁶ is not (revealed).

The Alter Rebbe explains this at length in *Tanya*:²⁷ The reason a Jew can transgress the will of Hashem is because the soul’s level of *chochmah* — the faith in Hashem that transcends logic²⁸ — is slumbering. Consequently, he doesn’t grasp how transgressing, even a minor sin, separates him “totally from the Unity and Oneness of Hashem.”²⁹

If³⁰ he fully grasped that his sins separate him from “the Unity and Oneness of Hashem,” just as with idolatry, he could withstand the challenge with the same resilience that he and every Jew (even the most lax Jew, and even willful sinners) would {display by} giving their life for the sanctity of Hashem.

²² *Vayikra* 25:55. This is the reason why one who is sold to a Gentile is freed in the Jubilee year (see further in ch. 4).

²³ See *Responsa of Chovas Yair*, sec. 141: An apostate like this denies the unity and creator of the world.

²⁴ Love is the source for all 248 positive mitzvos and fear is the source for all 365 negative mitzvos, (*Tanya*, beg. of ch. 4 (note the change in wording from the beg. of ch. 41; beginning of *Chinuch Katan*); see *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah*,” ch. 2).

²⁵ *Malachi* 1:6.

²⁶ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 3, based on *Zohar*, vol. 3, 290a.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, ch. 19 (25a).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 18 (24a).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, ch. 24.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, ch. 18.

He would do so “without³¹ any knowledge or reflection, but as though it were absolutely impossible to renounce the One Hashem.”

On this basis, the (inner) reason “his father” is neither mentioned here nor in the Torah section dealing with the laws of inheritance is clear: The concept of spiritual death — “the wicked, while alive, are called dead,”³² or on a more subtle level, “one who descends a level... is called dead”³³ — arises from one’s failure to remember his Father in Heaven. {This means that he doesn’t experience} (the revelation of) the level of his soul’s *chochmah* — “**father**” — which is in a state of sleep, as “sleep is one sixtieth of death.”³⁴ In contrast, when he does remember, then there is “My honor,” {so that} when the level of his soul’s *chochmah* shines, then “wisdom {*chochmah*} **gives life.**”³⁵ The illumination of his soul’s *chochmah* doesn’t permit any form of (spiritual) death, not even a descent from one’s level. Because from the level of the soul’s *chochmah*, the *avodah* of a Jew is performed with complete and unwavering faith, beyond change.

4.

SERVANTS TO HASHEM FOREVER

As mentioned above, being sold to a Gentile represents (on a deeper level) **spiritual** decline; understandably, then, the converse is true of the process of **his redemption**.

When the Torah says “he shall have redemption,” it means his relatives **must**³⁶ redeem him. Moreover, the phrase, “he shall have redemption,” connotes also a promise. Even when his relatives do not redeem him, “he goes free in the Jubilee year....”³⁷ And Scripture provides a reason: “For the children

³¹ Ibid., ch. 18

³² *Berachos* 18b ff.; Rashi, end of *parshas Noach*.

³³ *Zohar*, vol. 3, 135b.

³⁴ *Berachos* 57b.

³⁵ *Koheles* 7:12; *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 19 (p. 24b).

³⁶ *Kiddushin* 21b; see *Kiddushin* 20b; *Toras Kohanim* and Rashi on this verse; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avadim*,” ch. 1, par. 4; ch. 2, par. 7.

³⁷ *Vayikra* 25:54.

of Israel are servants³⁸ to Me; they are My servants.” (After all, “My contract was in force earlier.”)³⁹

This refers (on a deeper level) to the **spiritual** redemption from the lowly state in which a person may find himself: At the giving of the Torah, every Jew became a servant to Hashem **forever**. This is an essential preeminence that cannot be stripped away.⁴⁰ Even if the person were to act against Hashem’s will, his connection to evil (being sold to an idol) would still only be extrinsic to his essential being, because his essential being (as a servant to Hashem) cannot be changed. Therefore, without a doubt, “he shall have redemption.”

[On this basis, the connection between the end of the *parshah* and its beginning is now clear. The opening verse emphasizes that “Hashem spoke... **on Mount Sinai...**” This serves as a preamble⁴¹ to the **entire** *parshah*: Because the Jewish people had come from Mount Sinai when⁴² Hashem’s contract with them was first ratified, as it says, “My contract was in force earlier” (the Children of Israel are My servants), this explains why even after a person undergoes a spiraling, spiritual descent — May Hashem spare us! — **certainly**, “he shall have redemption.”]

5.

A JEW WOULD NEVER FORGET

Now we can also explain the (deeper) reason for Rashi’s explanation of, and emphasis and elaboration⁴³ on, the scriptural expression “to the **eiker** (of a Gentile family)” as referring to “one who is sold to idolatry itself, to be tasked with looking after it **and not for worship**, but to chop wood and draw water.”

³⁸ See *Malachi* 1:6: “And a servant {honors} his master”.

³⁹ *Vayikra* 25:55; Rashi (Similarly, Rashi and *Toras Kohanim* on *Vayikra* 25:42)

⁴⁰ See *Maharal* in *Sefer Gevuras Hashem*, ch. 61; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, p. 177, and fn. 32.

⁴¹ For the halachic connection between the opening verse and the continuation of the *parshah*, see *Toras Kohanim* (cited by Rashi) on *Vayikra* 25:1.

⁴² See Rashi on *Mishpatim* 21:7 (from *Kiddushin* 22b): “The ear that heard (my voice) **on Mount Sinai (when I said)**, ‘for the Children of Israel are My servants.’”

⁴³ Rashi on the verse; similarly in his commentary on *Kiddushin* 20b; see also Rashi on *Bava Kama* 113b, *Bava Metzia* 71a, *Erchin* 30b.

It seems unclear how Rashi knows that {the above verse means} “not for worship.” If it is because a Jew is prohibited from being sold for the purpose of idol worship, he is also forbidden to sell himself “to be tasked to look after it” or even (just) to be sold to a Gentile, as previously stated.

Rather, with his interpretation, Rashi reassures us that no matter how low a Jew may fall, even to the bottom, G-d forbid, it is inconceivable that he would ever sell himself “to idolatry... for worship,” since this is “something **entirely impossible**.” Because even before being redeemed, the person has not reached the state where the memory of his Father in Heaven is absent, G-d forbid. Rather, he was only “distracted” and in a state of {spiritual} “sleep.”⁴⁴ The *chochmah* within his soul did not disappear; it is (in the nuanced wording of *Tanya*) only “in a state of **sleep**.”

Thus,⁴⁵ when the person faces a “test that challenges his faith in the One Hashem,” and which touches the deepest part of his soul — the *chochmah* within his soul — it serves to “awaken his soul from its sleep,” preventing him from failing the test. Furthermore, it prevents him from even entertaining a **foreign** thought, speech, or action (“without believing it in his heart at all”) that runs “counter to his faith in One Hashem.”

Thus, it is inconceivable for a Jew to sell himself “for worship” (or even to do it “without believing it in his heart at all”). The furthest a Jew can fall, when the *chochmah* of his soul is in a state of sleep (without taking into account free will),⁴⁶ is to sell himself only “to be tasked with looking after it... to chop wood and to draw water.”

⁴⁴ See the *Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch*, “*Hilchos Talmud Torah*,” ch. 2, par. 10; *Likkutei Torah*, end of “*Kedoshim*.”

⁴⁵ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 19 (25a-b).

⁴⁶ However, with free choice, it is possible to act **opposite** to his nature, etc.; note *Maskil L'Dovid* here, that one who is sold for worship is considered an apostate, and the law is... {to treat him accordingly}; note the *Chovos Yair* above, fn. 23.

6.

SELF REDEMPTION FROM ABOVE

Since the person's memory — the *chochmah*⁴⁷ in the soul of an individual sold to a Gentile — is asleep, to the extent that it is as if he is no longer the master of himself, the individual becomes indentured to a Gentile master, even “to idolatry itself.” In such a state, for the person to redeem himself is impossible, as the saying goes,⁴⁸ “A prisoner cannot free himself from prison.”

His redemption can only come through an awakening from **Above**, (from a higher spiritual plane) by another person (who is not in a sleep-like state) who will redeem him. This is why the verse first mentions the concept of redemption through relatives, as it refers to an awakening from Above that is needed to drag the person out of his wretched state.

The goal, however, is (not for the person to depend constantly on the inspiration of others but) to reveal **his inner-self**, that he is a servant of Hashem, as discussed above. Then, the person's redemption will be such that he (**on his own**) will no longer be vulnerable to such a spiritual downfall.

This is similar to providing material help: The best and the ideal way to assist the poor is by helping them to become self-sufficient and to cut their dependency on others.⁴⁹

This is the (deeper) reason the verse concludes with the clause, “he obtains the means, he shall be redeemed”: The ultimate aim of his relatives in redeeming him is so that eventually, the servant will redeem himself by **his own means**.

[For this reason, the sequence in which family members redeem him is that “the closest relative takes precedence”: Since the ultimate aim is to awaken

⁴⁷ *Chochmah* is the memory part of the brain (*Torah Or*, 81c; 110d; *Likkutei Torah*, end of “*Kedoshim*”; “*Shir Hashirim*” 33a; **et al.**).

⁴⁸ *Berachos* 5b.

⁴⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Matnas Ani'im*,” ch. 10, par. 7; *Tur*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” ch. 249, par. 6.

the servant's inner faculties⁵⁰ and then his external ones so that he can redeem himself, it stands to reason that the closer the “relative” is to the servant, the more profound the relative's influence and impact on the servant.]

7.

A REDEMPTION FOR THE LAND

The potential reason and cause of the descent is hinted at and underscored at the beginning of the *parshah*, “When you enter the land”:⁵¹

In the desert, the Jewish people hadn't needed to engage in material matters: They ate bread from Heaven — *manna*; they drank water from the well of Miriam; and they wore clothes that the “Clouds of Glory would rub... press... {and} their clothes would grow with them....”⁵²

In contrast, the Jewish people were about to enter a settled land where they would need to conform to {and employ} natural methods {to support themselves} — “Six years you shall sow your fields....”⁵³ This {need to engage in nature} would make room for the above-described spiritual downfall.

Therefore, at the beginning of the *parshah*, we are immediately reassured that because we come with the power of “Mount Sinai,” it is certain that (not only will we remain complete **ourselves** — “he shall have redemption,” but) we will also refine the “**land**.” The land of *Canaan* will be transformed into the land of *Israel*. And ultimately, in the land of Israel itself, we will bring about {the spiritual elevation foretold by the verse} “The land shall rest a Shabbos for Hashem.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Since repentance takes place primarily in the heart (*Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 29, 36b) and is drawn into all of his soul-powers.

⁵¹ *Vayikra* 25:2.

⁵² Rashi on *Devarim* 8:4.

⁵³ *Vayikra* 25:3.

⁵⁴ *Vayikra* 25:2.

In place of false gods in the land of Israel (to which a Jew might sell himself, Heaven forbid) — “the **eiker** of a Gentile family” will take place. *Tosafos*⁵⁵ explains this means that “**ultimately,**⁵⁶ **it will be uprooted.**”⁵⁷ Anything to do with idolatry will be eradicated. Instead — “The land will rest a **Shabbos for Hashem,**” and one will behold how “Mine is the land.”⁵⁸

— Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Behar-Bechukosai*, 5723 (1963)

⁵⁵ *Kiddushin* 20a; *Erchin* 30b.

⁵⁶ And not only (as many commentators explain it — Ramban, ad loc; et al.) because a **person** is obligated to dig it up and to uproot it.

⁵⁷ {In the original Hebrew, “*sofa le’aker.*” The root of the infinitive “*le’aker*” is “*eiker.*”}

⁵⁸ *Vayikra* 25:23.