

# Parsha Ponders

Mishpatim | January 28, 2022 | 26 Shevat 5782

## Eye trouble<sup>1</sup>

שלש פעמים בשנה יראה כל זכורך אל פני האדון יקוק

All of your males shall appear, three times a year, before The Lord, Hashem<sup>2</sup>

In conjunction with the three major Festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, there is a *mitzvah* to “appear” in the Temple, before G-d. That is, all males should make the effort to personally bring a special offering in the Temple, in honor of the Festival. The *gemarra* makes an interesting derivation<sup>3</sup>. The Torah uses the word יראה, which could be read “shall be seen”, and also read “shall see”. As such, we derive that just like we “shall be seen” so-to-speak by Hashem with “two eyes”, so too we “shall see” with two eyes. Namely, someone who is blind in one eye is exempt from this *mitzvah*, for whatever reason<sup>4</sup>.

Now, this derivation presents a problem<sup>5</sup>. Our Sages teach us<sup>6</sup> that when we fulfill the will of Hashem, we are called His children. However, when we don’t fulfill the will of Hashem, we are called His slaves. It would seem, the verse from which we derived the exemption of those blind with one eye, is referring to us as slaves. The verse calls Hashem “The Lord”, a term not commonly associated with parents. Another teaching says<sup>7</sup> that when the Jews fulfill the will of Hashem, He “looks at us”, so-to-speak, with two eyes. As the verse says, “the eyes of Hashem are towards the righteous”<sup>8</sup>. However, when we don’t fulfill the will of Hashem, He “looks at us” with one eye, as the verse says, “the eye of Hashem is towards those who fear Him”<sup>9</sup>.

Putting two and two together, we have a contradiction. The verse regarding “appearing” in the Temple refers to Hashem as “The Lord”. That implies that the verse is referring to when we are in the status of Hashem’s slaves, that we aren’t fulfilling His will. When we don’t fulfill His will, He “looks at us” with one eye. If so, how can we derive that “just like we shall be seen by Hashem with two eyes, so too we shall see with two eyes”, to exclude someone blind in one eye? When we don’t fulfill Hashem’s will, He looks at us with one eye! That’s what the verse is referring to. So why should someone blind in one eye be exempt<sup>10</sup>?

There’s a pretty ingenious solution to this issue<sup>11</sup>. We need to analyze this idea that when we fulfill the will of Hashem, we are called His children, yet when we don’t, we are called His slaves. If so, why then do we find many righteous individuals are praised as עבדים, usually translated as slaves? Avraham is

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Kehillas Yitzchak to Exodus 23:17, by Rav Yitzchak Reitbord, a student of the Beis HaLevi

<sup>2</sup> Exodus loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Chagigah 2a

<sup>4</sup> See <https://parshaponders.com/korach-5781/> for a *chassidische* explanation

<sup>5</sup> The Kehillas Yitzchak presents this question in the name of Rav Yisroel Salanter

<sup>6</sup> Bava Basra 10a. See also Shemos Rabbah 24:1

<sup>7</sup> Shir HaShirim Rabbah 8:13

<sup>8</sup> Psalms 34:16

<sup>9</sup> ibid 33:18

<sup>10</sup> The Kehillas Yitzchak says we should see Even Yisroel § 5

<sup>11</sup> The Kehillas Yitzchak says he heard this from רב החרף המשכיל מו"ה בן ציון נ"י משקוד

called<sup>12</sup> Hashem's עבד, Moshe is called<sup>13</sup> Hashem's עבד. Hashem's prophets are called<sup>14</sup> His עבדים. King David is called<sup>15</sup> Hashem's עבד. The list keeps going. Something must be missing here.

We can say that there are two types of עבדים, slaves, and servants<sup>16</sup>. Being a slave is considered lowly and not complimentary. That's what it means when our Sages say that when we don't fulfill the will of Hashem, we are considered His slaves. However, in some ways, slaves are on a higher level than children. The difference between a child and a slave is that the child serves their parent because of love. A servant serves their master due to fear, or for some personal benefit. In this way, a child is more special than a slave. However, there's something a slave has which a child doesn't. A slave's service to their master is without pause. It's never ending<sup>17</sup>. This is untrue for a child, whose service of their parent has its limits<sup>18</sup>.

In truth, the righteous possess both of these qualities. They serve Hashem out of love, like a child. As well, they are steadfast in their service, like a slave. That is why they are referred to as עבדים, meaning the higher status of servants. That implies that they are never ending in their service, like a slave.

With this, we can answer the question we started with. Why does the verse regarding the *mitzvah* to appear in the Temple three times a year use the term "The Lord"? As we said, that implies that the Jews aren't fulfilling Hashem's will, and are in the status of His slaves. Why is the verse assuming the worst in us? It would have been much more optimistic to imply that we are in the status of His children, fulfilling His will. The verse seemingly should have said, "You shall appear three times a year before Your Father in Heaven".

It must be then that this really is the intent of the verse. The Torah is assuming that we are going to fulfill Hashem's will. If so, why does it refer to Hashem as "The Lord"? It's assuming that we'll achieve the higher status of servants, serving Hashem out of love, and without pause. Since we'll be fulfilling Hashem's will, Hashem will be "looking at us" so-to-speak with two eyes. As such, the derivation to exclude someone blind in one eye is totally justified.

Good Shabbos

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<sup>12</sup> [Genesis 26:24](#); [Psalms 105:42](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Numbers 12:7](#); [Deuteronomy 34:5](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Jeremiah 25:4](#); [Amos 3:7](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Ezekiel 37:24](#)

<sup>16</sup> The [Kehillas Yitzchak](#) doesn't make this differentiation in translation, but I figured his point works nicely in English

<sup>17</sup> See [Bava Basra 127b](#) with [Rashbam](#) (דמשמש לי כעבדא קאמר)

<sup>18</sup> The [Kehillas Yitzchak](#) says to see the [Alshich](#) to [Avos 1:3](#)