

From the desk of Rabbi Baumann



Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Behar-Bechukosai 5780

An unfortunate by-product of our current situation is a rise in feelings of anxiety. While concern about the future is the main reason for these feelings, as spiritually sensitive, G-d-fearing Jews, many of us have an added layer of concern about whether we are handling and balancing our religious, familial, work and community responsibilities properly. Specifically, with our inability to access shuls and schools on the one hand, and work, relatives and friends on the other, we and particularly our children, have become involved with technology, internet and additional time on-line and on-screen to an extent we never would have allowed beforehand.

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While this is certainly a concern, and there are practical, common-sense measures to take to reduce the impact, it may be worthwhile to understand a lesson imbedded in this week's Parsha that can help give us perspective. It should be helpful in addressing and reducing our anxiety levels.

The *Torah* speaks (*Vayikra 25:47- 48*) of a Jew who has fallen so low, that in his current circumstance, he finds it necessary to sell himself as a slave. And, not just to a Jewish slave-owner, but to a non-Jewish one! In such a case, it becomes the obligation of a relative or any fellow Jew to redeem him and bring about his release. The language of the *Pasuk* is that after he is sold, he shall be redeemed. The *Kli Yakar* (*Pasuk 48*) is perplexed by the language of the *Pasuk*. Is it possible to talk about redeeming before he is sold?!

To answer, the *Kli Yakar* points out that the *Torah* discussed a few *Pesukim* earlier (*43*) that one is not allowed to treat a slave harshly. In the case we are now discussing, that of a Jew enslaved by a non-Jew, don't think that the need to redeem him is only after you observe him being treated harshly by his non-Jewish owner. You must redeem him immediately upon his being sold. Why? So as not to expose the Jewish slave to the spiritually negative influence of his new master, living a typical non-Jewish lifestyle.

The *Kli Yakar* then goes on to point out an anomaly in the *Pasuk*. In telling us that the redemption should take place after the sale, the word used is *Acharei*, which usually means a long interval after, not immediately after (as opposed to *Achar*). That, says the *Kli Yakar* is to teach an additional idea – that even if many years have passed since the sale, and the Jewish slave is being handled fairly and compassionately, you still need to redeem him to protect him from learning from his master's (spiritually degenerate) ways.

This is hard to fathom. We are obligated to extricate the Jewish slave immediately from his new, spiritually negative surroundings without delay, lest he be exposed to bad influences. One would therefore assume, that if the slave was not redeemed, and remained in the negative circumstance, he would become a 'lost cause' rather quickly – why else the imperative to save him so quickly? Nevertheless, the *Kli Yakar* tells us that even though that did not happen, and the Jew spent many years in a spiritually hostile environment, it is still necessary and most worthwhile to get him out, at the first possible moment.

This illustrates a wondrous truth about spiritual health. It is not black and white. A Jew's spiritual resilience is potentially limitless. We must save the new slave from even one day of exposure to bad influences. Nevertheless, if that did not happen, and many years have gone by, it is likewise critically important to protect him from even one more day of negative exposure.

We can take heart from this idea. We need to move quickly and decisively to guide our children in the proper path, make the right decisions concerning their *chinuch* and provide a proper, wholesome environment in which to raise them. However, if we failed in any or all of these categories, there is no reason to despair or give up. No matter how many mistakes, over how many years, there is still a precious *Neshama* in every child that can be ignited at any moment.

This should be especially uplifting in our current situation. None of us knew what to do when this started two months ago, and we are still trying to figure it out. Even if we feel we got off on

the wrong foot – we were too loose, we were too strict, we weren't careful enough about what we allowed the children to see or we were too restrictive, what we decide to do today can make a difference. We have not gone down a path from which there is no turning back. Our children are malleable, impressionable and open to positive influence.

Let optimism replace anxiety. Many decisions lie ahead and great opportunities will present themselves for us to turn the current difficulties into positive, teachable moments for our children. Let us not be deterred by whatever missteps we feel may have taken place until now – the future holds the promise of wonderful growth and accomplishment for us and our children.

Best wishes for a positively wonderful *Shabbos*,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann

“A Jew's spiritual resilience is potentially limitless.”