



Toras Avigdor Junior

Adapted from the teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l

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The Right Kind of Eved

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The Right Kind of Eved

Tzadok “Hatzadik” sat in the prison yard, across from his fellow inmate, Yuval. Between them sat a backgammon board, which Yuval was studying intently.

“Tzadok,” said Yuval, “I’ve been wearing the kippah you gave me the entire game. I thought you said it was a *segulah* for me to win at backgammon. But you’re still winning.”

“Ah, yes it is,” said Tzadok wisely. “But you see, I’m wearing a black hat. That’s an even bigger *segulah*.”

Yuval rolled the dice. “Two and one again!” he muttered. “Tzadok, what did you do to these dice?”

“Can you keep a secret?” Tzadok asked.

“Of course I can,” answered Yuval.

“Okay. Here’s what I did. Last night before going to sleep, I put the dice inside of a crack in the wall of my cell. I can’t go to the Kotel while in prison, so I have a special *tefillah* that allows me to turn the cell wall into my own personal Kotel Hamaaravi.”

“*Tefillot* can actually do that?” asked Yuval in wonderment.

“Of course!” said Tzadok. “I get everything that I ask Hashem for. For example, this morning I asked Hashem to help me find my shoes and I found them right where I left them last night!”

“Well then why don’t you ask Hashem to get you out of jail?” asked Yuval, skeptically, as he moved his checkers down the board.

Tzadok looked uncomfortable for a few moments. “Uh... who said I want to get out of jail?” he finally replied. “Maybe I like it here.”

“Hello, Tzadok,” came a voice from behind him.

“Oh nice,” said Tzadok, looking at the dice. “A five and a six!”

“Tzadok?” the voice repeated.

“Let’s see,” Tzadok said. “How should I move my pieces?”

“TZADOK!”

Tzadok turned to see Rav Volender, the prison rov, standing next to him.

“Kavod harav!” Tzadok said, looking up. “Do you want to play next?”



“No, Tzadok,” said Rav Volender. “I would like to speak with you.”

“Oh okay,” said Tzadok, moving his pieces. “After this game.”

“Tzadok, I need to speak with you now.”

“PLEASE?” begged Tzadok. “I’m about to win! Just seven or eight more moves!”

“Tzadok, if you don’t come with me right now, I will report you to the warden.”

“Okay, okay,” said Tzadok, reluctantly, walking after Rav Volender, looking back to make sure Yuval wasn’t cheating.

“Tzadok, what is going on with you?” Rav Volender said. “Didn’t you hear me talking to you? You need to understand that as a prisoner, you need to listen when a prison official—and that includes me—tells you to do something. You don’t want to be in prison forever, do you?”

“Chas vechalilah!” exclaimed Tzadok. “How could you say that? I can’t wait until I get out of prison. Then I can play backgammon all day!”

“All day?” asked Rav Volender, shocked. “I thought you told me you want to be an eved Hashem.”



“Oh of course I do. I’ll go to the *beit kenesset* and I’ll do all of the *mitzvot*. But I’m going to become a professional backgammon player, so that is what I’m going to spend the rest of my time doing.”

“Tzadok, do you know what an *eved ivri* is?”

“Of course I do,” said Tzadok. “It’s a Jewish slave.”

“Very good!” said Rav Volender, both surprised and relieved to hear Tzadok give the right answer for a change. “Now, how long does an *eved ivri* remain a slave?”

“Until *moshiach* comes,” said Tzadok, proud that he could answer two questions in a row.

“No,” Rav Volender said. “He is only a slave until *shmittah*. And do you know why?”

“Because he’s not good at being a slave?” Tzadok guessed.

“No, listen to me. It’s because we are not supposed to be slaves to people. We are *avodim* to Hashem. And we can’t be true *avdei* Hashem if we are serving someone or something else.”

“Exactly,” said Tzadok. “That’s why I need to get out of prison.”

“Yes, but you said you want to spend all of your time playing backgammon. That doesn’t sound like you want to be an *eved* Hashem.”

“But *kavod harav*, I told you that I would do the *mitzvot*.”

“That’s not enough,” Rav Volender said. “An *eved* also has to do all of the *mitzvos*. But when your entire life revolves around something other than Hashem, you are serving that thing and not *Hakadosh Boruch Hu*.”

“So I’m not allowed to play backgammon?” asked Tzadok fearfully.

“Of course you are allowed to play a game if it helps you relax so that you can serve Hashem better,” Rav Volender said kindly. “But you talk about it as if it’s the most important thing to you. A *Yid* must remember that the only thing that is important is *avodas* Hashem. And when serving Hashem is the most important thing to you, only then are you a true *eved* Hashem and not a slave to something unimportant like playing backgammon.”

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!

let’s review:

- How is Tzadok like an *eved ivri*?
- What does Tzadok need to do to become an *eved* Hashem?

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