1. In describing why the Torah demands that all עבדים be freed during יובל, the פסוק says כי לי בני ישראל עבדים, עבדי הם – Hashem says that we are His servants, strongly indicating that it is wrong and unbecoming of us to be anybody else’s servants. The term עבד or שפחה doesn’t seem like a positive term – in our culture we associate it with thankless tasks that we have little control over and gain no joy from. “The boss is a slave driver” “I am not your maid, so clean up your room!” Yet, the highest compliment paid to the most accomplished Jew in history, is that he is a servant – "משה עבד ה'". In fact, next week when we celebrate שבועות we will be re-experiencing a moment where אזן ששמע בהר סיני כי לי בני ישראל עבדים – our ears heard and internalized the message that we are all supposed to be servants. Apparently it is not all bad, and signifies a level of religious accomplishment.

On the other hand, the תורה also refers to us as children of Hashem – "בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם". We look up to “tatte in himmel” and ask the אב הרחמים for mercy. Our relationship with Hashem is also one of father-son.

1. In a דרשה delivered in 1973, Rabbi Lamm explored three distinct, and important explanations of this dual relationship we enjoy with Hashem.
2. First, the גמרא בבא בתרא דף י. records the famous conversation between טורנוסרופוס הרשע and ר"ע: וזו שאלה שאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את ר"ע: אם אלהיכם אוהב עניים הוא, מפני מה אינו מפרנסם? א"ל: כדי שניצול אנו בהן מדינה של גיהנם. א"ל: [אדרבה,] זו שמחייבתן לגיהנם! אמשול לך משל, למה הדבר דומה? למלך בשר ודם שכעס על עבדו וחבשו בבית האסורין, וצוה עליו שלא להאכילו ושלא להשקותו, והלך אדם אחד והאכילו והשקהו, כששמע המלך לא כועס עליו? ואתם קרוין עבדים, שנאמר: +ויקרא כ"ה+ כי לי בני ישראל עבדים! אמר לו ר"ע: אמשול לך משל, למה הדבר דומה? למלך בשר ודם שכעס על בנו וחבשו בבית האסורין, וצוה עליו שלא להאכילו ושלא להשקותו, והלך אדם אחד והאכילו והשקהו, כששמע המלך לא דורון משגר לו? ואנן קרוין בנים, דכתיב: +דברים י"ד+ בנים אתם לה' אלהיכם. What emerges from this גמרא is that if one has a mentality that we are all עבדים, he views misfortune that befalls other people as something that ought not be rectified. If, however, he sees other people as בנים, their misfortune is a way of Hashem allowing us a chance to help perfect the world, to show the רחמנות that He so wants to show Himself.
3. The message of this approach is that we are best off viewing ourselves as עבדים, being מקבל our own יסורים, but viewing everybody else as בנים, never accepting that they should remain in a state of suffering.
4. Second, the תורה תמימה writes, an עבד must do what he is tasked to do, and has little interest in doing more. The עבד is serving because he has a job to do, while the son is serving a person who he loves and admires. The son will not just do his job, but will find a way to go the extra mile. The עבד does what the master asks, while the son does what the master wants.
5. The measure of our success in service of Hashem is to appreciate the responsibilities of an עבד while never losing sight of ways to show genuine love. We are steadfast in our commitment to דבר ה' but always think of doing more to fulfill the רצון ה'. When you love somebody you simply do more for them. An employee of his company knows that he has to do a job, but somebody who has bought in to the mission of the company, who sees value and fulfillment in his work and what his place of work stands for, will volunteer more time, more effort and more creativity in his job.
6. Finally, Rabbi Lamm points to a זוהר in פרשת בהר that doesn’t just highlight how a son does *more* than a servant, but that a son does things *differently* than a servant. The servant does what he is expected to do, but it is done robotically, while the son serves tenderly. In the words of the זוהר, the son is "מחפש בגנזי אביו". As Rabbi Lamm describes, “the עבד is one who observes and gives and participates, but you can feel the icicles hanging from his heart. The ben is a Jew who not only observes and participates, but also worries and loves and feels…”
7. Rav Moshe Weinberger tells of the poetry reading in a town in England where a young man read from psalms. He very elegantly and poetically read “For the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want…” When he was done people applauded. Then an alter yid in the back of the room asks to give the same psalm a try and he read ה' רועי לא אחסר. When he was done everybody was crying. The young man asks the alter yid why people reacted so emotionally to his reading but only coldly appreciated the young man’s reading. The alter yid responded “its entirely different when you know the shepherd”. A בן can be מחפש בגנזי אביו – connect in a deeper way to his father.
8. This past week my sister sent me a story that was published in the Florida Sun Sentinnel, discussing the way that the different denominations of Judaism celebrate שבועות. In order to appreciate the Orthodox practice, they went to BRS, the Orthodox shul, to ask some people about the Yom Tov. My brother in law happened to have been in shul when the reporter was there and when asked about Shavuos was quoted in the story saying “It is my favorite night of the entire year. We stay up all night learning Torah and there is nothing as enjoyable and exciting as when a piece of Torah clicks in your head”. The part that wasn’t reported in the article is that the secular Jewish reporter went on to ask my brother in law what is so great about Torah. How would you answer that question? If you are an עבד like me, you would probably coldly describe ancient tradition and connecting with God or something of the sort. If you are a בן like my brother in law, you say “come let me show you” and proceed to sit and learn torah for a few minutes with the secular reporter.
9. The עבודה of שבועות is three-fold. We are supposed to come together as Jews כאיש אחד בלב אחד, and appreciate our fellow Jews as worthy children of Hashem. We are supposed to go beyond the letter of the law the way a loving child would do for his parent, and perhaps most importantly, all of our מצוות, both בין אדם לחבירו and בין אדם למקום, must be done with a sense of vibrancy and warmth, a sense of love and emotion. The popularization in many Modern Orthodox circles of חסידות fill this void of warmth in many people’s lives, and it is certainly effective, but it is not the only way. I have been so taken by the descriptions of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, a kalte Litvak if there ever was one, as an איש התפילה. His daughter said "אבא לא אמר תהלים, הוא צעק תהלים". When he spoke about Torah, he started to become more poetic than Shakespeare, as if he were describing the love of his life.