

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Pekudei 5768

And the silver of those counted in the congregation was one hundred talents, and one thousand, seven hundred and seventy-five shekel, by the holy shekel. (38:25)

The Minchas Chinuch (Mitzvah 105) is uncertain as to whether the Temple accepted half-shekel contributions from those who committed idolatry or violated the Shabbos. The Maharam Schick, in his work on the 613 commandments, says that they did not accept them, and brings proof from the Gemara. But it seems that we can bring a simpler proof from the above verse, which says that the silver used for the Mishkan was exactly 603,550 half-shekels, that is one half-shekel for each Jew descended from the Twelve Tribes. The Eirev Rav, comprising much more than that number, clearly did not contribute.

The Alshich writes in the name of the Maharash ben Alkabetz that the purpose of the half-shekel was to teach the Jewish people to be united. Every man by himself is only a half; to become a whole he must unite with his fellow Jews. Similarly, the Yismach Moshe writes that a census, by its nature, divides a large group into individual units. Each man counts as one, and he is thus severed from the group. Therefore it was necessary when taking the census for each Jew to give a half-shekel, in order to unify the people. So we see that the donation of the half-shekel had two functions: unification of the good Jews, and separation from the bad company of the Eirev Rav.

The Tanchuma in Ki Sisa (2) says: "Come and see how beloved the Jews are, for even their sins bring about good things. If this is what their sins do, imagine how much more their merits can do! Yosef's brothers met together and decided to sell him into slavery, and that decision supplied the world with food throughout seven years of famine. Here too, the Jews sinned with the golden calf, and as a result they had to give the half-shekel as an atonement for their soul. If

such a great sin brought about such a mitzvah, imagine what a mitzvah done by them can accomplish!"

The Tanchuma's comparison seems very strange. True, the sale of Yosef turned out to be a positive development in G-d's plan, although from the brothers' viewpoint it was a sin. But the sin of the golden calf had no positive aspect. G-d in His great mercy forgave them for the sin and allowed them to give a half-shekel as an atonement for their soul, but of course it would have been better had they never committed the sin and never required any atonement.

But according to the above, we can explain that the sin of the golden calf was a wake-up call for the Jewish people to separate from the Eirev Rav. At first, when the Jewish people left Egypt, they saw no harm in mingling with the Eirev Rav. But after the Eirev Rav induced the Jews to make the golden calf, G-d gave them the atonement of the half-shekel, which symbolized both separation from the Eirev Rav and unification of all good Jews.

In the same way, we can understand another passage of the Tanchuma (Ki Sisa 5): "For G-d is the judge, this He lowers and this He raises" (Tehillim 75:8). Rabbi Yonah explained this as referring to Israel: with the word "this" they were lowered when they made the golden calf, saying, "For this man Moshe..." (Shemos 32:1); and with the word "this" they were raised, as it says "this they shall give" (30:13). The sin of the golden calf indeed lowered them immensely, but this incident was the cause for their rise, for they realized the necessity of separating from the Eirev Rav and unifying all good Jews. (Divrei Yoel, p. 394)



True Torah Jews
183 Wilson St. PMB 162
Brooklyn, NY 11211

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