

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Shekalim 2-8

Week of 26 Kislev - 2 Tevet 5759 / 15 - 21 December 1998
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

The Generous Jew

Two appeals for contributions are recorded in the Torah, and the response of the Jewish nation to each of them raises an interesting point regarding the character of this nation.

When the people became anxious over what they misunderstood as a delay in Moshe's return from Heaven, they initiated the sin of the Golden Calf. As a delay tactic, Aharon appealed for contributions of the gold adorning the women and children, confident that they would not be so quick to part with their jewelry. But the men-folk surprised him by enthusiastically coming forward with their own jewelry. (*Shmos 32:2-3*)

The second appeal to the people for contributions was made by Moshe when Hashem commanded him to solicit gifts for the building of the Sanctuary. Once again there is an enthusiastic response as the people bring all the necessary materials. (*Shmos 35:21-22*)

What is the relationship between these two responses?

One perspective of our Sages is that this is a comment on the unique nature of Jewish generosity.

"They are asked to contribute to the Golden Calf and they give. They are asked to contribute to the Sanctuary and they give!"

A different approach is that the response to the appeal for the Sanctuary was not an expression of the readiness of Jews to contribute to any cause. Rather, it was a calculated effort on the part of a repentant people to atone for misguided generosity.

Shekalim 2b

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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Issue #253 - Shekalim 2-8

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When A Half Is More Than A Whole

The name of this *mesechta* — the only one in the Daf Yomi cycle from the Talmud Yerushalmi — is "*Shekalim*." Its central topic is the silver coin which Jews were required to contribute annually to the *Beis Hamikdash* for the purpose of funding the communal sacrifices.

Why did Hashem command us to give exactly a *machatzis hashekel* — a half-shekel coin of silver? Our Sages offer many explanations: Some see a connection with the sin of the Golden Calf which occurred at the end of six hours — half of the day. Others see in this coin's ten *geirah* units an atonement for violating the Ten Commandments with that sin.

Rabbi Pinchas, however, cites the perspective of Rabbi Levi that the atonement of the *machatzis hashekel* relates to a much earlier sin — the sale of Yosef into slavery perpetrated by his envious brothers. They received a total of twenty *dinar* from this transaction, so that each of the ten brothers gained two. Each Jew must therefore contribute two *dinar* — half a shekel — to the *Beis Hamikdash* as an atonement for their sin.

A similar calculation appears in the famous midrash we relate on Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av about the Ten Martyrs so cruelly slain by the Roman emperor, who claimed that he held them accountable for the sin of Yosef's ten brothers selling him into slavery.

There is an apparent problem, however, in regard to this calculation. Yosef had *eleven* brothers, but the youngest, Binyamin, was home with his father and not an accomplice to the sale. But since the oldest, Reuven, was also not present when the sale took place, we are left with only *nine*.

Two approaches are suggested by the commentaries. One is that although Reuven was not directly involved in the sale, and even tried to save Yosef from his brothers by suggesting that they place him in a pit rather than slay him, his initial conspiring against Yosef made him culpable as well.

Another idea is that Reuven is indeed not in the calculation but the victim, Yosef, is! It was his indiscreet behavior towards his brothers which aroused their envy and he therefore shares in their guilt.

Shekalim 6a

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