

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 26

Tisa, Sicha 1

The Verse:

The parshah opens with G-d's instruction to Moshe on how to conduct a census, leading to the mitzvah of giving a half-shekel to the Beit Hamikdash treasury annually.

“When you take the sum of the children of Israel according to their numbers, let each one give to G-d an atonement for his soul when they are counted... This they shall give, everyone who goes through the counting: half a shekel according to the holy shekel...” (Shemos 30:12-13)

Rashi comments on the phrase, “this they shall give,” implying that G-d displayed something specific to Moshe:

This they shall give — G-d showed Moshe a sort of coin of fire weighing half a shekel, and He said to him, “Like this one they shall give.”

The Question:

Tosfos explains that Moshe was perplexed over the idea that a physical coin could

achieve “atonement” for the giver’s “soul.” To alleviate this concern, G-d showed the coin of fire.

But how does this display answer Moshe’s question? What does a fiery coin have to do with atonement? If we would suggest that the fire means to represent the passion that accompanies the mitzvah, and is this passion which elicits atonement, then why would Moshe not know this on his own? And why would G-d need to make an exceptional display of a coin of fire to Moshe, and not communicate this with speech alone?

The Explanation:

Some rewards for mitzvos are commensurate with the nature of the mitzvah; they are a natural consequence of the deed. Sometimes, however, G-d promises a reward that is incommensurate with the deed; it is a Divine decree that this deed should elicit this qualitatively higher reward.

When the mitzvah itself is an irrational decree, then we might expect the reward to be similarly irregular. G-d did not imply that the giving of the half-shekel was an

irrational decree, a chukah. Yet, the reward of atonement for the soul, a purely spiritual reality, is disconnected entirely from the physical act of giving half a shekel. Thus, Moshe, who personifies Divine wisdom, could not fathom how this reward could be connected to this deed.

To answer this, G-d showed Moshe the flaming coin. This was to illustrate that the very coin itself which the Jewish people give is a coin that is consumed with the ascendant holiness of G-d. This is not a metaphor for the vitality or passion that the Jew invests in the deed. It is a decree of G-d, so to speak, that unites the material with the spiritual. The sages specify that "G-d said to him, 'Like this one they shall give,'" because this novelty is similar to the novelty

of creation itself which required G-d's speech to bring into being. G-d's "speech" can accomplish the paradox of uniting the material with the spiritual.

Thus, G-d displayed to Moshe that the coins given by the Jewish people were not merely physical, they were consumed with the Divine, by Divine decree, and therefore they could also elicit a spiritual reward, atonement, through a physical act.

In our lives, this illustrates that whenever we do a mitzvah with a physical item it is actually a "coin of fire," a spiritual act which, like fire, is constantly yearning to ascend. By consciously investing passion and yearning into our material mitzvot, we reveal this essential truth about the mitzvah.
