

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER PROPERLY

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

At the beginning of the tractate of Shekalim, we find that "On the first day of the month of Adar, a public announcement is made concerning the payment of the shekels and concerning "kilayim," "forbidden mixtures." Simply understood, there was good reason for announcements to be made on these two subjects on the same day. Annual half-shekel contributions were due by the beginning of the next month, Nissan, so a reminder a month in advance was appropriate. The planting of two different species together is prohibited. As Adar was still early enough in the agricultural season to remove the foreign plants before they had time to grow and render the field forbidden, a warning to that end was made at that time. On an allegorical level, the Minchas Yitzckak notes that the connection between these two subjects teaches us something about finding our partner in life.

The commandment upon each person to contribute the half-shekel is found at the beginning of the Torah portion of Ki Sisa (Shemos 30:11 et seq): "When you take the census of the children of Israel according to their numbers, every man ("Ish") shall give an atonement for his soul to Hashem. . . This they shall give, every one who passes among those who are counted, half a shekel of the sacred shekel."

Each person is to give one half shekel. As the Torah states later in that portion, the wealthy cannot give more, the poor cannot give less. Each person must give the same one half shekel. Why one half? Why not one whole shekel? Our Sages have told us that this amount was established to teach a lesson. An individual should not think that he does not need others in his life. Everyone must realize that we need one another; we need to join together, in order to be "of worth." We need one another to be "complete" people. Therefore, each person takes only one half to demonstrate that without another person, he cannot amount to a whole.

However, the use of another word in connection with this commandment has a different connotation. The Torah uses the word "Ish," "man" as the subject of the commandment. There are other words in the Hebrew language to describe a person, such as "adam" or "enosh." However, these later two terms connote someone that is lacking. The verse in Tehillim (8:5) says "What is frail man ("enosh") that you should remember him, and the son of mortal man ("adam") that you should be mindful of him." These terms differ from that of "Ish." The word "Ish" connotes a complete, elevated, person.

And where do we see an example of this concept? "Therefore shall a man ("Ish") leave his father and his mother, and shall cling to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Bereishis 2:24) A person who

marries, takes for himself a wife, is called an "Ish." That person is called one who is complete. Such a person has taken the step needed to fulfill the goals of G-d, as stated "He did not create it for emptiness, he fashioned it to be inhabited." (Isaiah 45:18) We see that a person who has incorporated the significance of the half shekel into his life, a person who realizes that he needs another to be considered whole, is termed an "Ish." It is the "Ish" who takes that half-shekel: he has taken it physically, and taken it to heart as well.

Yet, the half-shekel he takes is no ordinary shekel. The Torah uses a double expression when describing the shekel - it is a "half shekel, of the scared shekel." This seemingly excess verbiage exhorts us to make sure that when we "take that shekel," when we understand that we need someone else to make ourselves complete, it is of a "holy shekel," it is someone who is "holy." It should be someone who will enable the couple to grow spiritually, who will truly be able to bring a spirit of completeness to the union. The resulting couple will be devoted to Hashem, to serving Him together, in the proper spirit of holiness, one that is the foundation of the marriage and that permeates the home.

It is this important message to which the Mishna at the beginning of Shekalim alludes. The Talmud (Pesachim 49a) tells us that a proper union is comparable to that of "the grapes of a vine with grapes of a vine, which is a beautiful and acceptable thing." Conversely, if the partner chosen is inappropriate, the union is comparable to "grapes of a vine with berries of a thorn bush, [which is] a repulsive thing." The later combination could be termed a "forbidden mixture," "kilayim." On the day on which the commandment of taking a shekel is announced, the warning about kilayim is sounded as well. When we are reminded about the importance of marriage, we are reminded about the importance of selecting the appropriate partner as well.

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