

SHRUNKEN INVENTORY

by Nechama Stampler

Shrunken Inventory

These are the accountings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of Testimony¹.

Rashi: The word mishkan/tabernacle appears in our pasuk twice, one following without any separation from the other. This alludes to another meaning of the letters MShKN, namely collateral. The pasuk hints that the Beis HaMikdosh would serve as collateral, and would be twice collected to satisfy the debts caused by the transgressions of Klal Yisrael. Each destruction of a Temple was therefore collateral seized for a debt that had not been paid.

Maharal: The thought is certainly true. But why here? Our parshah offers an audit of what was done in building the Mishkan. Wouldn't it be more appropriate to tie in the Mishkan with the larger, fixed versions of the Mishkan - the two Temples in Yerushalayim - in an earlier parshah? In earlier parshios we were introduced to the general concept of providing a place for the indwelling of the Shechinah. Surely an allusion to the importance of the future versions of the Mishkan belonged there, not here.

Know that according to Chazal² the first luchos failed in their mission because they were given in public, amidst much fanfare. Berachah does not attach itself to phenomena that are public and micro-managed. Instead, the ayin hora attaches itself to those events. Berachah is a dynamic process of unfettered, unlimited growth. It is the opposite of scrutiny and observation, where the eye sizes up a situation, and frames it in a discrete snapshot of an image, limiting it to that perception.

The allusion to the destructions of the two Temples had to wait till this point in the text. In this parshah, all aspects of the Mishkan are turned into numbers. The Mishkan is spliced into different components, all of which are measured and numbered. Whatever is measured this way is vulnerable to the ayin hora - and therefore to ultimate failure and destruction. Our pasuk alludes to the fact that this limiting of the Miskhan provides a benefit as well - it allows for the expiation of their sin, through the destruction of the Batei Mikdash.

Testimony of Forgiveness

Rashi: It is called the Mishkan of Testimony because it testified that Hashem forgave them for the sin of the Golden Calf, for He caused His presence to dwell among them.

Maharal: Acutally, this is not the way most of us remember the story. Hashem demonstrated that He

forgave them by having Moshe alight the mountain again, and presenting him with a replacement set of luchos. It would seem to us that these luchos were the strongest testimony to having achieved forgiveness.

Rashi's point is that the luchos did not indicate forgiveness. Torah is given to us as a yoke. No matter how well we understand it and appreciate it, the fact remains that we are supposed to go about our daily halachic lives telling ourselves, "The Ribbno Shel Olam demands something of me at the moment, and I stand prepared to do His bidding." Elsewhere, we explained that Hashem held the mountain over their heads in order to impress upon them - even after having so beautifully expressed their love for Him in the words naaseh v'nishma - that Torah is not subject to voluntary acceptance or rejection. It is something we must do.

Presenting Moshe with a second set of luchos, therefore, only indicates that they were deemed worthy enough to continue to be pressed into Divine service. By bringing His presence to dwell in their midst, however, Hashem showed His reinstated approval of them, kivayachol. No one chooses to dwell among those he despises or dislike. We choose to live among friends, among those with whom we are emotionally close. The Shechinah's presence in the Jewish camp showed that Hashem had turned away from His earlier rejection of them.

Additionally, the position of Klal Yisrael after the eigel was that of a woman who has been unfaithful to her husband. By straying after another god, it was as if they had been adulterous towards their mate, HKBH. An adulterous woman is forbidden halachically to her husband. When Hashem took up residence, as it were, among them, He restored the marital home. He indicated thereby that it was only the mixed multitude, the erev rav, who had descended to the level of willful avodah zarah. They, too, were the immediate cause of the transgression of the bulk of the people. The sin of everyone besides the erev rav, as severe as it was, did not amount to the amorous fling of a straying wife. Hashem's return of his presence to them clearly demonstrated that the allocation of guilt among the people was not equal, and that the bulk of the nation was not seen as having been adulterous.

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1. Based on Gur Aryeh, Shemos 38:21; Chiddushei Aggados, Bava Metzia 42A
 2. Tanchuma, chap. 31
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