

A TALE OF TWO CROWNS

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Moshe's return to the camp after being away forty days and nights began the process of Teshuva - repentance. He broke the Luchos - Tablets, and then destroyed the Egel - calf. The Golden Calf was burnt, ground into dust, mixed with water, and given to the Bnai Yisroel to drink. Moshe confronted Aharon who reported to him the details and circumstances that led to the worshipping of the Egel. (Note: Moshe destroyed the Egel before talking to Aharon.) Moshe assessed the mood of the people as requiring a stronger response to bring them back to their senses. He deputized the tribe of Layvie and instructed them to kill all the known idol worshippers and their supporters. Three thousand individuals were killed. (See Rashi)

The next morning, Moshe confronted the nation with the gravity of their sin informing them that he would attempt to elicit G-d's forgiveness. Moshe implored G-d on behalf of the nation putting his own life on the line, and G-d relented from destroying the nation. G-d's forgiveness did not mean that there would not be any consequences. Of course they would have to endure whatever consequences G-d decided, however, they were given a second chance at being the Chosen People. Immediately, G-d afflicted the nation with a plague further killing an unknown number of sinners. (See Rashi 32:35)

G-d instructed Moshe to continue the journey to Eretz Yisroel; however, G-d Himself would no longer lead them. Instead, G-d would send a messenger to lead the nation into Eretz Yisroel. Moshe informed the people of the new conditions in their relationship with G-d and they mourned the loss of G-d's direct involvement. "They heard this bad tiding, they became grief stricken, and no-one donned his jewelry." (33:4) Rashi quotes the Talmud in Shabbos 98a that explains the "jewelry" as referring to the "two crowns that had been bestowed upon every Jew after they said "Naaseh V'Nishmah" We will do all that G-d commands and then we will attempt to understand the rational for the commandments."(23:7) The two crowns symbolized the elevated level of spirituality that the Bnai Yisroel had attained after the giving of the Torah and before sinning with the Egel. The crowns reflected the uniqueness of the answer, Naaseh V'Nishmah.

What was the relationship between the words Naaseh V'Nishmah and the two crowns? What was the relationship between Naaseh V'Nishmah, the two crowns, and the Golden Calf?

The sin of the Golden Calf redefined the parameters of our relationship with G-d. Following the destruction of the Golden Calf and the first phase of punishment, Moshe engaged G-d in the process

of Teshuva - return - forgiveness. The process was difficult to negotiate and difficult to navigate. On the part of the Jews it demanded an awareness of their sin, an acceptance of the consequences of their sin, and the desire to renew their commitment to G-d and Torah. However, above and beyond awareness, acceptance, and commitment was convincing the Jews that G-d desired their Teshuva, their return, their closeness. They had to believe that G-d truly wanted to still "dwell in their midst," even though they had sinned. Otherwise, their sense of failure, self-loathing, and guilt would drive them further away from G-d. Their perceived rejection by G-d in the face of their depression could easily become fatalistic and destructive.

At the time of Mattan Torah the Jews had attained a blissful level of absolute trust, singular focus and sense of purpose. They cloaked themselves in the sanctity of priesthood and the dedication of royalty. Confronted with the choice of accepting G-d's will as their own or retaining the prerogative to decide right from wrong, the nation cried out with singular intent and passion, "Naaseh V'Nishmah! We will do and then we will attempt to understand!" The uniqueness of their response was not in the word "V'Nishmah" - the obvious desire to understand G-d's intent. Their trust and devotion was proclaimed in the courageous subjugation of their freewill to the commandment of G-d. The totality of their service to G-d was in the word "Naaseh" We will do! However, the second word V'Nishmah and we will attempt to understand, reflected the love of the people to "know G-d." They wanted more than to listen and do. They also wanted to attain the closeness and intimacy that comes with knowledge and understanding. That was the significance of the two crowns. G-d "crowned" his loving chosen people with the sanctity of priesthood and the dedication of royalty

When Adam and Chava sinned with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they exchanged the higher level of "Naaseh" we will do and listen, "with the lower although more loving level of "V'Nishmah" we will attempt to understand." They were driven to sin by the enticing words of the Serpent, "And you will be as G-d, knowing good and evil." (Ber. 3:5) The difference between Adam and Chava before the sin and after the sin was manifest in the need for clothing. Prior to the sin they had no reason to wear clothing. The inner sanctity and purpose of the free willed human was self evident in every movement and action. They did not have to impose an external set of rules and regulations to express their G-diness. The mere fact that they were created in the image of G-d was self-evident because it radiated from within their being. However, once they sinned by ignoring the simplicity of the "Naaseh" do as G-d had commanded, and made their own desire "to know, the Nishmah," as their priority, they perverted their inner divinity and G-dliness. From then on, their divinity and purpose as manifesting the image of G-d had to be externally imposed by wearing clothing.

An easy analogy would be natural beauty vs. made-up beauty. In our fair city of illusion and falsehood (LA), many a pretty face have captured the prurient interests of the market place because of altered bone structure, figure, and coloring. Compare that to a truly aesthetically beautiful individual whose beauty comes from within, requiring no make up or external enhancements. Adam

and Chava before the sin had a natural beauty of spirit and holiness that would have been marred not enhanced, by anything external. They were the creations of G-d and they radiated perfection of form and purpose. After the sin they needed the hair, the color, the clothing and the jewelry to manifest their designation as a Tzelem Elokim " a human formed in the image of the Divine. In other words, the "Naaseh" we will do" was natural perfection and purpose. The V'Nishmah "we will attempt to understand" was imposed perfection and purpose. The first was the pure innocence of the newly born heart, the second the culpability of the maturing intellect and desire.

The word used by the Torah to describe the removal of the two crowns is Vayinatzloo - and they were stripped of their jewelry." (33:6) The term is used only one other time in the Torah. When the Jews were leaving Egypt they asked the Egyptians to give them gold and silver vessels and clothing. There too the Torah says, ? Vayinatzloo - and they stripped Egypt bare." (12:36)

The "stripping" of Egypt was done willingly by the Egyptians. For those few precious moments they understood that their wealth and power were never intended for personal use. They accepted that all their riches were to be used in the service of G-d. Willingly giving it to the departing Jews was a statement of understanding and purpose that the gold and silver was never theirs to begin with. They knew that whatever they gave to the Jews would be properly used in the service of G-d. Therefore, giving it to the Jews was a willful act of sanctification, no different than sanctifying an animal for the service of the Mishkan.

The Meiri on the Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud) in Kiddushin explains why sanctity can be conferred on an object with "Amira" oral declaration" alone. Based on the verse in Tehilim 24:1, "The whole world belongs to G-d " the Meiri explains that an owner's declaration of intent to give an item to the Temple automatically sanctifies the object making it the property of the Temple. No other act of acquisition is necessary for the transference of ownership. Likewise, once the Egyptians acknowledged the true purpose of their wealth, it immediately became the property of the Jews who could be seen as G-d's agents. Giving it to the Jews gave it purpose beyond its intrinsic value.

The Jews, on the other hand, had to embrace their uniqueness as the chosen of G-d. Otherwise, the "stripping of Egypt" would have been nothing more than plunder and booty. So long as the Jews behaved as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation," whatever they owned became holy because they were holy. This immediate sanctification through ownership and acquisition remained so long as they were within the framework of "Naaseh V'Nishmah - doing and then understanding." Our level of "Naaseh " the natural intrinsic sanctity - granted the Jews permission to take from Mitzrayim, so long as the Egyptians gave it freely at the moment of their awareness. Giving it sanctified it. There was immediate Kedusha. This was the meaning of Vayinatzloo - and they stripped Egypt bare."

After the splitting of the Yam Suf " Red Sea the same thing occurred. Their level of trust in G-d and Moshe was so absolute that they were functioning on the level of Naaseh " natural, intrinsic sanctity. Therefore, G-d gave them the added wealth of Pharaoh's defeated army. Of course, their

spontaneous singing of Shira - song highlighted this as they momentarily "knew" that the entire universe was the manifestation of G-d's will and intent.

Following the Golden Calf, the Bnai Yisroel fell from their exalted position of first Naaseh and then V'Nishmah. No longer could they intrinsically and naturally manifest singular purpose and intent. They were no longer the pure hearted innocent agents of G-d. The sanctity of priesthood and the dedication of royalty were no longer intrinsic to their being. Therefore, like Adam and Chava, external acts of sanctification became necessary. No longer were they worthy of the two crowns.

Once the Jews sinned and the crowns were "stripped" away, it meant their ownership alone was not sufficient to dedicate an object as holy and purposeful in the service of G-d. Instead, the gold, silver, precious woods and materials had to be actively sanctified by dedicating it for the sake of the Mishkan - Tabernacle. Holiness had to be imposed externally.

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