

NO CONTEST

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"When you take a census of the Children of Israel according to their numbers, every man shall give Hashem atonement for his soul..." (Shemot 30:12)

The census in the Wilderness was taken using a half shekel coin from each party to be counted. Rich and poor alike were called upon to contribute the exact same amount towards the construction of the Tabernacle. The status of Israel is elevated by giving charity and that is why they were counted by having the entire nation join in contributing to this Holy cause.

The word "Shall give" in the Holy tongue is "v-Natenu". The Baal Haturim points out that this word is spelled the same backwards and forwards. He suggests that the Torah would like to stress that when one "gives" charity one also "gets" in return.

Our sages teach that the Evil Inclination puts extra effort in his wiles to prevent a Jew from giving charity and learning Torah. He realizes the value of these two misvot and so he does his best to deter one from doing these two great commandments.

There was an incident that took place in a town in Poland. One morning while people were busy going about their business two armed Polish policemen appeared marching two trembling Chassidic Jews down the middle of the town's main thoroughfare.

"Where are you taking them", one brave townsman inquired.

"To be killed tomorrow at noon - dog", one policeman rudely barked back.

The town Rabbi approached to plead for their lives only to find that the gangsters demanded an unusually large ransom for their freedom.

Determined to save them the Rabbi started his drive to collect "Pidyon shevuyim" Ransom money for their freedom.

First he and his gabai approached a successful merchant who sold carpets. "We need at least 50 rubles from a man like you", begged the Rabbi.

"50 Rubles?," The merchant retorted, "At that rate you will never get what you need in time. I will give you 150 rubles. That is triple what you asked." He smiled as he handed over the money he had hidden under the counter.

Next they approached the Fabric salesman. He too was asked for a large sum of money.

"That is not enough to fill your needs. You won't save anyone at that rate. I'll give double."

The third stop was no less successful with the prospective donor giving more than what he was asked.

The Rabbi stopped on a bench to rest for a few moments and to prepare for the pressure of the task that still lay before him. Suddenly he asked his gabai to take him to the local Yeshivah. Once there he asked the Rosh Yeshivah if he could have 20 of his biggest and strongest students for an hour. When the Head of School agreed he commanded the boys to go to where the captives were being held and to beat not only the captors and the captives as well. After their initial refusal the reluctant warriors went to fight in the captor's lair. After a few moments the captives and captors were cowering in fear begging the yeshiva boys to stop their onslaught. At the Rabbi's behest they continued the beating. Then - to their surprise- the beards of the captives started to fall off! It was then that everyone realized that the whole thing was just a plot to extort money from caring Jews.

The word spread and the Rabbi was held in awe and praised as one with the Holy spirit - ruach HaKodesh!

"No - it is not true", explained the wise man. "I don't have any special powers. I saw that the people were giving easily and more than what we asked. I know that when it comes to charity - the Satan fights extra hard to stop one from doing the mitzvah. When I thought for a moment I understood that there could not possibly be such a great mitzvah at hand and so little resistance from the Evil Inclination."

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