

Teachings of the Maharal

Three Offerings

25:2 - ...take to Me from every man whose heart makes him willing you shall take my offering.

Rashi - Our rabbis said three offerings are mentioned here, one, a half-shekel per head offering for the sockets [38: 26-27], the second, a half-shekel per head for the fund for the Altar offerings, and the third a freewill offering for the construction of the Mishkan.

Gur Arye - The word "offering" [t'ruma] is mentioned twice in this verse and once in the next, alluding to three offerings, only one of which is explicit here. But the mandatory offerings discussed later take precedence over the freewill offering mentioned in our verse. If a man would give too much of the freewill offering first, he may not have enough for the mandatory offerings.

The allusion to the three offerings binds them together in a singular purpose - atonement for the Golden Calf.

There are three aspects of man that were involved in the sin of the Calf - soul, body, possessions. The spiritual aspect is the realm of thought - they thought the Calf had godly attributes. The rabbis said [Kiddushin 40a] that for idolatrous thought alone one is punished, citing the prophet [Yechezkel 14:7-8], "For every one... who takes idols into his heart..., I Hashem, will answer him Myself, and I will set My face against that man."

Hashem is everything, and even the thoughts of man are within His domain. By thinking idolatrous thoughts, one departs from Hashem's domain, and since his sechel is bonded to Hashem, departure to idolatrous thoughts is itself idolatrous worship. The sin of the Golden Calf was a sin of thought, a sin of nefesh that required one of the t'eruma offerings.

The sacrifices they performed in worshipping the Calf were actions - the domain of body [guf]. The body is the agent of deeds, either the conduct of mitzvot or that of transgressions. It is possible for the body to sin without thought, which is called inadvertent sin [shogeg], which does not relate to the essence of a person, his daat [intent, awareness, knowledge]. The Calf was a sin of body, a sin of action, requiring a second atonement in the form another offering.

Israel sinned with their property as well. When Moshe in trying to defend them, he says "they made gods of gold" [32:31], Rashi notes he was implying that the excessive gold Hashem provided them contributed in causing their sin. Sinning with their possessions required a third atonement, the third offering.

The t'ruma offering for body and soul were each one-half shekel. We know a shekel equals twenty gera [30:13], ten for body, and ten for soul. Gemara tells us [Nida 31a] of the three partners in man, father, mother and Hashem. The father contributes five white elements - bones, tendons, nails, brain and white of the eye. The mother contributes five red elements, skin, muscle, blood, hair and

iris. Hashem contributes spirit, soul, facial features, sight, hearing, speech, locomotion, de'a [knowledge, awareness], bina [understanding, intuition] and intelligence. Hashem's ten contributions are all holy and spiritual, and the parental ten contributions are all physical. When a person dies, Hashem takes back His portion, the soul, which returns to Him, and the body rests. Now we understand the verse [30:13], "The shekel has twenty gera, a half-shekel is an offering to Hashem."

Now let us analyze the three offerings and how they were directed to atone for soul, body and possessions. The half shekel for the sacrifices [30:15] was explicitly to "atone for your souls". The half shekel for the sockets atoned for the body, as the sockets were the "foundations" of the Mishkan, the bearer of the spiritual structure, just as the body is the bearer of the soul. The third offering, in our verse, atones for the sin that they committed with their possessions. This offering varies from person to person just as wealth varies from person to person.

But this offering is not a wealth tax that would be fairly assessed according to ability to give - the offering is voluntary. The wealthy may give little and the poor much. To understand this, those who have and do not give are said to have a "bad eye" - their eye constrains them from giving and they cannot be said to be wealthy, no matter how much they have. The truly wealthy person has a "good eye" and a "good heart"; he gives of his own to provide for others. The rabbis said, "Who is rich? He who rejoices in his lot" [Avot

4:1]. People who have money are lacking, for however much they have, someone else has more. But if they feel they have enough, irrespective of how much they have, there is no lacking, and they are the rich ones. Therefore, the Torah says to give a heartfelt gift and that will be in accord with his true wealth.

Column prepared by Dr. Moshe Kuhr