

SUPPLEMENT

Historical Evidence Of A Challenge To The Collection Of The מחצית השקל

פרשת שקלים always falls out on the שבת on which we announce the date of the month of אדר (or in a leap year, 'אדר ב'). That practice is based on the following משנה:

משנה מסכת שקלים פרק א' משנה א'—באחד באדר משמיעין על השקלים ועל הכלאים בחמשה עשר בו קורין את המגילה בכרכין ומתקנין את הדרכים ואת הרחובות ואת מקואות המים ועושים כל צרכי הרבים ומציינין את הקברות ויוצאין אף על הכלאים:

Translation: MISHNAH . On the first of Adar a public announcement is made concerning the payment of the Shekels and warning against the planting of diverse seeds in close proximity of each other. On the fifteenth thereof the Scroll of Esther is read in walled cities. The roads, the broadways and the ritual water baths are repaired. Other public duties are performed. Graves are marked, and messengers go forth to warn against planting together diverse seeds.

The book: מגלת תענית, written during the period of the השמונאים, considered to be the first Rabbinic text ever put into writing, opens with a משנה that tells of a moment in Jewish History when the צדוקים / בייתוסין, Sadducees and Boethusians, challenged the practice of collecting the מחצית השקל. The צדוקים / בייתוסין, Sadducees and Boethusians, were two groups that existed during the period of the השמונאים which rejected Rabbinic interpretations of the Torah and which fell under the influence of the Hellenist culture of that time².

The book: מגלת תענית is a compilation of the days of the year in which fasting and eulogies were not permitted during the period of the השמונאים. It is an important source for the history of that period since it includes holidays and fast days that we no longer observe. Copies of the book with commentaries can be downloaded from www.hebrewbooks.org. The following is the opening משנה. A commentary that is designated: גמרא was added to מגילת תענית during the period of the משנה and the גמרא: מגילת תענית (ליבטנשטיין) הסכוליון משנה א'—אלין יומא דילא לאתענאה בהון ומקצתהון דילא למספד בהון. מן ריש ירחא דניסן עד תמניא ביה אתוקם תמידא דילא למספד.

Translation: These are the days on which it is not permitted to fast nor may eulogies be delivered. From the first day of Nissan until the eighth day, the period in which the Tamid sacrifice was preserved, eulogies may not be delivered.

2. One of the mysteries of Jewish History that scholars have tried to resolve is why both groups disappeared from the pages of Jewish History after the destruction of the Second Temple.

נמרא—שהיו בייתוסין³ אומרים מביאים תמידים משל יחיד; זה מביא שבת אחד וזה מביא שתי שבתות וזה מביא שלשים יום. ומה היו דורשים? אמרו (שמות כט', לט') את הכבש אחד תעשה בבקר, ליחיד משמע. אמרו להם חכמים: אין אתם רשאים לעשות כן לפי שאין קרבן בא אלא משל כל ישראל שנאמר (במדבר כח', ב') צו את בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם את קרבני לחמי לאשי ריח ניחחי תשמרו להקריב לי במועדו. קרבני זה הדם, לחמי אלו חלבים, לאשי זה הקטרת. ריח זו הלבונה. ניחחי אלו הנסכים, וכל שהוא כריח ניחחי תשמרו להקריב לי במועדו. שיהו כלם באים מתרומת הלשכה . . . וכשגברו עליהם ונצחום התקינו שיהו שוקלים שקליהם ומניחים אותם בלשכה והיו תמידים קרבים משל צבור וכל אותן הימים שדנום עשאו ימים טובים.

Translation: The Sadducees and the Boethusians asserted that the cost of bringing the daily Tamid sacrifice should be borne by individual contributors. One person absorbs the cost for one week. Another provides the funds for two weeks. Another contributes the funds needed for thirty days. On what basis did they support their position? They based it on a verse in which the words are presented in the Torah in the singular number: one lamb you shall present as a sacrifice in the morning. Our Sages responded to them: contributions by individuals to pay for the cost of the Tamid sacrifice may not be accepted. The daily Tamid sacrifice must be brought by the community as a group and from funds collected from the community, as the verse provides (in the plural number): Command the people of Israel, and say to them, My offering, and My bread for My sacrifices made by fire, for a sweet savor to Me, shall you observe to offer to Me in their correct time. The words: My sacrifice represent the blood. The word: the bread represents the fats. The word: sacrifice represents the incense. The word: the smell represents the spices. The word: savor represents the pouring of liquids. All that is like the smell of the sacrifices which you should be careful to sacrifice at the correct times and that all the Tamid sacrifices should originate from the donations to the Treasury . . . When the Rabbis gained the upper hand and overcame the challenge from the Sadducees and the Boethusians, they renewed the practice of collecting the half Shekel and placed the funds into the treasury of the Beis Hamikdash. The cost of the Tamid sacrifice was once again paid from the communal funds. The eight days in which it took to overcome the challenge were declared to be days of celebration.

מגילת תענית—פרשיות בתולדות בית השמונאי לאור משנה Ben Tzion Luria in his book: משנה explains this משנה as follows. At the time of the חשמונאים, two sects, the ביתותים and the צדוקים, opposed the theological tenets of the פרושים, the Pharisees, who conducted themselves in accordance with the Oral Law transmitted from משה רבינו. Both of the latter groups fell under the influence of Hellenism. The first משנה in מגילת תענית presents one aspect of Hellenism; that either the King or one of the members of the aristocracy should be responsible for paying for the cost of the daily sacrifices brought on behalf of the local deity. As applied to the service on the בית המקדש that doctrine conflicted with the rule that had been transmitted by the Oral Law that the cost of the public sacrifices brought in the בית המקדש were to be paid from the money collected

3. Some versions change the word to: צדוקים.

annually in the form of the **מחצית השקל**.

Luria alleges that after being successful in re-establishing the rule that public funds should be used to pay for public sacrifices, the Pharisees instituted additional rules to bolster the practice. For example, a rule was promulgated that **כהנים** were exempt from contributing the **מחצית השקל**. This rule eliminated the possibility that any single **כהן** would claim that he participated in a Tamid sacrifice for which the cost was covered by his **מחצית השקל**.

A second innovation instituted by the Pharisees was the practice known as the **מעמדות**. The area in Israel occupied by the Jews at that time was divided into 24 districts. **כהנים** from each district would serve in the **בית המקדש** for a week at a time, once every 24 weeks. The **מעמדות** were groups of lay Jews who would congregate in a central location in the district when the **כהנים** from their district served in the **בית המקדש**. That week would be devoted to fasting and praying on behalf of the Jewish People. According to Luria, the practice of the **מעמדות** was instituted just after the resolution of the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees on the issue of the Tamid sacrifice. The **מעמדות**, the practice of laymen fasting and praying as representatives of the Jewish community, reinforced the concept that the communal sacrifices were being brought by the community and not by individuals. Luria notes that the verse quoted in the **משנה** in **מגלת תענית** to support the position of the Pharisees appears in the **משנה** in 'ע' א' as the basis for the practice of the **מעמדות**.

This is how Luria concludes his discussion of the first **משנה** in **מגלת תענית** (page 94):

כללו של דבר: המגילה מדברת ביום טוב לזכר הימים שבהם 'הוקם התמיד'. אבל ההסדר בענין קרבן התמיד הוא רק פרט אחד, היוצא ללמד על הכלל. הטעם ליום טוב זה היה חידוש צורת בניינו של כל העם, קביעת מעמדות, יסוד זיקה חדשה של כל אחד מישראל לבית המקדש. שיתופו של כל העם כולו בקרבן התמיד נעשה מנוף כביר לאחדות ישראל. משהוכרה שותפות זו נתקבצו סביב הקרבן לא רק יהודי ארץ ישראל, אלא גם יהודי התפוצות. מחצית השקל לגולגולת, שהרימו כל היהודים מכל מדינות תבל, שימשה בראש וראשונה לתמיד, ואחר כן גם לשאר צורכי בית המקדש וירושלים—וסביב לנושא זה נתלכדו כולם למרות המרחקים הגדולים, שהפרידו בין היהודים במלכות הפרתים ובין יהודי העולם היווני והרומי. על כן היתה גדולה כל כך חשיבתו של יום טוב זה לזכר הקמת התמיד ועשוהו שמונה ימים.

Translation: We can conclude that the Megilah speaks of a holiday that commemorates the days in which the Tamid sacrifice was renewed. However, the resolution of the debate concerning the Tamid sacrifice should be viewed as a minor issue that points to the existence then of a much more substantial problem.

The true reason for the holiday was that the structure of the nation was reorganized through the establishment of the Ma'Amados, the foundation for creating a new bond between the Jewish People and the Beis Hamikdash. The goal in requiring the participation of the whole nation in the Tamid sacrifice was to unify the Jewish people. Once the communal participation in the Tamid sacrifice was accepted, not only did Jews who lived in Eretz Yisroel rally around the Tamid sacrifice but Jews of the Diaspora began to participate as well. The half Shekel that was collected from all the Jewish communities was used first to cover the cost of the Tamid sacrifices, then to cover the cost of maintaining the Beis Hamikdash and then to maintain all of Yerushalayim. The entire Jewish community united around this issue despite the distances that divided the Jews, some of whom fell under Persian dominance while others lived under Greek and Roman control. That is why the holiday took on such importance. It became an opportunity to commemorate the renewal of the Tamid sacrifice which they celebrated for eight days (similar to Hanukkah?).

לפני זמנם של החשמונאים לא נהגו יהודי הגולה להעלות את מחצית השקל לבית המקדש ולא לעלות ברגל. בסופה של תקופה זו כבר אנו רואים אירגון יעיל של העלת מחצית השקל לגולגולת בכל תפוצות ישראל ועלייה לרגל לירושלים של המוני עם בחגים ובימות החול-מסתבר שקשר זה נוצר בתקופת החשמונאים, לאחר שפרקו עול נכרים וקבעו סדרים והתקינו תקנות לעם כולו, בארץ ובתפוצות. והרעיון העיקרי שבתקנות אלו קשור בקרבן התמיד, שהוא בא מתרומת הלשכה, מתרומתו של כל העם כולו.

Translation: Before the period of the Hasmona'Im, the Jews of the Diaspora did not regularly contribute the half Shekel to the upkeep of the Beis Hamikdash nor did they travel in great numbers to Yerushalayim for the holidays. By the end of that era, we see all the Jewish communities in the Diaspora undertaking a strong and organized effort to contribute the half Shekel. We further see masses of people travelling to Yerushalayim for the holidays and for non-holidays. It makes sense that this link to Eretz Yisroel developed in the period of the Hasmona'Im after they overcame the domination by other nations and after they developed rituals and instituted practices for the whole nation, whether they lived in Eretz Yisroel or in the Diaspora. We can point to the Tamid sacrifice which was funded by the communal fund, the money contributed by all members of the Jewish community, as the foundation for the new practices.