

On the “Erev Rav”

1) **An *erev rav*/mixed multitude.** An ethnically mixed group of converts.

-Rashi

2) **A mixed multitude.** Of Egyptians who mingled with them; this is the “riffraff” of Numbers 11:4 [i.e. the ones who whine for meat to eat].

-Ibn Ezra

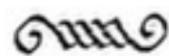
3) YHVH said to Moshe: Go, get down! For your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt has wrought ruin! (Exodus 32:7, Fox translation)

It does not say “the people” have corrupted but “your” people — the mixed multitude (*erev rav*) whom you received of your own accord and accepted as converts without consulting Me. You thought it a good thing that converts should be attached to the Shechina — now they have corrupted themselves and have corrupted others.

-Rashi based on Exodus Rabbah 42:6

This is what Moses meant when he said: **Our possessions too**—this refers to the mixed multitude, those we have acquired and brought near to ourselves, **will go along with us; not a portion of them will remain behind.** The word *parsah* can mean [either “hoof” or] “portion”; *peres* alone, however, could mean “portion,” so that these are “the portion of the letter *heh*,” referring to the *shekhinah*, the latter *heh* of Y-H-W-H. It is known from the *Zohar* and other books that proselytes are rooted in that place, and no spark [of them] was to be left behind in Egypt....

For we will take of them to serve Y-H-W-H our God. It was for the sake of these holy sparks that we came into Egypt, in order to raise them up. We became enslaved in bricks and mortar ... and suffered our own exile in order to do so. It was for the sake of this that we came near to God’s service. **Therefore we will take of them to serve Y-H-W-H our God:** it is for this purpose that we ourselves have been drawn near to the service of Y-H-W-H.



There is no stronger statement anywhere of “the mission of Israel.” The Jewish people has been called as a “kingdom of priests” in order to serve God by finding holy souls and sparks throughout the world, beyond their own borders, and drawing them close to the single God who is the source of all. This is why we were sent into Egypt, and this is why God brought us forth. Even if we have to convince God that they are ready to come forth with us, that is part of our role. Is this why we were sent into our present diaspora as well?

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