



NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF נחמה בן רחל ויעקב בן רחל נחמה (שמות ל, יג-טו) MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

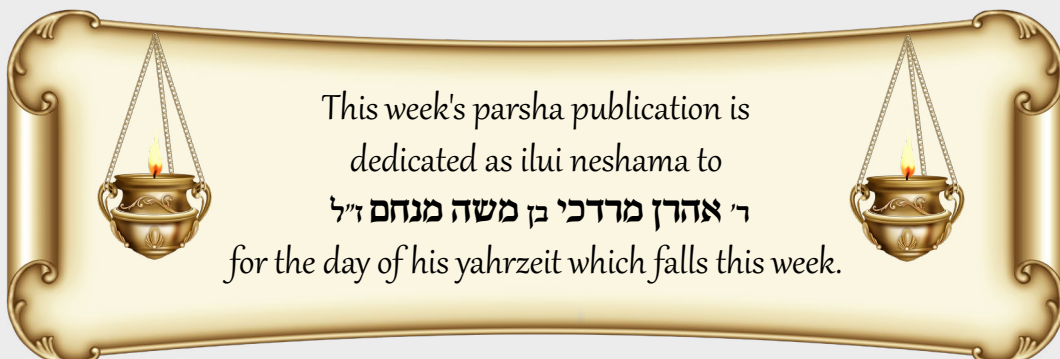
This Shekel is Holy

זֶה יִתְּנוּ כָּל הָעֵבֶר עַל הַפְּקָדִים מִחֻצֵי הַשֶּׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְגוֹי לְתַת אֶת תְּרוֹמַת ה' לְכַפֵּר עַל נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם: (שמות ל, יג-טו)

This is what they shall give, all who are counted: half a *shekel* of a holy *shekel*... to give Hashem's donation, to atone for their souls. (*Shemos 30:13-15*)

“This is what they shall give” – *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* showed Moshe a sort of coin of fire, and its weight was half a *shekel*, and said to him, “They shall give one like this.” (*Rashi ad loc*)

It is a wondrous thing, as the Commentators if Heaven has decreed that a person should die, the have already pointed out, that a mere half a *shekel* small sum of half a *shekel* given by him as *tzedakah* can atone for the soul. They explain it literally. Even has the power to affect atonement and save his life.



This week's parsha publication is dedicated as *ilui neshama* to ר' אהרן מרדכי בן משה מנחם ז"ל for the day of his *yahrzeit* which falls this week.

However, this *shekel* is described a “coin of fire,” as Rashi explains. This indicates the condition upon which the atonement depends. If a person gives his *tzedakah* with fiery enthusiasm, joy and desire, it has the wondrous power of atonement that the Torah attributes to it. The Rambam writes:

Whoever gives *tzedakah* to a pauper with a sour expression, looking at the ground, even if he gave him a thousand gold pieces, he lost his merit and forfeited it. Rather, he should give it with a pleasant expression and with joy, and share in the poor man’s sorrow over his misfortune, and speak encouragingly and consolingly to him.¹

The *shekel* to be donated is also described as “holy,” and this alludes to another important point. The Rambam says² that Hebrew is called the Holy Tongue because it has no words for vulgar things. It is a clean and sacred language.

This elucidates the meaning of the word *kodesh*, “holy.” Something is “holy” when it is dedicated to one and only purpose. Hebrew, although all the worlds were created through it, and the Torah spoke in this language, still would not be called the Holy Tongue if we could use it for vulgar speech. Only because it is reserved for pure speech alone does it earn the name of “Holy Tongue.”

The Torah requires a “holy” *shekel* to atone for the soul, so it is not sufficient if a person uses his money “also” for holy purposes such as *tzedakah* and supporting Torah learning. His money can be

considered “holy” only if he abstains from using it for unholy purposes. Let’s say he contributes generously to *chesed* causes. There is no question that he has thereby performed a great *mitzvah* and acquired lofty merits for himself. But what if he spends his money also on newspapers or magazines full of improper content, or he purchases electronic devices that bring impurity and vulgarity into his home, or other things that are far from being holy? Then we can no longer say about his home that it is holy, and resembles *Beis Hamikdash*, neither can we say about his money that it is holy, that it is “*shekel hakodesh*.”

There is an allusion to this point also in the “coin of fire” concept mentioned above. One of the qualities of fire is that it doesn’t mix with other elements. Fire is always free of impurities; it is just fire. Similarly, a person’s money needs to be like a “coin of fire.” This applies to how he acquired his money, that it is free from unjust gain of any kind, and also that he spends his money only for proper purposes.

The money a person spends on supporting his home in order to rear children to Torah learning is completely holy and pure. But his other expenditures, too, need to be holy. He should not spend money on worthless matters and luxuries. Jewish money is not to be treated lightly. The coins in our wallets are “coins of fire,” and we need to treat them with *kedushah*. Then they will serve to atone for our souls and bring great blessing to our home. ●

1 *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Matnos Aniyim* 10:4.

2 *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:8.



Tzaddikim Have it Good

הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת דְּרָכֶיךָ. (שמות לג, יג)

Please grant me knowledge of Your ways. (*Shemos* 33:13)

Moshe said before Him, “*Ribono shel Olam!* Why are there righteous people who have it good and righteous people who have it bad, evil people who have it good and evil people who have it bad?” (*Berachos* 17a)

I was at a *kiruv* seminar not long ago in America, and one of the rabbis there spoke at length about *galus* and accepting suffering with love. Someone from the audience stood up and asked, “Okay, but what’s the real answer to the question about “righteous people who have it bad”?”

I got very upset. I couldn’t restrain myself and answered as follows: You need to know that this question you asked, about righteous people who have it bad and evil people who have it good, was originally asked by *Moshe Rabbeinu*. And the prophets Yirmeyahu and Chavakuk asked it after him. If not that such great people brought up the issue, we would say it isn’t even a question. Because ninety-nine percent of the time, *tzaddikim* have it good and *resha'im* have it bad!

Moshe was asking about the one percent who are the exception to the rule. He wanted an answer about the handful of righteous people who had it bad and the handful of evil people who had it good. But when we look around at what is happening in the world, we see that the absolute majority of *tzaddikim* have it good. Those who keep Torah and *mitzvos* usually have good, peaceful lives. And those who don’t usually have it rough. Who can’t see this?

We can readily see that the *frum* people lead good lives. We raise families and marry off children. We

lack nothing. Those who follow a secular lifestyle have bitter lives bereft of pleasure. They have an astounding divorce rate. They have so many cases of mental illness and emotional issues. They simply have a very tough time in life.

When people of the Torah-observant community complain about their problems they are like the man who has a toothache and starts to cry, “*Ribono shel Olam*, why do I have it so bad?” He forgets that his eyes are good and his ears are good and he has healthy children and he has food and clothing and so many other things that *Hashem* gave him. He simply forgets about the whole world and knows just one thing: my tooth hurts.

So he goes to the dentist, who tells him, “You are lucky you came in to get checked. There is a serious condition here that needs immediate treatment. But it will be okay, thanks to your toothache!”

In the end we see that everything was for the good.

The Torah promises that “if you will surely obey My commandments, I will give the rain of your land in its time,”¹ and this promise is alive and well. Just “taste and you will see that *Hashem* is good.”²

This is especially apparent in our generation. When a person is a *tzaddik* he has it good. If you will really be a *tzaddik* you won’t lack anything. You will *daven* right, and then you will have everything. ●

1 *Devarim* 11:13-14.

2 *Tehillim* 34:9.





Machatzis Hashekel: Partnership With Hashem

זֶה יִתְּנוּ כָּל הָעֶבֶר עַל הַפְּקָדִים מִחֻצֵית הַשֶּׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ. (שמות ל, יג)

This is what they shall give, all who are counted: half a shekel of a holy *shekel*.

(*Shemos* 33:13)

What's So Hard to Understand About Machatzis Hashekel?

In this *parshah* we have the *mitzvah* of *Machatzis Hashekel*. Although it applied only in Temple times, we have a custom also today of giving money to *tzedakah* before Purim as a remembrance of *Machatzis Hashekel*.

This *mitzvah* has great depth. *Chazal* alluded to this when they said that *Moshe Rabbeinu* had difficulty with *Machatzis Hashekel* until *Hashem* showed him a coin of fire and said they should give one like this, as Rashi explains on the *pasuk*. The Midrash spells it out:

At that time, *Moshe Rabbeinu* was puzzled over the matter, until *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said to him, “This is what they should give.”¹

But what was so hard about *Machatzis Hashekel* to understand? It sounds so simple. Every Jew donates a coin of a certain clearly stated weight. What didn't Moshe get?

However we will explain it, one thing is for sure: there is something very profound about *Machatzis Hashekel*. We will not delve into deep Kabbalistic matters here, but we will speak about a few allusions contained in the *mitzvah* of *Machatzis Hashekel*.

Half implies Connection

First let us understand the concept of “half.”

Whenever we have a half, where is the other half? With someone else. If I have half of something, another

person must have the other half of it, because a half is, by definition, a part of a whole. For this reason, a half always implies connection, relationship. When there is connection, when there is relationship, it is because half is with me and half is with the other person. But when I have the whole thing, I will never be connected to the other person. Only if I hold half and he holds the other half are we connected.

It is like a chain. Each link intertwines with link next to it. Half of one link joins with half of the next link. When there are two halves, the first half always mixes in with the second half, and the second half with the first half.

We need to be like a chain: each part enters the space of the other. This is the concept of “half.” I enter your space, you enter my space, and that way we are connected and have a relationship.

Now we can understand the *Machatzis Hashekel*. We tend to think that our money is ours, but in truth, what we have is just a “half” *shekel*. The money is not under our full ownership, because we have a partner: *Hashem*. He is partners with us in our money.

This is why giving *Machatzis Hashekel* is “to atone for your souls.”² The Hebrew word for “atone” is *כפר*. It denotes wiping away and purifying. By giving *Machatzis Hashekel* the soul becomes purified. Because if a person has “whole” coins, they are exclusively his, and he is disconnected from *Hashem*; he is not partners with

1 *Pesikta Zutarta, Shemos* 30.

2 *Shemos* 30:15.

Him. But if he has a “half” *shekel*, he has partnership. The other half of the money belongs to *Hashem*, so he becomes connected to Him.

What kind of partnership do we have with *Hashem*? What does it mean that He is partners with us?

All Yours

There are actually two kinds of partners. The *Mishnah* in the beginning of *Bava Metziah* highlights one kind of partner. The *Mishnah* says:

Two people are holding on to a shawl. This one says, “It is all mine,” and that one says, “It is all mine.” The law is that they divide it.

I have a question: what would be the law if two people go to *beis din* while they are both holding on to a shirt, and this one says, “It is all yours,” and that one says, “It is all yours”? Instead of claiming the disputed garment as his own, each claims it belongs to the other party. What would be the *halachah* in such a case?

The *Midrash*³ in fact presents this exact case and states the legal verdict as well. Alexander of Macedon, the great Greek conqueror, went to visit the king of Katzia, whose kingdom was beyond the dark mountains. The king of Katzia came out to greet him with many gifts of gold and silver, but Alexander refused them, saying he has enough gold and silver in his own land. He then said, “I only came in order to know how you judge.” He wanted to learn from the king of Katzia how to handle judicial matters. So the king of Katzia let him observe how cases are judged in his land.

One day, two people came to the king with their case. One said: My master the King, I have a problem. I bought a field, and when I plowed it, I found a great treasure buried underground. The treasure does not belong to me because I bought a field and not a treasure. So I want to return the treasure to its rightful owner, who is the man who sold me the field.

The other litigant said: It’s not that way at all. When I sold him the field, I sold it with everything in it. The treasure belongs to the buyer.

This is a case where Reuven says everything belongs to Shimon, and Shimon says everything belongs to Reuven.

This one says, “It is all yours,” and that one says, “It is all yours.” Exactly the case I asked about.

And how did the king of Katzia rule?

He asked one of them if he has a son, and the other if he has a daughter, and they both answered affirmatively. So he ruled that the son and daughter should marry each other and the treasure will belong to them as a wedding gift.

The king of Katzia noticed that Alexander of Macedon was puzzled, so he asked, “Did I misjudge the case? If such a case would come before you, how would you judge it?”

Alexander answered, “I would kill both of them and take the money for the royal treasury.”

The king of Katzia asked him, “Does the rain fall in your land? Does the sun shine?” When Alexander said it does, the king of Katzia asked if they have livestock there. Alexander again answered yes. Then the king of Katzia said, “Not in your merit does the sun shine, and the rain fall, but rather in the merit of the animals, as it says, ‘*Hashem* saves man and animal’⁴ – He saves man in the merit of the animals.”

The World stands on Selfishness

Let us try to understand what Alexander of Macedon was thinking. His judgment sounds awfully strange. Was he so corrupt that he killed innocent people who came before him for judgment? Why did these two people deserve the death sentence?

Alexander actually was very wise and his judgment reflected this. A country’s society is built on each citizen saying, “It’s all mine.” This attitude is what a successfully functioning society is based on. It is the mutually beneficial spirit of “healthy competition.”

For instance, let’s say you look down on the floor and see a carpet. Who made that carpet, and why did he make it? Whoever it was, we may assume he made the carpet because he wanted to earn money. The bread we ate today required a lot of labor before it could get to our plate. People plowed, planted, baked, and much more. For all these people, the only motivation that brought them to do what they did was the desire to make money. Everything gets done due to selfishness. Thus, the world depends on selfish motivations.

³ *Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim 727.*

⁴ *Tehillim 36:7.*

If so, argued Alexander of Macedon, people who don't care about themselves, who don't look out for their own interests at all, who say, "It's all his," are dangerous elements. They are destroying society. Because when a person wants to get rich, he builds a factory, he manufactures clothes, food, etc. But these two people are saying, "No, you take it, you can have it all." They are espousing a philosophy that, if it spreads throughout the population, will result in no clothes and no food being produced. In the end, the entire country will collapse.

An outlook like this constitutes rebellion against the kingdom, so those who espouse it are liable for the death penalty, and to have their property appropriated for the king's treasury, because the king's role is to see to the welfare of the country.

This is how Alexander Macedon looked at it.

The King of Katzia's Elegant Solution

However, as mentioned above, the king of Katzia saw things quite differently. He disparagingly commented to Alexander of Macedon that if this is how they do things back home, the sun and rain must be in the merit of the animals, not the people.

The king of Katzia ruled that this one's son should marry that one's daughter, and the treasure will belong to both of them.

What message are *Chazal* trying to teach us through this novel ruling?

As we said before, when there is a shawl that two people are fighting over, they can fight over it in two ways. Each can claim it is all his, or each can claim it is all the other party's.

If the former, if each says, "It's all mine," the *halachah* is, "They shall divide it." In such a case, each one receives half. If they are dividing a shirt, each one will get one sleeve, which is basically worthless. But if each one says, "It's all yours," then the *halachah* is not to divide it between the two. On the contrary, each one gets it all, because each is not taking from the other, but rather giving to the other. Practically speaking, how does each

person get it all? By partnership. They become partners, *mechutanim*. This one's son marries that one's daughter, and together they will benefit from it all.

I once spoke of this principle in connection to *shalom bayis*. A husband and wife who live together have two ways to manage things. One way is for him to say, "Look how much I do for you!" and she says, "Look how hard I work and how much I help you!" In other words, he says, "It's all mine," and she says, "It's all mine."

The result in such a case is he takes half and she takes half. The home is divided. Each has "half a shirt." Those who suffer the most from this are the children. Each parent pulls them in a different direction.

But if he says, "It's all yours, I know that everything is in your merit," and she says, "It's all yours, only you work and help," then each acknowledges the whole of both of them, and they live in harmony, in unity, and in the end they both have it all.

This is the secret of *shalom bayis*. And this is also the secret of the *Machatzis Hashekel*: we are partners with *Hashem*. But what type of partnership? If a person says to *Hashem*, "It's all mine," then *Hashem* will say to him, "What do you mean, 'It's all yours?'" On the contrary, it's all Mine." The outcome is that *Hashem* gives him half; He gives him the minimum he needs to subsist.

But if a person recites with proper intention the blessing of ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם, שהכל נהיה בדברו, he is saying, so to speak: *Hashem*, everything is Yours. You made everything. A different approach altogether. *Hashem* will respond by giving him everything.

This is the message of the *Machatzis Hashekel*. A person says to *Hashem*: let's be partners, like husband and wife, and then the *halachah* is that both have equal control over the possessions: וישלטו בנכסיהם שווה בשווה. What type of control? The type by which each has it all. *Hashem* receives it all, because everything a person eats is eaten *l'sheim Shamayim*.

If we live this way we will never lack anything because *Hashem* takes very good care of those who seek Him out: דורשי ה' לא יחסרו כל טוב. ●