



**Partners In Torah**  
**San Diego-Los Angeles-Venutra**  
**Take home Dvar Torah**

**Parshat Ki Tisa תשפ"ד**

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By: Rabbi Avi Cohen

***Hello, Welcome!***

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant. Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.***

***Thank you for joining us!***

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.**

This year, in shuls around the world, *Parashat Ki Tisa* will be read on Shabbat two weeks in a row!

This coming Shabbat, it will be read for the first time as the portion of the week. Next week, the Shabbat before the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Adar 2 (this year is a leap year, and a second month of Adar is added to the calendar), is called *Parashat Shekalim*, on which we must read the commandment for every male to give a half-shekel to the Mishkan, and, later, to the Holy Temple. Hence, in addition to the Sefer Torah for next week's portion of the week - *Parashat Vayakhel*, we will take out a second Sefer Torah from the ark and again read the beginning of *Ki Tisa* for *Parshat Shekalim*.

This week's portion begins with the following instructions to Moshe (Exodus 30:12, 13):

יב) כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָקְדֵיהֶם וְנָתַנּוּ אִישׁ כֶּפֶר נַפְשׁוֹ לַיְדֹד בַּפֶּקֶד אֹתָם וְלֹא  
יְהִיָּה בָהֶם נֶגֶף בַּפֶּקֶד אֹתָם  
יג) זֶה יִתְּנוּ כָּל הָעֶבֶר עַל הַפְּקֻדִים מִחֻצֵי הַשָּׂקֶל בַּשָּׂקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ עֶשְׂרִים גֶּרֶה הַשָּׂקֶל מִחֻצֵי  
הַשָּׂקֶל תְּרוּמָה לַיְדֹד

*12) When you count the Israelites according to their numbers, every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul when counting them, so that there will not be a plague among them when counting them. 13) This shall they give, everyone who passes through the census, a half-shekel as a portion to Hashem.*

The instructions are that when counting the Jewish people, instead of counting heads, each male must give a half-shekel, and by counting the half-shekels you will know the number of adult males. Indeed, the Torah tells us that by not counting heads we prevent a plague from coming upon the Jewish people.

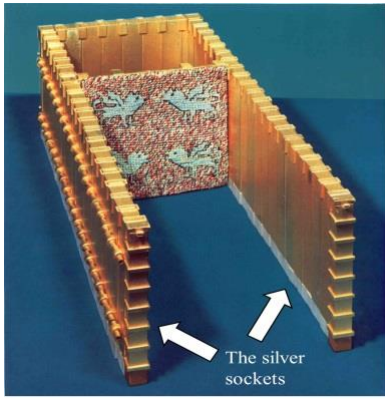
The inference is that counting the actual “heads” will result in a plague. (This is the basis for the custom not to count people when determining if there are ten for a *minyan*, but, instead, to recite a 10-word verse from scripture so that we count the words, not the people.)

This half-shekel was not connected to the voluntary donations given for the Mishkan’s construction. The donations for the materials used to construct the Mishkan and its components was requested only from those whose hearts inspired them to give. One who had no interest in sharing his wealth with the Mishkan, was not obligated to. The half shekel was a mandatory obligation on every male between the age of 20 and 60.

What was the silver from this collection used for?

In this case only, the silver from the half-shekel donations was melted down and used for the 100 sockets that supported the beams of the Mishkan. In future years, the money would be used to buy the animals for the community sacrifices, the incense, and the ingredients for the showbread. Since these items were needed for the Tabernacle’s daily service, an annual mandatory half-shekel contribution was imposed on every person to provide the funds necessary.

The law is that the sacrifices of one fiscal year may not be used in another and the fiscal year for sacrifices begins in Nissan (the first month). Therefore, beginning with Nissan, only newly purchased animals were used for the daily sacrifices. The half shekel donation provided the funds to purchase those animals, so, from Adar, the prior month, the communal leaders would begin announcing and urging



people to bring their half-shekels to the Mishkan so that they could buy the new animals.

This is why the Shabbat before the 1st of Adar is called *Parshat Shekalim*, and, as noted, we take out a second Sefer Torah and read about the half-shekel to remind us of the

times in our history when the call was made for the people to bring in their half-shekels.

It is easy to understand why the half-shekel was used to purchase the daily sacrifice, the incense and ingredients for the showbread. These were communal sacrifices, and therefore, they had to come from the funds of the entire community. Through the half-shekel each person was a partner in each of the sacrifices, incense and the showbread. But why was it necessary that the sockets that supported the beams of the Mishkan be made from the collected half-shekels of the people?

Harav Yosef Tzvi Salant זצ"ל, in his sefer *באר יוסף* gives the following explanation.

The goal of the Mishkan was that the Jewish people should draw inspiration and holiness from it. Each component of the Mishkan corresponded to a different facet of a person, and through the service that went on there, one received a daily dose of spiritual energy into his soul. The silver sockets provided the foundation for the sanctuary. On them stood the poles that made up the sanctuary. (The 48 poles that made up the perimeter of the sanctuary each stood on two sockets totaling 96, and the four poles that held up the curtain each stood on one for a total of 100 sockets.)

Since these sockets represent the foundation of the Mishkan, it would be logical to say that they correspond to a fundamental concept in Judaism that applies to one and all.

The Talmud (Tractate Makot 23b) teaches us:

דרש רבי שמלאי שש מאות ושלוש עשרה מצות נאמרו לו למשה... בא דוד והעמידן על אחת עשרה... בא ישעיהו והעמידן על שש... בא מיכה והעמידן על שלש... **בא חבקוק והעמידן על אחת שנאמר וצדיק באמונתו יחיה**

*Rabbi Simlai taught: Hashem gave Moshe 613 mitzvot on Sinai. King David came and distilled them into 12 main mitzvot. Yeshayahu the prophet came and further distilled them into 6 main mitzvot. Micha the prophet came and distilled them even further into 3 mitzvot. Finally, Chabakuk the prophet came and distilled the mitzvot into one all-encompassing mitzva, **“A Tzadik lives with his אמונה - his trust in Hashem.”***

Rashi explains why the prophets distilled the mitzvot into fewer mitzvot. When the Jewish people received the Torah on Sinai with its 613 mitzvot, they were very strong spiritually, and could carry the full complement of mitzvot. However, as the generations got further from Sinai, the people became weaker and weaker, and they couldn't concentrate on all 613. Therefore, the leaders of the subsequent generations distilled the mitzvot into fewer mitzvot that captured the essence of the others, so that by concentrating on those specific mitzvot they would derive the greatest benefit.

Chabakuk, brought it down to the bottom line. The foundation of one's service to Hashem is his Trust and belief in Hashem. Everything else, emanates from that. These are the words of the Ritva (1510-1580):

בא חבקוק והעמידה על אחת. שהמקיים אותה מקיים כל התורה, והיא האמונה בשם כראוי בקבלת אלהותו ויחודו ועול מלכותו כדרך שנצטוינו בפרשת קריאת שמע שכוללת כל התורה

*One who fulfills this, fulfills the entire Torah, and that is - proper belief in Hashem - which means accepting Him as the only G-d, His Oneness, and the yoke of his kingdom, as we were commanded in the Shema.*

When a person sees himself as a servant of Hashem in everything that he does, he is living with belief in Hashem. So, even though in the matter of mitzvah observance and Torah study, each person is at a different place, for each person has his own relationship with Hashem, in the matter of Emunah - belief in Hashem, all Jews must believe in the same thing; that Hashem and His Torah are true. The Talmud says, (Sanhedrin 99a) that if a person says that even one mitzvah is not from Heaven, he has denied the validity of the entire Torah.

This is why unlike the other donations to the Mishkan which were dependent on the decision of the donors who gave as much or as little as they wanted, the sockets required that everyone give the identical amount, indicating that in this matter, all must be the same. Everyone must have full Emunah in Hashem, bar none.

Therefore, since Emunah - belief in Hashem - is the *foundation* of one's relationship with Hashem, and the sockets were the *foundation* of the Mishkan, the goal of the silver sockets made from the half-shekels was to focus us on Emunah.

The silver sockets are supposed to strengthen us in our Emunah. When we look at them as the foundation of the Mishkan, we should think about the foundation of our relationship with Hashem, Emunah. What in the sockets should bring this out in us?

The secret lies in the *half-shekel*. Why were they instructed to each give a half-shekel instead of a whole?

The answer lies in understanding this passage from the Jerusalem Talmud, (Shekalim 2:3): *The half-shekel is to atone for the sin of the golden calf which happened at the half-point of the day.*

When Moshe went up the mountain, he said he would return by the 6<sup>th</sup> hour (half the day) of the 40<sup>th</sup> day. When he did not, the people came to Aharon and Chur complaining that it was after the sixth hour of the 40<sup>th</sup> day and Moshe hadn't yet returned. Something must have happened to him; perhaps he had decided to remain in heaven. Aharon explained to them that they had miscalculated, and that day was only the 39<sup>th</sup> day. "Wait until tomorrow morning, day 40, and he will be back." But the people had no patience to wait until the end of the day. They imposed on Aharon to make the golden calf immediately, and this caused all the problems. Had they only waited until the end of the day to see the end of the story unfold, before making the calf, everything would have turned out differently.

What's the connection between the half-day at which time the Jews sinned with the golden calf and the half-shekel?

This is the lesson of the *half-shekel* used for the sockets. The half shekel teaches us that we are always in the middle of the story, and we cannot see everything that transpired before, and we cannot know what will follow. This is often why our Emunah is shaken. We see things that are difficult to understand, and we think, G-d forbid, that there is no G-d. How could Hashem let such a horrific thing happen? But, when we would be able to see the entire picture, we would immediately understand the wisdom and fairness of Hashem's judgments. Everything He does is perfect and good, for Hashem is only good. But since we come to this world for only a few years somewhere in the middle of the story, we cannot see the whole picture. Buh Hashem is keeping track since the beginning of time, and His decisions are directed towards the end of time, and in His world, it is all perfect.



There is a story about a student of Nachmanides who was very ill. When Nachmanides came to visit him, he realized that his student was not going to make it. He told the student, that he had a job for him when he passed away.

“There is a world in heaven called “כסאות למשפט” the *Chairs of Judgment*. All judgments of this world emanate from that world. I am going to write you an amulet that will open the doors of all the lower worlds and let you through to that upper-most world. When you get there, I would like you to ask them these awesome and difficult questions that I have.” With that, he gave the student the amulet and the paper with the questions written on it.

A while later, Nachmanides was sitting near a window studying Torah when the image of his deceased student appeared before him. The student said, “Rebbe, you should know that the amulet you wrote for me worked perfectly. With it, I was able to go through the doors of all the spiritual worlds until I reached the world of כסאות למשפט - *Chairs of Judgment*. But when I got there and opened the paper to ask your awesome questions, there were no questions. Everything was resolved.”

This is especially relevant to what is going on in our world today. We live in an upside-down world. A country of peace-loving people, who are trying desperately not to hurt a fly, who only want to be left alone to live in peace, are being condemned as murderers. But a nation of murderers whose entire raison d’être is to kill as many innocent men women and children as they can, are considered the victims. Why does Hashem allow this? Doesn’t He see what His beloved children are going through?

The same question may apply to a very righteous person that we know, who is suffering from a terminal disease, while a completely evil

person is as healthy as a horse. Where is the justice here? Doesn't Hashem run the world?

The answer is, that we do not see the whole picture. We see only a small sliver of it. We cannot see what was before and what is yet to come, and how Hashem is being extremely careful to be just and kind in everything He does. This is why it makes no sense to us. But, rest assured, that in the future when Hashem brings the ultimate redemption, Mashiach, we will retroactively understand how each of the components were essential to bring forth the Mashiach.

The Chofetz Chaim (d. 1933) would give the following parable to illustrate this concept.

One Shabbat morning after services, a visitor approached the *gabbai* (the person who decides who gets called to the Torah and in which position) and asked him the following question:

“I noticed that when you call people to the Torah you have no system. You call up men seemingly randomly from different places throughout the Shul. Why don't you go in order of how they sit so that every man will get called the same number of times throughout the year?”

The gabbai answered, “Please understand that you are a guest here and so you don't see the whole picture. Each person whom I called this morning had a specific reason why he needed to get called to the Torah. One had yahrzeit, the other one had a simcha, etc. If you would be here for a whole year you would see how, throughout the course of the year, everyone gets called to the Torah an equal number of times.”

Similarly, we come to this world for roughly 70-80 years somewhere in the middle of the story, and we want to understand how Hashem operates it. Why are missiles falling on Israel? Why is this

person suffering? Why did this happen or that? The questions have no end. But we are only seeing a small part of the picture. Hashem's calculations began at the beginning of time and continue until the end of time. He is placing each piece of the puzzle in its proper place to complete the picture. As with all puzzles, many pieces look weird or have no discernable image on them; but when put into their proper spots in the puzzle, not only do they take on meaning, but they also complete the picture for the other often unidentifiable puzzle pieces.

This is how the half-shekel given for the sockets is to help us remain strong in our Emunah. It is to remind us that we are always in the middle of the story, so there is no reason to get bent out of shape if things don't work out as you think they should.

There is yet another way in which the sockets support strong Emunah in Hashem, based on the *Baal HaTurim* (1269-1343) (Exodus 38:27):

(כז) מאת האדנים - כנגד מיוסדים על אדני פז (שה"ש ה, טו) וכנגדם תקנו מאה ברכות בכל יום

There was a time during King David's rule that a plague killed 100 people each day. King David instituted that every person recite 100 blessings every day, and the plague stopped. The *Baal Haturim* revealed that these 100 blessings corresponded to the 100 sockets that upheld the Mishkan.

What is the connection? The connection is that the blessings that we recite during the day, thanking Hashem for our food, for all the blessings that He bestows upon us, and, yes, even for the proper functioning of our bodies, are a most potent way to reinforce our Emunah in Hashem. When we constantly recognize Hashem as our benefactor, we develop a strong bond of love with Him and He becomes

a greater reality in our lives. The more we concentrate on the blessings we make, deepening our gratitude to Hashem, the greater our Emunah in Him. Reciting blessings is an exercise in Emunah. The more *reps* we do, the deeper our Emunah will become.

Unfortunately, we no longer have the silver sockets or the Holy Temple to strengthen our Emunah, but we do still have the 100 blessings that we can recite every day. Let us redouble our efforts to make our blessings with more concentration so we can increase our Emunah in Hashem.