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LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

RELATING TO THE WEEKLY SECTIONS OF THE TORAH AND
SPECIAL OCCASIONS IN THE JEWISH CALENDAR

by the

Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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Volume VII: *Shmos*

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In English rendition
by
Rabbi Eliyahu Touger

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Mrs. **Roneete Mona Mina** bas Reb **Zev** ע"ה **Kurtzman**

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BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

69

KI SISSA

WHY MOSHE WAS ASTONISHED

On the verse:¹ “This is what all... should give: a half-*shekel*,” the *Jerusalem Talmud*² and the *Midrash*³ comment: “The Holy One, blessed be He, took out a coin of fire from beneath His throne of glory and showed it to Moshe, telling him: ‘This is what [all] should give.’”

*Tosafos*⁴ explains that the reason G-d showed Moshe the coin of fire was not because Moshe found it difficult to visualize the coin. Instead, Moshe’s difficulty was: How is it possible that by merely giving such a coin a person could attain “atonement for his soul”?⁵ The *Midrash* quotes the verse:⁶ “A person will give his flesh [to save] his flesh, and everything he owns will he give for the sake of his soul.” And, concludes the *Midrash*, even this is not sufficient. To satisfy Moshe’s question, G-d showed him a “coin of fire,” explaining that the coins the Jews would give possess a unique spiritual nature.

On the surface, the concept should not have been so difficult to comprehend, for it had already been established that sacrifices could serve as atonement for sins. Indeed, this concept was communicated directly after the giving of the Torah, before the command to give a half-*shekel*, as it is written:⁷

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1. *Shmos* 30:13.
 2. *Shekalim* 1:4.
 3. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:3, also cited in *Rashi*’s commentary to *Shmos* 30:13.
 4. *Chulin* 42a, entry, *Zos hachayah*.
 5. *Shmos* 30:12.
 6. *Iyov* 2:4.
 7. *Shmos* 20:21.

In our generation - the last generation of exile and the first generation of Redemption - after the tremendous amount of "our efforts and Divine service" of the Jewish people throughout all the previous years and generations, and now even the last purification has been accomplished, now the main emphasis must be first of all on completing, concluding and perfecting the Divine service - to bring the "Gimmel" - the third stage of the true and complete Redemption, in actual reality!

(From the talk of Tuesday night, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Shabbos Kodesh, Parshas Ki Tisa, 14-18 Adar Rishon, 5752)

the half-*shekel* itself — i.e., the concept that each is a half-entity, and only together can they become whole — was revealed. For it is the giving of the Torah which made possible the realization of the fundamental unity between G-d and the Jewish people — “Israel and the Holy One, blessed be He, are all one.”⁴⁰



“And upon [this altar], you will sacrifice your burnt offerings and your peace offerings.” At that time, Moshe did not raise any questions.

There was, however, a difference. The half-*shekel* was to serve as atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf,⁸ a sin of idol worship. And this caused Moshe to wonder: How can giving a half-*shekel* atone for so severe a sin?

To explain: The *mitzvos* can be compared to the limbs and organs of the human body.⁹ Within the body, there are limbs and organs which are particular in nature, each one receiving its individual life-energy from the soul. Within this grouping, there are two sub-categories, limbs and organs on which one’s life depends, and those on which one’s life does not depend. And then there are organs like the brain and heart, which are general in nature; within them rests our *essential* vitality, the life-energy for the entire body.¹⁰

Similarly, there are *mitzvos* which are particular in nature, and others which are of general import. For example, the *mitzvos* “I am G-d” and “You shall have no other gods” include the entire Torah.¹¹ They are of fundamental importance to the soul, for the Jews’ connection with G-d depends on them.

Therefore, when G-d told Moshe that the half-*shekel* would serve as atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe was astonished. He wondered how a half-*shekel* could become atonement for a soul tainted by idol worship.

8. *Shekalim* 2:3; *Midrash Tanchuma, Parshas Ki Sissa*, sec. 10.

9. See *Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 30* (p. 74a); *Tanya*, ch. 23.

10. See *Tanya*, ch. 9. See also *Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 21* (p. 53a) and *Tikkun 27* (p. 72b).

11. *Sheloh*, at the beginning of *Parshas Yisro* in the name of the Sages of early ages; *Tanya*, ch. 20. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Yisro* in this series, where the concept is discussed.

40. See *Zohar*, Vol. III, p. 93b.

A DESCENT FOR COMPREHENSIVE SOULS

The above also gives us insight into the interpretation of the verse:⁵ “When you take the census of the heads of the children of Israel, according to their number,” offered by the *Or HaChayim*. The *Or HaChayim* explains that the verse refers to the premature passing of the righteous — “the heads of the children of Israel.” They may pass away before their appointed time because of *pikudeihem* — literally, “their number,” but in an extended sense meaning “your lack,” as in the verse:¹² *lo nifkad mimeno ish*, “Not one man was lacking.”

All the different interpretations of a verse share a connection.¹³ What then is the connection between the interpretation offered by the *Or HaChayim* and the simple meaning of the verse?

The connection revolves around the fact that, according to its simple interpretation, the verse is speaking about the sin of idol worship, a sin which causes a blemish of a general nature. As such, there is a connection to the interpretation of the *Or HaChayim*. For a sin of a general nature affects the overall connection of Jewish souls to G-d, as expressed within the comprehensive soul of that generation, the “head of the children of Israel.”

Indeed, we see such a pattern with regard to the sin of the Golden Calf, for it caused a spiritual descent within Moshe, the head of the children of Israel. Even though Moshe was not involved with the sin — at that time he was in the spiritual realms — G-d told him:¹⁴ “Go down,” interpreted by our Sages¹⁵ to mean: “Descend from your greatness.”

We find that the Sin of the Golden Calf also brought about the possibility of death. For the Tablets of the Ten

Accordingly, the nose-ring which Eliezer gave was associated with the unity of marriage, and in particular, the marriage of Yitzchak and Rivkah,³⁷ which serves as an analogy for the bond between G-d and the Jewish people. And it intimates that through their Divine service, the Jews can evoke the half-*shekel* given by G-d, as it were.

Nevertheless, “the deeds of the Patriarchs are [merely] a sign for their descendants;” the true expression of this unity came after the giving of the Torah. Only then was the heavenly decree dividing the spiritual from the physical nullified. Therefore Eliezer did not give Rivkah a half-*shekel*, but rather a nose-ring of equivalent weight.³⁸

At that time, man’s Divine service did evoke a corresponding influence from G-d, but the unity was not complete. It was like a relationship in which each partner merely influences the other. It was only after the giving of the Torah³⁹ that

37. This point is emphasized by the fact that the marriage between Yitzchak and Rivkah is the first mentioned in the Torah. In contrast to the relationship between Adam and Chavah, which came as a result of G-d’s creation, the bond between Yitzchak and Rivkah came as a result of man’s initiative. See *Likkutei Torah, Berachah* 96c, *Or HaTorah*, the *maamar* entitled *Yafah Sichosan*, which explains that the marriage between Yitzchak and Rivkah represents the union of the mystic forces referred to as *mah* and *ban*.

38. The nose-ring was said to weigh a *beka* (which, as the *Ibn Ezra* comments alludes to the concept of a half-*shekel*, for *beka* means “divided”). There is, however, no explicit mention of a half-*shekel* with regard to Eliezer’s gift.

With regard to the half-*shekel*, by contrast, although the term *beka* is also used, as in *Shmos* 38:26, “a *beka*, a half-*shekel* per head,” its association with the half-*shekel* is explicitly mentioned.

On the surface, the opposite pattern would seem more appropriate. On the first occasion the Torah uses the term *beka*, it should have defined its worth, and afterwards it could have relied on the definition given previously. Nevertheless, because the spiritual concept of the half-*shekel* was not relevant in a full sense until after the giving of the Torah, it was not until then that this association was made.

39. Nevertheless, the Divine service of the Jewish people after the giving of the Torah depends on the “deeds of the Patriarchs” which preceded it and made it possible. Therefore, as mentioned above, the Tablets of the Ten Commandments are also alluded to in connection with the marriage between Yitzchak and Rivkah.

12. *Bamidbar* 31:49.

13. See the explanation of this concept in the *sichah* of *Parshas Toldos* in this series.

14. *Shmos* 32:7.

15. *Berachos* 32a, cited by *Rashi* in his commentary to the verse.

the covenant are half-entities, each complemented by the other.

This was the concept G-d wished to share with Moshe in connection with the atonement for the Sin of the Golden Calf. By establishing a covenant, He sought to reveal the ultimate oneness between G-d and the Jewish people, showing the bond between the essence of the soul and G-d's essence. Nothing can affect that connection. As G-d states:³³ "Regardless, they are My children; to exchange them for another nation [heaven forbid] is impossible."

"THE DEEDS OF THE PATRIARCHS ARE A SIGN FOR THEIR DESCENDANTS"

The covenant between G-d and the Jewish people began with Avraham, our Patriarch; the covenant established with Moshe represented a higher level.³⁴ Similarly, the concept of the half-*shekel* was first initiated at the time of the Patriarchs, as reflected in the nose-ring, a *beka* in weight, which Eliezer gave Rivkah,²⁴ as mentioned above. Since "the deeds of the Patriarchs are a sign for their descendants,"³⁵ our Divine service after the giving of the Torah is dependent on the Patriarchs' accomplishments.³⁶

33. *Kiddushin* 36a (see *Rashba*, Responsum 194), *Pesichtah, Rus Rabbah*, sec. 3, *Pesachim* 87a.

34. For the covenant with Avraham involved the observance of the Torah and its *mitzvos*, while the covenant with Moshe centered on *teshuvah*, as explained in the *maamar* entitled *Hinei Anochi Koreis Bris*, 5654.

35. *Or HaTorah, Parshas Lech Lecha*. See also the *Ramban's* commentary to *Bereishis* 12:6 which states: "Everything which occurred to the Patriarchs is a sign to their descendants." See also the *Ramban's* commentary to *Bereishis* 12:10.

36. On this basis, we can understand the connection between the two gifts which Eliezer gave Rivkah. He gave her a ring weighing a half-*shekel* and two bracelets (which allude to the Tablets of the Ten Commandments, *Kli Yakar*, commentary to *Bereishis* 24:22). For the new development brought about by the giving of the Torah is the fusion of the physical and the spiritual. This parallels the theme of the half-*shekel*.

Commandments are associated with freedom,¹⁶ and in particular, "freedom from the angel of death."¹⁷ Worshipping the Golden Calf reawakened the influence of the Sin of the Tree of Knowledge, which brought death to the world.

Similarly, sins of a general nature affect the individuals who serve as the "soul" of an entire generation. This relates to the *Or HaChayim's* insights regarding the premature passing of righteous men.

GIVING WITH INNER FIRE

To return to the coin of fire, a question arises: Moshe did not have difficulty conceiving of a half-*shekel*; his difficulty consisted of understanding how the gift of the half-*shekel* could bring about atonement. How was this difficulty resolved by showing him a "coin of fire"?¹⁸

In resolution, it may help to consider the following analogy, attributed by some to the Baal Shem Tov: A man was trained in the art of crafting gold and silver. The master to whom he was apprenticed taught him almost everything, but neglected to mention that before shaping gold or silver, the metal must be heated to make it pliable. The master thought this point was so obvious that it needn't be taught. The apprentice, however, never grasped it, and consequently was never able to become a successful craftsman.

In the analog applying to our Divine service: Our deeds and observance must be fired with the "warmth" of the G-dly soul.

On this basis, we can understand how showing Moshe a coin of fire resolved his difficulties. The mere physical act of giving a coin cannot in itself provide atonement for the soul.

16. *Avos* 6:2.

17. *Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun* 56 (p. 91a).

18. See similar concepts in *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. I, *Parshas Ki Sissa* and *Parshas Terumah*, and in the sources mentioned there.

When, however, the giving is fired by the warmth of the soul's essence, keeping in mind that "the lamp of G-d is the soul of man,"¹⁹ the half-*shekel* can serve as atonement for the soul.

AT THE ESSENCE OF THE SOUL

The deed through which a *mitzvah* is performed reflects the intent of the *mitzvah*, and its inner dynamic. Accordingly, it must be said that the giving of a half-*shekel* reflects the spiritual intent of the *mitzvah*, showing how it is connected with the fire of the soul's essence. This, however, does not seem to be true. G-d showed Moshe a coin of fire, but the half-*shekel* which a Jew gives is a simple coin.

It is not sufficient to attempt to resolve this difficulty by explaining the advantage of *tzedakah*: that a person gives away money for which he worked with all the powers of his soul and/or with which he could purchase his own life's necessities,²⁰ and thus show that *tzedakah* affects the essence of the soul. This is not an adequate explanation of the matter at hand, for it does not differentiate between the giving of the half-*shekel* and other gifts to charity.

Similarly, it is insufficient to explain that the half-*shekalim* were significant, because they were used for the *adonim*, the sockets which formed the base of the Sanctuary. In our Divine service, this refers to the initiative of *kabbalas ol*, making a commitment to fulfill G-d's will that transcends intellect.¹⁸ This initiative stems from the essence of the soul, a level which joins all Jews together. Moreover, in subsequent years, the half-*shekel* was used to purchase communal offerings, which also express the unity of the Jewish people.¹⁸

This explanation is inadequate because although it explains the fundamental importance of the utilization of the

ESTABLISHING A COVENANT

This concept is also related to another element of *Parshas Ki Sissa*, the covenant established between G-d and the Jewish people. After Moshe begged G-d to forgive the nation, G-d agreed to pardon them and promised:³⁰ "I will establish a covenant before all your people."

Making a covenant establishes unity between the principals. A covenant was made by dividing a single entity and having the two principals pass between the halves.³¹ As we see in *Bris Beyn HaBetarim*, the covenant established between G-d and Avraham,³² Avraham and Heavenly fire passed between the halves of slaughtered animals.

This practice raises a difficulty, for the division of an entity seems to reflect separation rather than unity. Nevertheless, the intent of a covenant is to communicate consummate unity. The practice intimates that just as the two halves of the animal are parts of a single whole, so too the two principals of

idol (*Ibid.*, 12a). The *mitzvah* of the half-*shekel* aroused the essential connection between the Jews and G-d, which stands above all connection with sin. This essential bond was expressed in the Jews' commitment to *mesirus nefesh* for an entire year, and in the manifestation of G-d's choice of the Jewish people — that regardless of their conduct, they are His children (see *Kiddushin* 36a and the sources cited in note 33).

On this basis, we can appreciate the significance of the directive (*Shekalim* 1:1): "On the first of Adar, an announcement is made with regard to the *shekalim*." For aside from the fact that Adar precedes Nissan (when the collection will be needed to purchase communal offerings), there is an inherent connection between the giving of the half-*shekel* and the month of Adar. For the fundamental element of Adar is Purim, and the essential point of Purim is the revelation of the elementary bond between G-d and the Jewish people. (Indeed, the very name Purim reflects a connection which goes deeper than our logic and reason, as explained in the *sichos* of Purim in this series.) This relates to the inner theme of the giving of the half-*shekel*.

30. *Shmos* 34:10.

31. See *Yirmeyahu* 34:18. See also *Likkutei Torah, Nitzavim* 44b, the *maamar* entitled *Hinei Anochi Koreis Bris*, 5654, and the *maamar* entitled *Ki Cheilek Havayah Amo*, 5702, sec. 13.

32. *Bereishis*, ch. 15.

19. *Mishlei* 20:27.

20. See *Tanya*, ch. 37.

ond ten *gerah*, the ten sublime *Sefiros* which are emanations of G-dliness.

G-d Himself is not limited at all, and cannot be defined in any manner. Nevertheless, because of His great love for the Jewish people, He confines Himself in the structure of Ten *Sefiros*. And from these Ten *Sefiros* are derived the ten powers of soul that exist within man.²⁷ In this vein, man is called *Adam*, referring to the phrase *Adamah L'Elyon*, “I resemble the One Above.”²⁸

Thus the two — man’s ten spiritual powers and the ten sublime *Sefiros* — together make up one complete entity. Alone, without the other, each one is incomplete.

This is how the intent of the *mitzvah* — that the coin a Jew contributes must be a “coin of fire,” shining with the fire of the soul’s essence — is reflected in the actual giving of the half-*shekel*. For a half-*shekel* demonstrates that, together, a Jew and G-d are a single entity, the essence of a Jew’s soul being connected with G-d’s essence. At times, there can be blemishes and inconsistencies with regard to the relationship our revealed powers of intellect and emotion share with G-d. The essence of our souls, however, is unified with G-d in an essential bond, clinging essence to essence.

This explains how giving a half-*shekel* can atone for the Sin of the Golden Calf. For all sins, even worshipping false divinities, do not disrupt a Jew’s essential connection with G-d. This connection remains intact at all times, and when it is revealed (through giving the half-*shekel*), it revitalizes the connection shared by the revealed powers, uniting them with G-dliness.²⁹

27. *Tanya*, ch. 3.

28. Cf. *Yeshayahu* 14:14. See *Sefer Asarah Maamoros*, *maamar Aim Kol Chai*, tract 2, sec. 33; *Sheloh* 20b.

29. On this basis, we can also understand why the gift of the half-*shekel* negated Haman’s decree against the Jewish people (*Megillah* 16a, *Tosafos*). The spiritual reason for the decree was the fact that the Jews bowed down to Haman’s

half-*shekalim*, it does not explain how giving the coins expresses the essence of the soul.

Similarly, we cannot argue that the connection between the giving of the half-*shekel* and the essence of the soul is expressed by the fact that in contrast to the other donations to the Sanctuary, a specific amount had to be given. With the other donations, every person gave according to the generosity of his heart, some giving more than others. With regard to the half-*shekel*, however, there was a specific command that²¹ “The rich should not give more, nor should the poor give less.” This points to that level of the soul which is the same in all Jews. When it comes to the revealed powers of intellect and emotion, there are differences between individuals, but all Jews share the same essence.¹⁸

This concept is not specifically alluded to by the command to give a half-*shekel*. On the contrary, the same concept is alluded to by all those commandments which require that a single sum be given by all. Accordingly, we are forced to say that it is the half-*shekel* itself which alludes to the fire of the soul’s essence.

WHY A HALF AND NOT A WHOLE?

To explain the above concept: The command to give a half-*shekel* states:¹ “This is what all... should give, a half-*shekel*.... A *shekel* is twenty *gerah*; a half-*shekel* [should be given as] an offering to G-d.”

The verse informs us that we should give a half-*shekel*, and then, so that we know the amount to be given, the Torah informs us that an entire *shekel* is twenty *gerah*, leading to the understanding that the donation to be given by every individual is ten *gerah*.

An obvious question arises: Why is the elaboration necessary? Why didn’t the Torah merely say to give ten *gerah*? If

21. *Shmos* 30:15.

for some reason it was necessary to mention that the gift was a half-*shekel*, the Torah could have said that we should give “a half-*shekel*, ten *gerah*.” Why was it necessary to mention that an entire *shekel* is worth twenty *gerah*?

This indicates that both factors are important. A person must give half of an entire *shekel*. When a person gives ten *gerah*, he must realize that he is giving half of an entity worth twenty *gerah*.

This concept, however, requires explanation. In general, the Torah requires that our gifts to G-d be made from the best and most perfect articles we possess, as intimated by the phrase: “All the choice parts [should be given] to G-d.”²² Why then does this *mitzvah* involve only half an entity?

The fact that the sum could have been larger is irrelevant, for every *mitzvah* has its purposes and limits. The question is, why a half only? Why not a complete *shekel*?

This is particularly true in light of the statements made previously, that the half-*shekel* serves as atonement for the Sin of the Golden Calf. That sin involved the denial of G-d’s oneness, and the conception of division between the world and a G-dliness which is all-encompassing. Accordingly, it would seem appropriate that the atonement follow the pattern of “measure for measure,” and involve giving *everything* to G-d. This, however, was not the case. Indeed, the *mitzvah* of giving half a *shekel* implies that one must retain a portion for oneself; it is forbidden to give an entire *shekel*.²³

The difficulty is further compounded by the fact that the Torah mentions the weight of a half-*shekel* with regard to another subject, but there uses a term that implies an entire entity. Eliezer gave Rivkah a golden nose-ring weighing a *beka*,²⁴ a term which *Rashi* identifies with a half-*shekel*. Why

22. *Vayikra* 3:16. See the interpretation of this phrase offered by the *Ramban*, *Mishneh Torah*, the conclusion of *Hilchos Issurei Mizbeach*.

23. See the commentary of the *Ramban* to *Shmos* 30:15.

24. *Bereishis* 24:22.

then doesn’t the Torah use the term *beka*, which connotes an entire entity, rather than referring to a half-*shekel*, an incomplete entity?

MAKING A HALF, WHOLE

These questions can be resolved as follows: As mentioned previously, the worship of false divinities involves separation from G-dliness. Accordingly, the half-*shekel* which atones for this sin must express G-d’s oneness and demonstrate the united approach demanded of a Jew. This does not mean giving away everything for G-dliness. That would imply that a person is an entity which exists and which gives away things which rightfully belong to it for G-d. The *mitzvah* of giving a half-*shekel* teaches a deeper commitment.

Alone, a person is a non-entity; he is only half. How does he become complete? By uniting with G-d.

This approach to Divine service evokes a similar initiative from above. G-d’s perfection is dependent on the Jewish people, as it were. For that reason, G-d refers to the Jewish people as *Tamasi*, “the one who completes Me.”²⁵

The Jews’ connection with G-d is not a bond between two separate entities; they are one whole. Each alone is merely a half-entity.²⁶ It is only when they come together that they attain perfection.

This is alluded to by the half-*shekel*. It too is not a complete entity, containing twenty *gerah*. Instead, it has merely ten *gerah*, alluding to the ten powers of the soul which a Jew must dedicate to G-d. When he does, he draws down the sec-

25. *Shir HaShirim* 5:2, as interpreted by *Likkutei Torah*, *Shir HaShirim* p. 34d.

26. See the interpretation by the *Maggid of Mezeritch* (*Or Torah*, *Parshas Behaalos’cha*, explained at length by the *Tzemach Tzedek*, *Yahel Or Tehillim* 98:6) of the phrase (*Bamidbar* 10:2) *shnei chatzotzeros* as *shnei chatzi tzuros*, “two half entities.”