

כִּי תִשָּׂא

יֵא וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: יב כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת־
 רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָקְדֵיהֶם וְנָתַנּוּ אִישׁ כֶּפֶר נַפְשׁוֹ
 לַיהוָה בְּפָקֶד אֹתָם וְלֹא־יְהִי בָהֶם נֶגֶף בְּפָקֶד אֹתָם:
 יג זָה | יִתְּנוּ כָל־הָעֵבֶר עַל־הַפְּקָדִים מַחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל

יב וּמִלִּיל י' עִם מֹשֶׁה לְמִמְרָ: יב אֲרִי תִקְבֵּל
 ית חֲשַׁבְנוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמַנְיַיהוּן וַיִּתְּנוּ
 גְּבֵר פָּרְקוֹן נַפְשִׁיהָ קָדָם י' כִּד תִּמְנִי יִתְּחוּן
 וְלֹא יְהִי בְּהוֹן מוֹתָא כִּד תִּמְנִי יִתְּחוּן: יג דִּין
 יתְּנוּ כָל דְּעֵבֶר עַל מַנְיַיָּא פְּלָגוֹת סְלֵעָא

(יב) כי תשא. לשון קבלה, כהרגומו, כשתחפוץ לקבל סכום
 מניינס לדעת כמה הם, אל תמננס לגלגולת, אלא יתנו כל אחד
 מחצית השקל ותמנה את השקלים ותדע מניינס: ולא יהיה

בהם נגף. שהמנין שולט בו עין הרע והקֶבֶר בא עליהם, כמו
 שמנינו צימי דוד (שמואל ב' כד): (יג) זה יתנו. הראה לו כמין
 מטבע של אש ומשקלה מחצית השקל, ואומר לו כזה יתנו:

let each one give to the Lord an atonement for his soul. God requires that each person redeems himself, to “buy himself” back from God. The entire world is consecrated, or *hekdesh*. The only legal means by which we are allowed to use *hekdesh* is through redemption. The *halachic* means to redeem an object is a trade; one can exchange the *hekdesh* item with a non-*hekdesh* item. The non-consecrated item takes on the consecrated status of the item it is being traded for, while the *hekdesh* item takes on the secular nature of the non-consecrated item.

One’s body, one’s clothes, one’s children, the entire universe require redemption to allow us to make use of them. Yet what can man possibly offer in trade that could effect such redemption? The entire world belongs to God!

Upon reflecting on this paradox, King David, in a moment of resignation, proclaimed, *A man cannot redeem himself, he cannot give unto the Lord his redemption payment (Ps. 49:8)*. Yet many Jews have a tradition of reciting *Kaparos* on *erev Yom Kippur*, wherein we quote a different verse in which God says: *Redeem him from descending to the pit. I have found ransom (Job 33:24)*. Indeed, when God’s attribute of judgment is evident, King David’s verse is operative, while when His attribute of mercy prevails, the verse from Job pertains. Redemption is indeed possible.

Symbolically, one must make this payment in three ways.

God, the Infinite, the *Ein Sof*, contracted Himself to allow the existence of the world, to make it possible for a finite world to coexist with the Infinite. In keeping with the imperative of *vehalachta bidrachav (Imitatio Dei)*, man must also engage in *tzimtzum*. Man harbors illusions of greatness, thinking his abilities are limitless and that he can attain infinity. The first redemption coin that God exacts from us is our own “contraction.” Just as God Himself engages in *tzimtzum*, so must we. Man expresses *tzimtzum* first and foremost by observing the precepts of the *halachah*. Fealty to Jewish law is unenforceable: there is no police, no executive branch of government, no jails, no punishment for violators. By following *halachah* despite the lack of an external enforcement mechanism, we engage in *tzimtzum*.

The next attribute of God that we must imitate, the second redemption coin to redeem our worldly life, is known as *hester*, or *ne’elam*, the attribute of obscurity. The Master of the Universe not only contracts Himself; He obscures Himself as well. He does not act demonstrably, nor does He seek recognition.

Man is naturally inclined to strive for recognition, for honor. He wishes his efforts and actions to be appreciated by as many of his peers and with as much fanfare as possible. Yet the greatest individuals in Jewish history reflect precisely the opposite tendency—a predisposition towards obscurity.

KI SISA

11 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 12 “When you take the sum of the children of Israel according to their numbers, let each one give to the Lord an atonement for his soul* when they are counted; then there will be no plague among them when they are counted. 13 This they shall give, everyone who goes through the counting: half a shekel*”

Take, as one example, an august institution from thousands of years ago, the 120-member *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah*, the Men of the Great Assembly. This group of Rabbis preserved the remnant of Israel through the first exile. The *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* instituted the form of contemporary prayer as well as the standard formula for *berachos*. They instituted the laws of *muktzeh* and associated rabbinical prohibitions to safeguard the Sabbath. Their impact on our everyday lives is immeasurable.

Who exactly were the representatives of this noble body? How many of its members are identifiable by name? Ezra, Nechemiah, Mordechai, Zerubavel, and Shimon Hatzaddik—those are all we know. The Gemara states that there were prophets among this group. Who were they? We don't know. Why did they not include their names in the Oral Law through which they made their greatest impact? Because they reflected the obscurity of God Himself as He hid behind a cloud on Mount Sinai. If the Master of the Universe hides from the very world that He leads, so too must the masters of our tradition.

Finally, the third redemption coin that a person must pay in order to make use of this world is *ilem*: voiceless, mute, passive acceptance. Although God occasionally reveals Himself in a dramatic fashion: *The God of glory thunders* (Ps. 29:3), more often He is mute and passive. This tendency towards silence is also reflected in His attribute of slowness to anger. Despite the actions of man that should provoke an angry response, God is long-suffering, with silent acceptance of our foibles.

A Jew regularly recites a *berachah* upon eating and satisfying his hunger. All is well; he is healthy and in possession of his faculties. One can readily sense the presence of God. In cruel contrast, upon the tragic death of a mother, father, son, daughter, or spouse, as he rends clothing at the moment of greatest grief, a Jew recites: *Blessed are You...the true Judge* (*Dayan Ha'emes*).

A person prepares the body for burial, places it in the ground, shovels earth on top of the casket. As everything that means anything to him lies lifeless before him in this grave, he recites the *berachah* as he silently shouts, “Where is the *Attah*? Where is God's presence?” At the moment that he is most tormented by this question, he responds with the *Kaddish*, affirming that the world is God's and that everything that takes place in it is a reflection of His will.

Unanswerable, unexplained tragedies have accompanied the Jew in his long history. When faced with death, when a Jew is confronted with the ultimate *teiku* (unanswerable question), he recites the *berachah* of *Dayan Ha'emes*. Emotional sublimation is the greatest act of redemption that a Jew can “pay” the Holy One. (*Derashot Harav*, pp. 22-33; Boston, 1974)

מחצית השקל - *half a shekel*. What is the basis for the half-shekel obligation? On one hand, it could be argued that the *mitzvah* involves the communal purchase of sacrifices, allowing the contributor to retain a portion in these public offerings. On the other hand, perhaps the *mitzvah* involves the simple act of giving charity.

בַּשֶּׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ עֶשְׂרִים גֵּרָה הַשֶּׁקֶל מַחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל תְּרוּמָה לַיהוָה: יָד כָּל הָעֵבֶר עַל-הַפְּקָדִים מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה יִתֵּן תְּרוּמַת יְהוָה: טו הָעֵשִׂיר לֹא-יִרְבֶּה וְהִדֵּל לֹא יִמְעִיט מִמַּחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל לְתֵת אֶת-תְּרוּמַת יְהוָה לְכַפֵּר עַל-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם: טז וְלִקְחֹתָ אֶת-כֶּסֶף הַכֹּהֲנִים מֵאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנָתַתָּ אֹתוֹ עַל-עֲבֹדַת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְהָיָה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְזָכְרוֹן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לְכַפֵּר עַל-

לְחֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה שְׁשֵׁנָה הַשָּׁנִית, ונתנו כל אחד מחצית השקל, והן לקנות מהן קרצנות לצור של כל שנה ושנה, והשוו זה עניינם ועשירים, ועל אותה תרומה נאמר לכפר על נפשותיכם, שהקרצנות לכפרה הם צאים. והשלישית היא תרומת המשכן, כמו שנאמר (להלן לה, כד) כָּל מְרִיס תְּרוּמַת כֶּסֶף וְגִתְשָׁת, ולא יתהוה יד כלם שזה זה אלף איש איש מה שגדנדו לצו: (טו) ונתת אותו על עבודת אהל מועד. למדת שנלטוו למנותם בתחלת נדבת המשכן אחר מעשה העגל מפני שנכנס זה מגפה, כמו שנאמר (להלן לה, לה) וַיִּגַּף ה' אֶת הָעָם, משל ללאן הציבה על צעליה שנפל זה דָּבָר, ומשפסק אמר לו לרועה צנקה ממך מנה את לאני ודע כמה נותרו זהם, להודיע שהיא חציבה עליו. ואי אפשר לומר שהמנין הזה הוא האמור בחומש הפקודים, שהרי נאמר בו (במדבר א, א) צִאֲתָד לְחֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה, והמשכן הוקם באלף אחד לחדש הראשון, שנאמר (להלן מ, ב) וַיִּזְרַם הַחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן צִאֲתָד לְחֹדֶשׁ פְּקִידֵי אֶת-הָעָם וְהָיָה מֵאֵת כֶּסֶף הַכֹּהֲנִים מִשְׁקָלֵם שְׁלֹשׁ, שנאמר (להלן לה, כו) וַיְהִי מֵאֵת כֶּסֶף הַכֹּהֲנִים לְזָכָת וְגו'. הא למדת ששמים היו, אחת בתחלת נדבתן אחר יום הכפורים שנה ראשונה, ואחת שנה שנייה באייר משהוקם המשכן. ואם תאמר, וכי אפשר ששנייה היו ישראל שיש שם מאות אלף ושלש מאות אלפים וחמש מאות וחמשים, שהרי צנקה פקודי העדה נאמר כן, ובחומש הפקודים אף בו

העובר על הפקודים. דרך המונין מעצמין את הגמנין זה אחר זה, וכן כל אֶשֶׁר יַעֲבֹר פֶּסַח הַשָּׁבֵט (ויקרא כו, לב), וכן פֶּעֶזְרֵינָה הָאֵלֶּן עַל יְדֵי מוֹנֶה (ירמיה לג, יג): מחצית השקל בשקל הקדש. צמסקל השקל שקצתי לך לשקול בו שקלי הקדש, כגון שקלים האמורין צפרשת ערכין ושדה אחוזה (ויקרא כו, א-ט, טו-טז): עשרים גרה השקל. עכשיו פירש לך כמה הוא: גרה. לשון מעה, וכן צמסאל יצא להשפסות לו ללאגורת כֶּסֶף וְכֶסֶף לָחֶס (שמואל א' ב, לו): עשרים גרה השקל. [השלם] שהשקל (השלם) ארבעה זוזים, והזו מתחלתו חמש מעות אלף צאו והוסיפו עליו שמות והעלוהו לשש מעה כסף, ומחצית השקל הזה שאמרתי לך, יתנו תרומה לה': (יד) מבין עשרים שנה ומעלה. למדך כאן שאין פחות מנן עשרים יוצא לצא ונמנה בכלל אנשים: (טו) לכפר על נפשותיכם. שלם חנגפו על ידי מנין. דבר אחר, לכפר על נפשותיכם, לפי שרמו להם כאן שלם תרומות, שנכתב כאן תרומת ה' שלם פעמים, אחת תרומת אדנים שמנאן כשהתחילו צנדבת המשכן, שנתנו כל אחד ואחד מחצית השקל ועלה למאת הככר, שנאמר (להלן לה, כה) וְכֶסֶף פְּקוּדֵי הָעֵדָה מֵאֵת כֶּסֶף, ומהם נעשו האדניים שנאמר וַיְהִי מֵאֵת כֶּסֶף הַכֹּהֲנִים וְגו' (שם פסוק כו). והשנית אף היא על ידי מנין שמנאן משהוקם המשכן, הוא המנין האמור בתחלת חומש הפקודים (במדבר א, א) צִאֲתָד

While Rashi infers the former (see Rashi on verse 15 and in Kesuvos 108a), Maimonides clearly leans towards the latter. In the first chapter of *Hilchos Shekalim*, Maimonides writes, *It is a positive mitzvah from the Torah that each male in Israel give a half-shekel every year, while only in the fourth chapter is there an indication of what the money is used for.* Furthermore, Maimonides stipulates that only coinage may be used and not items of equivalent value. And although there are no sacrifices for which to donate, the half-shekel contribution requirement is still in force in regard to the giving of charity. Along these lines, the Gemara (*Bava Basra* 9a) states: *R. Asi says, a person must give a minimum of a third of a shekel per year for charity.* The *Shulchan Aruch* echoes this idea, indicating that if a person

according to the holy shekel. Twenty gerahs equal one shekel; half of [such] a shekel shall be an offering to the Lord. 14 Everyone who goes through the counting, from the age of twenty and upward, shall give an offering to the Lord. 15 The rich shall give no more, and the poor shall give no less* than half a shekel, with which to give the offering to the Lord, to atone for your souls.* 16 You shall take the silver of the atonements from the children of Israel and use it for the work of the Tent of Meeting; it shall be a remembrance for the children of Israel before the Lord, to atone for your

gave less than a third of a shekel per year, he has not fulfilled the obligation of giving charity (*Yorah Deah* 249:2). (The Ritva explains that the obligation involves just one-third instead of half a shekel because the shekel coin became larger during the time of Ezra.)

One can learn two new ideas from this *halachah*. First, the *mitzvah* of giving the half-shekel includes a *mitzvah* of charity. Even though the Temple is no longer in existence, the *mitzvah* of giving the half-shekel still applies in regard to the obligation to give charity. Second, like the *mitzvah* of the half-shekel, the *mitzvah* of charity on its most fundamental level involves an act of giving, even if the needy are not helped through the act. Proof for the latter contention is provided in *Yorah De'ah* 251:10, which suggests that the poor themselves have an obligation to give charity to each other, even though neither ultimately gains anything. While there is indeed an added fulfillment in helping the needy through one's charity, the basic *mitzvah* is the simple act of giving. (*Harrerei Kedem* Vol. 2, pp. 341-343)

וְהָדֵל לֹא יִמְעִיט - *and the poor shall give no less*. There is a general rule that no *mitzvah* requires one to expend more than a fifth of his assets to fulfill it. So, for example, if a *lulav* were to cost more than one-fifth of a person's assets, he would be exempt. The *mitzvah* of giving the half-shekel, however, is an exception; Maimonides states that a person must literally sell the shirt off his back to fulfill it (*Hilchos Shekalim* 1:1). The reason is found later in this same verse—the half-shekel performed an atonement for the soul. Without it, the atonement would not take place, and for matters of the soul there is no monetary limitation.

The Gemara (*Yoma* 35b) relates the famous story of Hillel who earned half a dinar a day, yet paid a quarter dinar daily to gain entry to the *Beis Midrash*. Why did Hillel give half of his salary to study Torah when his obligation was only one-tenth of a dinar? The Chofetz Chaim indicates that the study of Torah is yet another exception to the twenty percent expense limitation, since Torah is *your life and the length of your days* (*Deut.* 30:20). The study of Torah brings life to the soul, and therefore, similar to the half-shekel, there is no monetary limitation to the expenditure for the study of Torah. (*Harrerei Kedem* Vol. 2, p. 344)

לְכַפֵּר עַל-נַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם - *to atone for your souls*. Sin is a result of selfishness, when temptation overrules sacred principles. One abandons tradition because of the pleasure one expects to derive from the performance of the forbidden deed. *Tzedakah*, in contrast, demonstrates sympathy, compassion and sharing with others. For this reason, forgiveness for sin, can only be attained through *tzedakah*. *Tzedakah* also acts as ransom. In order to redeem himself the sinner must pay a ransom. The Torah therefore describes the half-shekel offering as a redemption payment for the soul. (*Noraos Harav* Vol. 6, pp. 260-261).