

THE CHABAD WEEKLY

Vol 7, #21

This week's Torah portion, Ki Tisa, contains the commandment to give the half-shekel: "This shall they give ...a half-shekel ...an offering to G-d." On this verse the Jerusalem Talmud comments: "The Holy One, Blessed Be He, removed a coin of fire from under the Throne of Glory and showed it to Moses, saying, 'This shall they give.'"

Moses had no difficulty understanding what was meant by a half-shekel; what he did not understand was how this offering could atone for the souls of the Jewish people. When G-d showed him the coin of fire, the concept was explained.

What lesson does the "coin of fire" contain for us in our own service of G-d?

A coin has the same fixed value for everyone. By contrast, different objects are worth more or less to different individuals. To one person the value of a particular object will be great, and he will be willing to pay a large sum of money to possess it. Another person, who does not desire it as much, will consider it to be of lesser value. But a coin is not open to disagreement. Its value is always the same.

A coin, matbei'a in Hebrew, comes from the root meaning nature, teva. It is symbolic of kabalat ol (the acceptance of the yoke of heaven), which is the same for everyone, independent of emotions or intellectual capacities. True, people differ greatly from one another, but the basic acceptance of the concept that G-d's will must be fulfilled is the same for all, just like a coin whose value is fixed and never changes.

Fire is characterized by a perpetual upward movement. The nature of flame is to rise up; it yearns to ascend ever higher. Not only does fire never move downward, it never stays still.

Fire is symbolic of movement and activity, of yearning and progression. A Jew's G-dly service is likened to fire, for he is always striving to ascend higher and draw closer to G-d. However, each person's spiritual service is dependent on his individual ability. The level of his service is determined by his particular powers of comprehension and emotional capacities. In this respect, all people are different. Each "fire" is different, unlike the coin whose value is always the same.

The half-shekel, the "coin of fire," represents a unification of these two concepts.

Human nature is such that when a person acts according to the dictates of his own emotions he is filled with vitality and enthusiasm - fire. When he acts out of a sense of obligation, this excitement is absent. His actions are deliberate and calculated, but they are not enthusiastic.

The Jew's service is to combine the "coin" with the "fire," to accept the yoke of heaven with fervor and enthusiasm. Such service has the power to atone for sin. (Adapted from Likutei Sichot, Volume 1 (From L'Chaim 5759, #559))

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"Half a shekel, after the shekel of the Sanctuary." (30:13) A Jew is only "half" an entity in two senses, attaining completion and wholeness by uniting with G-d, or alternately, with another Jew. Yet these explanations are interrelated, for when a person helps his fellow Jew and unites with him, he simultaneously merits G-d's blessing and draws closer to Him at the same time. (Likutei Sichot) (from L'Chaim #559)

This verse contains an allusion to the mitzva of tzedaka, charity, for the word shekel has the same numerical equivalent as nefesh, soul (430). This teaches that giving tzedaka has the power to effect atonement for the soul. (Baal HaTurim) (from L'Chaim #559)

Parshas Para: "...that is unblemished, that never had on it a yoke..." [Numbers 19:4] When someone thinks he has already achieved spiritual perfection and has no blemishes or defects, that in itself is a clear sign that he has never taken upon himself the "yoke of heaven", a sincere commitment to consistent spiritual effort. For if he had, he would have quickly realized that it is impossible for him to be unblemished. Seer of Lublin [translated from Sichat HaShavuah 429] – ascent.org.il

The Traveling Inquirer

In his early years, before he went public with his teachings and disciples came from far and wide to learn from him, the founder of the chassidic movement, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, was an incessant traveler. Dressed in the clothes of a simple villager, he would travel from town to town and from hamlet to hamlet, asking questions. "How are things?" he would inquire of the water-carrier yoked to his pails, of the market-woman minding her stall, of the child playing in the doorway of his home. "Is there enough to eat? Is everyone healthy?" "Baruch Hashem, blessed be the Almighty, all is fine" or "Thanks to the Almighty, things are improving," these simple, G-d-fearing and G-d-trusting Jews would reply, and the traveler would depart with the gratified step of one who has found what he was seeking.

One day, Rabbi Israel arrived in a village and made his way to the study hall. There, in a corner, sat an ancient Torah scholar over his books, wrapped in tallit and tefillin. This was the village porush ("ascetic"), who led a life of holy seclusion. From sunrise to sunset, not a morsel of bread nor a sip of water would pass his lips; he spoke to no one and never lifted his eyes from the sacred tomes. For more than fifty years he had kept to this regimen, utterly removed from the mundane cares of material life.

So why was this stranger pestering him? "How are things?" he was inquiring, "Is there enough to eat? Is everyone healthy?" The ascetic made no reply, hoping the stranger would go away. But the stranger only leaned closer, and his questioning grew more insistent. Impatiently, the ascetic waved him away, pointing him to the door.

"Rabbi," the stranger now asked, "why are you denying G-d His livelihood?"

The words had their desired effect: the old man was roused to indignant attention. G-d's livelihood?! The audacity of this uncouth peasant! "What are you saying?" he demanded in a thunderous voice. "How dare you disturb me with such blasphemous babble!"

"Only what King David, the sweet singer of Israel, proclaims in his Psalms," replied the Baal Shem Tov. "Tell me, Rabbi, what is the meaning of the verse, 'And You, the Holy One, who dwells by the praises of Israel?'"

"We mortal beings," continued the Baal Shem Tov when the porush made no reply, "subsist on the sustenance that G-d provides us in His great kindness. But what does G-d 'subsist' on? On the praises of Israel! When one Jew asks another, 'How are things' and his fellow responds by praising and thanking the Almighty, they are nourishing G-d, deepening His involvement with his creation." (Adapted from the teachings of the Rebbe by Yanki Tauber) – meaningfullife.org

Avoda (translated as "service" and "striving") is not the striving that avoda (service) itself be true; rather, truth itself is an avoda, that the "fingernails" be true. Why does that surprise you? "He saw the attribute of Truth," the Talmud declares, "and he prostrated himself." (From Rebbe's Hayom yom 20 ADAR 1).

The Alter Rebbe related: Among the teachings my Rebbe (the Maggid) told me at yechidus, there was one on the verse, "A constant fire shall be kept burning on the altar; it shall not be extinguished." The Maggid taught: Though fire descends from Above, spontaneously, it is a mitzva to bring from the 'ordinary,' by man. (Man's action is) an awakening from below which engenders an awakening Above. (For the nature of spirit is that) 'spirit elicits (another, responding) spirit and in turn calls forth another, yet higher spirit.' The spirit from below elicits the spirit from Above, calling forth spirit from higher and still higher. It is a positive mitzva to kindle fire on the altar. 'Altar' refers to the 'man who offers of you.' The offering itself is insufficient. Man must kindle a fire on the offering that is 'of you.' This fire, *Lo tichbeh* (literally, 'it shall not be extinguished'), shall extinguish (*tichbeh*) the *Lo* (the 'no,' the negative). My Master told me this teaching ten times to engrave it in the ten powers of my soul. "You, my pupil," he said to me, "are in need of this constant fire, for yours is the duty of extinguishing the great *Lo* (of the opponents of Chassidus). You shall extinguish the *Lo*, and G-d will transform the *Lo* to *hein* ('yes'; assent, the positive)." (From Rebbe's Hayom yom 20 ADAR II).

One who engages in illusions of grandeur is fooling no one but himself; so what's the big deal of fooling a fool?

— Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch (1834-1882)

PARTICIPATE IN WEEKLY CLASSES

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| <u>Sunday</u> | 8:00 AM | Gemara-Tractate Shabbos (men) |
| <u>Monday</u> | 8:00 PM | Chumash (men and women) |
| <u>Tuesday</u> | 8:00 PM | Gemara-Tractate Makos (men) |
| | 9:00 PM | Tanya (men and women) with Rabbi Wolf |
| <u>Wednesday</u> | 8:30 PM | Halacha and Tanya (women) |
| <u>Thursday</u> | 10:00 AM | Chassidus (women) |
| | 8:00 PM | Class for Beverly Hills Highschool Students |
| <u>Daily</u> | 6:45 AM to 7:15 AM | Chasidus |
| | Between Mincha and | Halacha |

**SHABBOS PARSHAS KI SISA
PARSHAS PARAH
March 12, 2004**

**Candlelighting: (Los Angeles) 5:40 PM
Friday Mincha: 5:55 PM**

LATEST TIME FOR SHEMA: 9:05 AM

SHABBAT MORNING

- **Tanya** **8:45 AM**
- **Shacharit** **9:30 AM followed by
Kiddush, Cholent &
Farbrengen**
- **Haggadah** **4:45 PM**
- **Mincha** **5:30 PM followed by
Seuda Shlishit**
- **Shabbat ends** **6:40 PM**

Happy Birthday to Yaakov Yehuda Shusterman,
Avraham Beroukhim, Gilda Beroukhim, Lori Meisel. &
Mahnaz Levin.

Happy Anniversary to Berel and Miriam Meisel.

☞ **This week only, the Wednesday night class for women will take place on Thursday night at 8:30 PM. Rabbi Shusterman will discuss the laws of Pesach.**

GOOD SHABBOS!

DAILY MINYONIM:

**Shacharis: Mon-Fri: 6:00 AM and 7:30 AM
Sunday: 9:00 AM**

Mincha/Maariv: 6:00 PM