

The Amazing Combination of Parshas Vayakheil and Parshas Shekalim

In the Merit of Serving Hashem during the Weekdays out of Yirah—Our Half Shekel HKB”H Supplies Ahavas Hashem on Shabbas Kodesh—the Second Half Shekel

This coming Shabbas Kodesh, which approaches auspiciously, is referred to as Shabbas Shekalim. This designation conveys the fact that the Maftir portion, taken from Parshas Ki Sisa, describes the mitzvah of “machatzis-hashekel.” Based on the the Mishnah (Megillah 29a), the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 685, 1 and 5) establishes that we read the Maftir designated for Parshas Shekalim on either Shabbas Rosh Chodesh Adar or the Shabbas on which we bless the month of Adar. So, on this Shabbas, when we bless the month of Adar Sheini, we will read Parshas Vayakheil and add the Maftir of Parshas Shekalim.

The Gemara explains the rationale for this practice. While the Beis HaMikdash was extant, they would announce the collection of the shekalim on the Rosh Chodesh Adar immediately preceding the month of Nissan. It states in the Gemara (Shekalim 2a): “באחד באדר משמיעין על השקלים”—**on the first of Adar, they would announce the collection of the shekalim.** In other words, Beis Din would announce publicly that each individual is obligated to donate a half-shekel to the fund used to purchase all of the communal offerings – “korbanos tzibbur”-- for the upcoming year. Thus, each individual would have a part in those korbanos.

This announcement was made on the first of Adar, because all of the communal offerings offered from Rosh Chodesh Nissan onward, had to be purchased from coins collected for the new year. For, it states in the Torah (Bamidbar 28, 14): “זאת עולת חודש—**This is the “olah” offering for the start of the new month, for the months of the year.** The Gemara states (Rosh HaShanah 7a): “אמרה תורה חדש והבא קרבן מתרומה חדשה”—**the Torah instructed us to renew the sacrificial service and to bring the offering from a new collection of funds.** Expounding a “gezeirah shavah,” the Gemara deduces that the renewal of the sacrificial service begins on the first of Nissan; from that day onward, all of the communal offerings must be purchased with new funds. The term “לחדשי השנה” appears

both here and with regards to the month of Nissan (Shemos 12, 2): “ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי השנה”. Therefore, the announcement regarding the collection of the shekalim was made on the first of Adar, thirty days in advance of Rosh Chodesh Nissan. For, we learn regarding the laws of Pesach (Pesachim 6a): “שואלין” “ודורשין בהלכות הפסח קודם הפסח שלשים יום”—we begin to examine the halachos pertaining to Pesach thirty days prior to Pesach.

Reading Parshas Shekalim Is an Example of: “ונשלמה פרים שפתינו”

Now, it is worthwhile recalling a principle brought down by the Mishnah Berurah (O.C. 685, 2) in the name of the famous “possek,” the author of the Levush (ibid. 1). By reading about the mitzvah of the “machatzis-hashekel” this Shabbas, we want it to be considered as if we actually fulfilled the mitzvah of the “machatzis-hashekel.” For it states (Hoshea 14, 3): “ונשלמה פרים—**and let our lips substitute for bulls.** Rashi explains: “**Let the bulls that we were supposed to offer before you be supplied by the acceptance of the words from our lips.**” In other words, rather than actually offering the specific korbanos, we are forced to rely on the mere acceptance of our recitation of the corresponding passages in the Torah.

Based on this notion, the Bnei Yissaschar (Adar, Maamar 2, Drush 6) explains the following Gemara (Megillah 13b): “גלוי” וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם, שעתיד המון לשקול שקלים על ישראל, לפיכך—**it was revealed and known to the Creator of the world, that Haman was destined to weigh out shekalim for the purpose of destroying the Jews; therefore, He caused the Jews to precede their shekalim to his shekalim. And thus we learned in a Mishnah: On the first of Adar, they (the Sanhedrin) announce the obligation to donate the shekalim.** Accordingly, the Bnei Yissaschar teaches us that the

Torah reading on Shabbas Shekalim served as a substitute for Yisrael for the actual donation of the “machatzis-hashekel.”

Therefore, it is only fitting that we examine the mitzvah of the “machatzis-hashekel” as it appears in Parshas Ki Sisa (Shemos 30, 12): **“כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקודיהם, ונתנו איש כופר נפשו לה; כל בפקוד אותם ולא יהיה בהם נגף בפקוד אותם, זה יתנו כל העובר על הפקודים מחצית השקל בשקל הקודש, עשרים גרה השקל מחצית השקל תרומה לה; כל העובר על הפקודים מבין עשרים שנה ומעלה יתן תרומת ה', העשיר לא ירבה והדל לא ימעיט ממחצית השקל לתת את תרומת ה' לכפר על נפשותיכם.”** **When you will take a census of Bnei Yisrael according to their counts, every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul when counting them, and there will be no plague among them when counting them. This is what they shall give—everyone who passes among the counted—half of the shekel, by the holy shekel, the shekel is twenty geirah, half of the shekel as a portion to Hashem. Everyone who passes among the counted, from the age of twenty years and up, shall give the portion of Hashem. The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease from half of the shekel—to give the portions of Hashem, to atone for your souls.**

At this point, it is worthwhile pointing out a difficulty raised by the Gemara (Megillah 29b). As explained, it was instituted that we read the passage pertaining to the mitzvah of the “machatzis-hashekel” on the Shabbas associated with Rosh Chodesh Adar to commemorate the “machatzis-hashekel” that each individual donated to the funds for the korbanos tzibbur. Now, in that passage in Parshas Ki Sisa, it only states that those coins were collected when taking a census of Yisrael: **“When you will take a census of Bnei Yisrael . . . This is what they shall give—everyone who passes among the counted—half of the shekel.**

The Gemara resolves the difficulty by noting that the term “תרומת ה'”—**“the portion of Hashem”**—appears three times in this passage: את, “לתת את”, “יתן תרומת ה'”, “לתת את”, “תרומת ה'”. One “terumah”—donation—was given when Moshe counted Yisrael, when they began collecting for the building of the Mishkan. Every individual donated one “machatzis-hashekel” to make the sockets—“adanim.” A second “terumah” of a “machatzis-hashekel” per individual was to purchase the animals and such for the korbanos tzibbur. The third “terumah” was the donation for the “bedek habayit”—the upkeep of the Mishkan; here every individual donated according to his heart's desire.

HKB”H Took the Semblance of a Fiery Coin from beneath the Kisei HaKavod

So, in honor of Shabbas Shekalim, it is worthwhile investigating several topics that deserve further explanation: (1) What prompted HKB”H to command Yisrael to donate precisely a half-shekel as each individual's portion of the communal offerings—no more and no less?

(2) Why did our blessed sages establish the reading of Parshas Shekalim on the Shabbas on which we bless the upcoming month of Adar, which actually precedes the first of Adar? Why not read the appropriate passage on the first of Adar itself, even if it falls on a weekday? After all, that is the day when they began announcing the collection of the shekalim, as we learned in the Mishnah: **“באחד באדר משמיעין על השקלים”**.

(3) We must endeavor to reconcile the precise language employed by the Mishnah: **“באחד באדר משמיעין על השקלים”**. It doesn't say that they announced the collection of the **“machatzis-hashekel”**—which is what each individual actually gave -- but rather the collection of the **“shekalim.”** Similarly, during Mussaf on Shabbas Shekalim, some communities recite the words of the divine poet: **“אור פניך עלינו אדון נשא, ושקל—אשר בבית נכון ונשא—the light of Your countenance did You shine upon us, O Master; and allow me to donate a shekel in the established and exalted Temple!** Once again, the commentaries question this declaration. After all, the mitzvah dictates the giving of a half-shekel and not an entire shekel.

(4) It is worthwhile scrutinizing Rashi's comment: **“This is what they should give”: He showed him a fiery coin weighing one half of a shekel and said to him, “Like this they should give.”** Rashi's source is the Midrash (S.R. 12, 3): **“Rabbi Meir said: HKB”H took the semblance of a fiery coin out from under the Kisei HaKavod and showed it to Moshe; this is what they should give, like this should they give.”**

Why did Moshe have difficulty comprehending the “machatzis-hashekel”? After all, HKB”H gave him precise details regarding its value: **“עשרים גרה השקל”-- the shekel is equivalent to twenty geirah.** Hence, a half shekel equals ten geirah. Furthermore, what is the significance of the fact that HKB”H took the coin of fire out from under the Kisei HaKavod? Are there coins of fire under the Kisei HaKavod?

The Six Weekdays Are a Preparation for Shabbas Kodesh

To explain all of these matter, we will begin by reviewing the opening pesukim of this week's parsha, Parshas Vayakheil (Shemos 35, 1): "ויקהל משה את כל עדת בני ישראל ויאמר אליהם, אלה הדברים אשר צוה ה' לעשות אותם, ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי יהיה לכם קודש שבת שבתון לה', כל העושה בו מלאכה יומת, לא תבערו אש בכל" -- Moshe assembled the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael and said to them: "These are the things that Hashem commanded to be done: 'On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death. You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day.'" The Ohr HaChaim hakadosh questions the language employed by the passuk: "אשר צוה ה'" -- "that Hashem commanded to be done. Shabbas observance does not involve doing; in fact, its focus involves abstaining from doing work.

It appears that we can reconcile this matter by introducing a valuable lesson from the teachings of the Noam Elimelech (beginning of Vayigash). He states that during the week, a Jew serves Hashem primarily out of fear and reverence; whereas on Shabbas Kodesh, a Jew serves Hashem out of love. Notwithstanding, even during the week, one must mention and recall the Shabbas day, in order to draw the element of Shabbas, service stemming from love ("ahavah"), into the weekday service characterized by fear ("yirah"). Here are his holy words:

"ונראה כי השבת הוא רק אהבה, והאדם צריך לקשר ימי החול בשבת כי ימי החול הם יראה, וכתבנו שהיראה צריכה להיות מתוך אהבה, ולכן מטעם זה אנו מונים ימי החול על ידי השבת, היום יום ראשון בשבת, וכן כל יום ויום, כדי לקשר השבת בימי החול, שגם בימי החול יהיה אהבה ויהיה יראה מתוך אהבה, וכשהיראה היא מתוך אהבה אזי גם ימי החול נקראים שבת, כי הם גם כן מדרגות אהבה, אבל אינם כמו השבת עצמו, כי השבת הוא רק אהבה לבד, אבל ימי החול הם יראה מחמת אהבה."

Shabbas is exclusively "ahavah" (love and adoration). Man must connect the weekdays with Shabbas, because they are characterized by "yirah"; we have explained that the "yirah" must emanate from love. Therefore, for this reason, we count the weekdays based on their relationship to the Shabbas— "today is the first day of the Shabbas," and so on and so forth for each day of the week, in order to connect the Shabbas with the weekdays. Thus, there will be

"ahavah" and "yirah" emanating from "ahavah" during the weekdays, as well. When the weekday service achieves this level, they, too, are called "Shabbas" to some degree. For, they are also characterized by a level of "ahavah," alBeis not to the same degree as Shabbas itself.

This fundamental idea is repeated in the writings of his pupil, the great Chozeh of Lublin, zy" a, in his sefer Divrei Emes (Yitro). He interprets the passuk (Shemos 34,21): "ששת ימים תעבוד וביום השביעי תשבות"—you shall work for six days and on the seventh day you shall rest—based on the formula recited at the conclusion of the Shabbas (in the berachah of Chonen HaDa'as): "אבינו מלכנו החל עלינו הימים הבאים לקראתנו: לשלום, חשוכים מכל חטא ומנוקים מכל עון ומדובקים ביראתך". We pray that our Father, our King, will allow us to begin the days of the upcoming week free of sin and imbued with "yirah"-- fear and reverence of the Almighty.

This clearly indicates that the service during the six weekdays is characterized by "yirah"; whereas the service on Shabbas is characterized by "ahavah." Thus, when the passuk states: "ששת ימים תעבוד"-- you shall work for six days—it is referring to work and service out of "yirah." After all, the term "תעבוד" connotes servitude, and a slave serves his master out of fear, as it is written (Malachi 1, 6): "ואם אדונים אני איה מוראי"— and if I am a Master, where is My fear? Nevertheless, as the continuation of the passuk indicates: "וביום השביעי תשבות"-- and on the seventh day you shall rest—on Shabbas, one should cease and rest from his service of "yirah" and advance to the level of service of Hashem out of "ahavah."

This allows us a very nice interpretation of the Gemara's statement (Shabbas 10b): "אמר לו הקב"ה למשה, מתנה טובה יש לי: "I have a special gift in my treasure-house and its name is Shabbas. This refers to the love HKB"H reveals to Yisrael on every Shabbas as a gift; they merit this gift as a reward for serving HKB"H out of "yirah" during the six weekdays. This is the implication of the HKB"H's statement: "I have a special gift in my treasure-house"—namely love of Hashem; "and its name is Shabbas"—because it does not entail laboring so hard to serve Hashem strictly out of "yirah."

We can add a pleasant tidbit with regards to the postscript: "ושבת שמה"-- and its name is Shabbas—based on a nice allusion presented by the Bnei Yissaschar (Shabbasos 1, 9) in

of complete rest for Hashem—we will be privileged to receive the gift of “ahavas Hashem” on Shabbas. To emphasize this point, the Torah admonishes us: “לא תבערו אש בכל מושבותיכם ביום השבת” —not to kindle the “fire” of “yirah” on Shabbas. Instead, do so during the six days of the work week; that is the appropriate time to serve Hashem with “yirah.” If you do that, you will merit receiving the attribute of “ahavah” from above on Shabbas.

We can suggest that this message is alluded to by the following passuk (Shemos 16, 5): “והיה ביום השישי והכינו את אשר יביאו” —**and it shall be that on the sixth day when they prepare what they will bring.** On the sixth day, one must arrange and prepare all of the service of Hashem that he performed out of “yirah” during the six weekdays. In that merit, the gift of “ahavas Hashem” will be bestowed upon him from above on Shabbas. This is alluded to by Chazal’s statement (A.Z. 3a): “מי שטרח בערב” —**whoever made an effort on erev Shabbas, will eat on Shabbas.**

I was delighted to find support for some of these ideas in the words of the Sefas Emes (Vaeschanan 5648):

“במצות ואהבת את ה' אלקיך מקשים החוקרים, איך שייך ציווי על אהבה, אבל באמת היא מתנה מן השמים, ועל ידי תורה ומצוות יכולין לעורר האהבה. והנה שבת נקראת מתנה טובה, כי השבת הוא בחינת אהבה, כמו שמבואר בספרים כי בימי המעשה עיקר ביראה ובשבת קודש באהבה עיין שם, ועל ידי היראה בימי המעשה זוכין בשבת קודש לאהבה, וכמו כן על ידי אהבה שבשבת, יש להוסיף היראה בימי המעשה, כענין שאמרו (תנא דבי אליהו רבא פרק ג) יראתי מתוך שמחתי, ושמחתי מתוך יראתי.”

Regarding the mitzvah of “loving Hashem, your G-d,” the investigators ask: How is it pertinent to command “ahavah”? For, in truth, it is a heavenly gift. By means of Torah and mitzvos, it is possible to elicit “ahavah.” Now, Shabbas is referred to as an exquisite gift, because Shabbas is associated with “ahavah.” As the sefarim explain, during the work week, “yirah” is of the essence; on Shabbas Kodesh, “ahavah” is of the essence . . . Through “yirah” during the work week, we merit “ahavah” on Shabbas Kodesh. Similarly, through the “ahavah” on Shabbas, it is possible to enhance the “yirah” during the work week—as they said (Tanna D’Bei Eliyahu Rabbah 3): “I revered through my joy and I rejoiced through my reverence.”

ש'בת קודש לה' Is an Abbreviation for שק"ל

Following this line of reasoning, let us endeavor to explain why HKB”H commanded us to donate a “machatzis-hashekel” for the korbanos tzibbur. Regarding the passuk in Parshas Ki

Sisa (Shemos 31, 15), the great Rabbi Gedaliah of Linitz, zy”a, writes in Teshuos Chen: ששת ימים יעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי שבת —the first letters of the words שבתון קודש לה' - ש'בתון קודש לה' ראשי תיבות שק"ל. (“shekel”). Similarly, the Imrei Noam writes (Vayakheil 1): שק"ל ראשי תיבות שבתון קודש —ש'בתון קודש לה'—**is an abbreviation for שק"ל--לה'.**

Following in their hallowed footsteps, we will proceed to explain why HKB”H commanded us to give a “machatzis-hashekel.” Thus HKB”H hinted to us that if we want to receive the gift of Shabbas—symbolized by the שק"ל, which is an abbreviation for שבתון קודש לה'—we must first supply our “machatzis-hashekel.” In other words, if we fulfill our half of the bargain by serving Hashem with “yirah” during the six weekdays, then Hashem will supply the second “machatzis-hashekel”—the exquisite gift of “ahavah”-- from above on Shabbas Kodesh.

Thus, it turns out that the service of Hashem characterized by “yirah” during the six weekdays represents the “machatzis-hashekel” that we, so to speak, give HKB”H from below. Correspondingly, the service of Hashem on Shabbas Kodesh characterized by “ahavah” represents the “machatzis-hashekel” that we receive from HKB”H in return from above. In this manner, the two half-shekels combine to form a whole שק"ל—the abbreviation for שבתון קודש לה'.

This coincides amazingly with what the esteemed author of the Chiddushei HaRim writes in Sefer HaZakut (Ki Sisa) and also appeared earlier in the writings of the Shela hakadosh (Ki Sisa) apropos the passuk: “כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל” (literally: “when you elevate the ראש”). They interpret this passuk as an allusion to Shabbas Kodesh. For, if you elevate each of the letters of the word ראש to the letter following it in the “aleph-Beis,” you obtain the letters שבת.

We can find an allusion to this phenomenon in the words of the divine poet Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, zy”a (Lecha Dodi, Kabbalas Shabbas): “לקראת שבת לנו ונלכה”—in anticipation of Shabbas, we should prepare and kindle the light of the Torah and the mitzvos during the six weekdays, so that they will shine on Shabbas; “כי היא מקור הברכה. מראש מקדם נסוכה” —**for Shabbas is the source of berachah,** and the kedushah of its illumination is determined by the quality of the preparation—the fire, intensity and enthusiasm demonstrated during the six weekdays preceding Shabbas.

Now, each weekday is comprised of twenty-four hours; so, the six weekdays combined contain one hundred and forty-four hours—the numerical equivalent of the word קד"ם. Hence, the Shabbas light is kindled by the flame that was already prepared and kindled: "מראש מקדם"-- during the preceding one hundred and forty-four hours of the six weekdays. Additionally: סוף "מעשה—the last element of creation, i.e. Shabbas—must be illuminated "במחשבה תחילה"—by preparation and forethought during the six weekdays.

Although the Fire Descends from the Heavens It Is a Mitzvah to Bring Ordinary Human Fire

We will now address the challenging question presented at the beginning of this essay: Why did HKB"H command each individual to donate a half-shekel to the funds designated for the purchase of communal offerings? We find the following elucidation in the Gemara (Yoma 53a) regarding the passuk (Vayikra 1, 7): "ונתנו בני אהרן הכהן אש על המזבח, אף על פי שהאש יורדת" "The sons of Aharon shall place a fire on the mizbeiach." They inferred from this passuk that even though the fire comes down from heaven, there is a mitzvah to bring fire from ordinary sources.

Based on our discussion, we can suggest that the heavenly fire alludes to the fire of "ahavah" that HKB"H provides from the heavens. In truth, however, in order for the heavenly fire to descend, it is necessary to first bring fire from ordinary, natural sources—representing service characterized by "yirah." This is the message conveyed by the elucidation in the Midrash (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2, 16): "סמכוני באשיות - בשתי אשות, באש של מעלה" "Sustain me with 'אשיות' (literally: "dainty items")." The Midrash expounds the term "באשיות" to mean "two types of fire"—fire from above and fire from below.

At this point, we can shed some light on the statement in the Midrash. It states that Moshe was perplexed by the concept of the "machatzis-hashekel." This implies that he could not understand why HKB"H commanded them to bring only a half-shekel instead of a whole shekel. Addressing this issue, Rabbi Meir says: "HKB"H took the semblance of a fiery coin out from under the Kisei HaKavod and showed it to Moshe; this is what they should give, like this should they give."

Let us explain. On Shabbas Kodesh, HKB"H sits on his Kisei HaKavod. We acknowledge this fact in the Shacharis prayers on Shabbas: "לא אל אשר שבת מכל המעשים, ביום השביעי נתעלה וישב על" "to the G-d Who rested from all activity, Who ascended on the seventh day and sat down on His Throne of Glory." This is what is meant when it states that HKB"H took out a fiery coin from beneath the Kisei HaKavod. This is a reference to the "machatzis-hashekel" that HKB"H provides from above on Shabbas Kodesh. Together with Yisrael's "machatzis-hashekel" below, they constitute a whole shekel. HKB"H showed this coin of fire to Moshe and said: "This is what they should give; like this should they give." In other words, first they must supply Him with their "machatzis-hashekel" below in the form of service characterized by "yirah" during the six weekdays. If they do so, HKB"H will complete the shekel, by providing the second "machatzis"—the attribute of "ahavah"-- on Shabbas Kodesh. As a result, the two half-shekels will combine to form a whole שבת קודש לה'—which is an abbreviation for 'שבת קודש לה'.

This is the message conveyed by Chazal with their statement: "באחד באדר משמיעין על השקלים"-- on the first of Adar, they would announce the collection of the shekalim. While it is true that we are only donating one half-shekel as our part of the process, the goal is to have HKB"H complete the process by supplying the missing half-shekel; so that we end up with a whole shekel. Thus, we will be able to serve Hashem with both "yirah" and "ahavah"—which act as two wings that elevate all of our Torah and mitzvos heavenwards.

We can now appreciate why our blessed sages instituted the reading of Parshas Shekalim specifically on Shabbas Kodesh. They wanted to teach us that HKB"H provides us with the second "machatzis-hashekel" from above on Shabbas Kodesh—in order to make a whole shekel. This then is the significance of the poet's words which we recite during Mussaf on Parshas Shekalim: "אור פניך עלינו אדון נשא" --we beseech HKB"H to shine the light of His countenance upon us imbuing us with "ahavas Hashem," which represents the "machatzis-hashekel" supplied by HKB"H from above; "ושקל אשא בבית נכון ונשא" -- and allow me to donate a shekel, so that we will be privileged to offer korbanos tzibbur in the third Beis HaMikdash-- in the established and exalted Temple—with the amazing combination of both ordinary fire from below and divine fire from above, swiftly, in our times. Amen.

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