

Fiery Coins

By Gabriel Dershowitz, Editor of Student Articles, 12th Grade

“This shall be given by everyone who passes through the counting, from twenty years old and up, a half shekel from the holy shekel coin, the shekel weighing twenty geirah, a half shekel as gift to Hashem.” (Shemos 30:13)

Parshas Ki Tisa opens with Hashem commanding Moshe to collect a half shekel, the Machazit Hashekel, from all adult males. These coins were to be accepted as a Teshuvah offering and later be melted down and shaped into sockets for the beams in the Mishkan. This seems like a pretty simple commandment for Moshe: collect silver coins from all Jewish males. But apparently, it wasn't so clear to Moshe. Rashi quotes a Medrash which says that Moshe was confused as to “what the coin should look like,” and Hashem responded by showing him an image of a fiery coin.

Now, this back and forth between Moshe and Hashem about the specifics of one of His commandments isn't new - it also occurred by the Menorah. But, it was obviously needed by the intricate design of the Menorah. Here, it seems to be a simple commandment. So, we're left with the following questions: firstly, why wasn't Moshe able to envision the coin on his own, and secondly, why did Hashem need to show him an image of the coin on fire; what's the significance of the fire?

Rabbi Zalman Sorotskin gives a fascinating answer to this question: Moshe wasn't curious as to the exact design of the required coins. As said before, it was obvious. Rather, Moshe was questioning the use of a coin itself to serve as atone-

(Continued on page 7)

A Double Edged Sword

By Moshe Crane, 12th Grade

In this week's Parsha, Hashem commands Moshe to relay the mitzvah of Machatzit HaShekel - the donation of a half Shekel coin to the Mishkan construction fund - to the Jewish people. Rashi comments that the design of the coin was shown to Moshe by Hashem. The Midrash further explains that the reason for Hashem's display of the design of the coin was due to Moshe's inability to visualize the design of the coin on his own. This type of problem has been seen before, as seen when Moshe was unable to construct the Menorah due to his inability to visualize the design. The question is simple: it is easy to see how Moshe would have trouble visualizing a complex structure like the Menorah, but how is it possible that Moshe cannot visualize something as simple as a coin?

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, the Lutzker Rebbe, gives an insightful answer. Rav Sorotzkin answers that Moshe's troubles in this instance didn't have to do with his inability to visualize the physical coin; Moshe's problems came from his inability to understand how money, a tool which is used for great evil, can be used for such a holy purpose. After all, as the old saying goes, “money is the root of all evil.” Therefore, when Rashi explains that Hashem “showed him the coin,” it means that Hashem explained that money is a double-edged

(Continued on page 7)

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Torah Teasers

By Rabbi Moshe Erlbaum, 9th Grade Rebbe

Parshas Ki Tisa Questions

1. Which two people appear in the Torah for the first time in this parsha?
2. In what context is the "the finger of God" (*Etzbah Elokim*) mentioned? Where else in the Torah is the "the finger of God" mentioned?
3. In this parsha, what is explicitly referred to as made of gold? Where in the Torah is the first time these items mentioned?
4. Aside from this parsha, where else in the Torah is a partial list of the 13 attributes of Hashem mentioned?
5. In this parsha, what item is destroyed in four different ways, and how?
6. In what connection does a *tzur* (rock) appear in this parsha?
7. Aside from a calf, what other animals appear in this parsha? (4 answers)
8. What descriptive term for the Jewish people (Bnei Yisrael) is used four times in this parsha?

Answers

1. Betzalel ben Uri, the artisan in charge of building the Tabernacle, and his assistant, Aholiav ben Achisamech, appear in this parsha for the first time (Exodus 31:2, 6).
2. The tablets of the Ten Commandments were written "with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18). In parshas Va'erah, the magicians of Egypt declare that the plague of lice displays "the finger of God" (Exodus 8:15).
3. The earrings donated to fashion the Golden Calf are referred to as "golden earrings" (Exodus 32:2-3). The Golden Calf itself is called a "molten calf" (Exodus 32:4). In parshas Chayei Sarah when Eliezer meets Rivka, he gives her earrings (Genesis 24:22).
4. In parshas Shelach, Moshe entreats Hashem through the 13 attributes to forgive the nation for believing the evil report of the spies (Numbers 14:18).
5. The Golden Calf is burned, finely ground up, scattered on water, and then drunk by the nation (Exodus 32:20).
6. Hashem agrees to show Moshe His glory, and directs him to stand on *ha'tzur* - "the rock" (Exodus 33:21-22).
7. Ox, sheep and donkey are all mentioned in reference to the law of redeeming a firstborn animal (Exodus 34:19-20). A kid is mentioned in reference to the prohibition of cooking together meat and milk (34:26).
8. Bnei Yisrael are called "a stiff-necked nation" in Exodus 32:9, 33:3, 33:5, and 34:9.

ALIYAH SUMMARY

First Aliyah: The Machatzis Hashekel that was used for the census, to buy the sockets for the beams of the Mishkan, and for the Korbanos Tzibur. The Kiyor - the wash basin that the Kohanim used for their hands and feet to become Tahor - was used before they served in the Mishkan and in the Mikdash. The instructions for making the Shemen Hamishcha - the anointing oil - and the Kitoresh - the incense - are listed. Betzalel is given wisdom and is appointed to be the chief architect of the Mishkan; Aholiyav will be his assistant. The Mitzvah to observe the Shabbos is given as a sign between Hashem and Bnei Yisroel.

Second Aliyah: Moshe goes up to Har Sinai for forty days and returns only to find the egel hazahav - the golden calf. Hashem tells Moshe on Har Sinai about the egel, and Moshe begs Hashem not to destroy Bnei Yisroel. Hashem agrees. Moshe descends the mountain and breaks the Luchos. Shevet Levi punishes the central figures in the story and 3,000 people are executed. Moshe goes back up to Har Sinai to again beg for Kaparah for Bnei Yisroel. Hashem agrees but there is another consequence: an angel, and not Hashem, will not lead them into Eretz Yisroel. Moshe removes his tent from inside the camp of Bnei Yisroel and he takes it outside of the camp.

Third Aliyah: Moshe asks Hashem to reconsider, and Hashem does, ultimately deciding that He will lead Bnei Yisroel into Eretz Yisroel.

Fourth Aliyah: Moshe asks to see Hashem's glory. Hashem agrees but tells Moshe that he will only be shown Hashem's back, so to speak, and not Hashem's face.

Fifth Aliyah: Moshe is told by Hashem that Moshe needs to carve new Luchos. Unlike the first Luchos where Hashem carved the stones, the second Luchos would be carved by Moshe. Moshe takes them to Har Sinai, and Hashem teaches Moshe the Yud Gimul Midos.

Sixth Aliyah: Hashem resigns the Bris with Moshe that Hashem had given before the Chait haegel. Hashem promises Moshe that Hashem's Shchina will only reside with Bnei Yisroel. Hashem also tells Bnei Yisroel that the Knaanim will be driven out of Eretz Yisroel, they are reminded to destroy Avoda Zara in Eretz Yisroel, and they are warned not to make any treaties with the nations living there. The prohibition of Avoda Zara is given. The Torah describes the Mitzvot of the Shalosh Regalim and the mitzvah to be Mikadesh male first born humans and first born cattle. The prohibition not to cook meat together with milk is given.

Seventh Aliyah: Moshe descends from the top of Har Sinai with the second Luchos and, without even realizing, rays of light radiate from his face. Aharon and the rest of Bnei Yisroel are afraid of Moshe now, and Moshe wears a veil except when teaching Torah to Bnei Yisroel or speaking to Hashem.

“To always have moist cake, eat it right away.”

- David Nisanov, DRS GO President



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Transcribed by
Joseph Cohen

Saying Mashiv Haruach 90 Times

Tur (Or Chaim 114) - if a person prayed a couple days after the onset of Mashiv Haruach Umorid Hageshem and he doesn't remember if he said it or not, you could assume that within 30 days of the onset of saying, that you did not remember, because you were used to not remembering. But from those 30 days and on, you can assume you said it and do not need to repeat Shemoneh Esrei. And the same is after Pesach with Morid Hatal. The Maharam from Guttenberg had the custom on Shemini Atzeret to sit down and say Mashiv Haruach... 90 times in order to create a regularity. Meaning, 30 days after Shemini Atzeret we assume you did not say Mashiv Haruach because it is not yet regular. But the Maharam, decided to say it 90 times corresponding to the 3 tefillos of all 30 days ($3 \times 30 = 90$), so that if he then forgot he would not have to repeat. However Rabbeinu Peretz says that drilling into your head 90 times does not create a sense of regularity, and that I have never seen anyone do like that custom.

Beis Yosef - the habit of regularity only comes when you say all of Shemoneh Esrei, i.e., the entire Shemoneh Esrei Prayer. But to repeat the second Bracha time and time again does not create a sense of regularity that you would not have to repeat Mashiv Haruach... And no matter how many times you drill it in your head in one night, it will never happen in one sitting. It must happen over time.

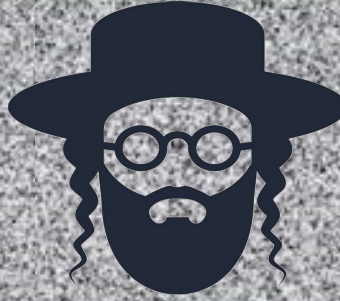
The Yerushalmi associates Mashiv Haruach... With V'tein Tal U'mater, but in actuality if it is really a din in saying it 90 times, the two are completely different because V'tein Tal U'Mater is not said on Shabbos. And if it were dependent upon the number of times you say Shemoneh Esrei it would not be equal across the board. And this entire concept of saying it 90 times is modeled after an opinion of Rebbe Meir from a sugya in Baba Kama, but in actuality we do not hold like Rebbe Meir, so this custom bears no weight in our lives today.

The Rama and Shulchan Aruch Pasken as follows: if you sit down and say it 90 times, then you are good, and do not need to question if you said it or not and do not need to repeat it.

The Biur Halacha agrees with Rabbeinu Peretz.

The Shla says this 90 times concept only works when you are trying to get in the habit of doing something. But if you are trying to not do something then it does not work. For example, if you are trying to remember to say Mashiv Haruach... so you say it 90 times to ensure a regularity. And this will work. But if after Pesach you sit down and say Shemoneh Esrei 90 times without Mashiv Haruach... this will not create a sense of regularity.

SPARKS OF CHASSIDUS



*With Jared
Mark*

As it is the foundation of our service to Hashem, there are many laws and commandments written throughout the Torah. They vary in many different ways and cover all aspects of our lives. On the surface, some make more sense while some don't really seem to make any sense at all. The commandments that seem to make no logical sense to us are called chokim. This week is the reading for Parshas Parah which includes the most famous example of a chok: the Parah Aduma- the red heifer. The purpose of this cow during the times of the Beis Hamikdash was to be used when a person became ritually impure due to contact with a dead body; this cow would be burned, mixed with some water and other ingredients, then sprinkled onto the person making them now pure. This cow must be completely red with not a single white hair in order for it to work. As you can tell, this is the paradigm example of a chok as on the surface there seems to be no real rhyme or reason behind it.

Although it seems that a commandment like this would be less significant than one like tzedakah or lashon harah where it makes sense and the reasons behind them are clear, this couldn't be further from the truth. The reason we do any mitzvah isn't because we think it's the right thing to do; rather, we do them only because Hashem told us to. So it makes no difference whatsoever whether there is a reason behind it or not, it's all from Hashem and all commandments must be treated with the same level of respect and observance.

If we take a look at the word chok it is actually very close in letters to the word chakkika- engraving. This can really show us the true essence of a chok. When words are engraved on something, it is an actual part of the item itself. However, when words are written on a paper it is simply a cover. A rule for which we don't see the reason is like engraving. This is because it is us directly doing what Hashem wants only because he wants it. However, a rule which we know the reason is more like a cover because we are covering Hashem's will in a logic.

I believe this can teach us a valuable life lesson. We may think that something is only good if we see the good in it, but really anything that happens is from Hashem and is therefore good for you no matter what. Even if you think there's no reason behind it, it's from Hashem and you should try to be just as happy with that. Hopefully, we can be back in Yerushalayim and eventually get the Parah Adumah as it was during the times of the Beis Hamikdash bembhaira beymaeinu.

Greater Than the Sum of Their Parts

By: Eitan Eckman, 11th Grade

Ki Tisah begins with Hashem telling Moshe that all Jewish men from ages 20 and up must pay a half-shekel in order to be counted (independent of wealth). A question on this piece of the Torah is, what is the significance of the Jews giving a half-shekel regardless of financial status? To answer, let's take a look at the Rambam who writes by the Laws of Teshuva that one who removes himself from the community is cut off from the world to come (Olam Haba). Now, that is a serious statement because of the severity of the punishment, so why does he say this? The Rambam says this because whenever Karet, or the cutting off from Gan Eden, is mentioned, it always talks about how the person is cut off from the Jewish people: exactly what's being done when one chooses not to participate in the counting of the nation.

Now that we understand the reason for giving the coin, one must wonder why it says specifically to bring a half-shekel, no more and no less, no matter their financial situation. Surely, after leaving Egypt there were many who were immensely wealthy and could afford to give more than just a measly half a coin?! On the flip side, there were likely many poor people who it would have hurt tremendously to give a half-shekel, so then why do we request a half a shekel? Well, the answer is quite simple: on a financial level a half a shekel is a very cheap coin and is probably the easiest thing that a person can give without the money being worthless. And the universal requirement signifies that no one is more important than the other and that everyone needs to give the coin for it to be worth something. The saying goes "the peak of the mountain is just as important as the rocks that form its base" and that perfectly describes this mitzva: everyone is equal and everyone needs to give the coin in order for it to be worth something as a whole. So too, we should realize as Jews that our small roles are important and necessary because just like the coin our actions look worthless without being put next to the collective.



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STORIES OF GREATNESS

TOLD OVER BY: YOSEF SCHAFLER

One year, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov said to Rabbi Ze'ev Kitzev, one of his senior disciples: "You will blow the shofar for us on Rosh Hashanah. I want you to study all the kavanot (Kabbalistic meditations) that pertain to the shofar, so that you should meditate upon them when you do the blowing."

Rabbi Ze'ev applied himself to the task with joy and trepidation: joy over the great privilege that had been accorded him, and trepidation over the immensity of the responsibility. He studied the Kabbalistic writings that discuss the multifaceted significance of the shofar and what its sounds achieve on the various levels of reality and in the various chambers of the soul. He also prepared a sheet of paper on which he noted the main points of each kavanah, so that he could refer to them when he blew the shofar.

Finally, the great moment arrived. It was the morning of Rosh Hashanah, and Rabbi Ze'ev stood on the reading platform in the center of the Baal Shem Tov's synagogue amidst the Torah scrolls, surrounded by a sea of tallit-draped bodies. At his table in the southeast corner of the room stood his master, the Baal Shem Tov, his face aflame. An awed silence filled the room in anticipation of the climax of the day—the piercing blasts and sobs of the shofar.

Rabbi Ze'ev reached into his pocket, and his heart froze: the paper had disappeared! He distinctly remembered placing it there that morning, but now it was gone. Furiously, he searched his memory for what he had learned, but his distress over the lost notes seemed to have incapacitated his brain: his mind was a total blank. Tears of frustration filled his eyes. He had disappointed his master, who had entrusted him with this most sacred task. Now he must blow the shofar like a simple horn, without any kavanot. With a despairing heart, Rabbi Ze'ev blew the litany of sounds required by law and, avoiding his master's eye, resumed his place.

At the conclusion of the day's prayers, the Baal Shem Tov made his way to the corner where Rabbi Ze'ev sat sobbing under his tallit. "Gut Yom Tov, Reb Ze'ev!" he called. "That was the most extraordinary shofar-blowing we heard today!"

"But Rebbe . . . I . . ."

"In the king's palace," the Baal Shem Tov interrupted, "there are many gates and doors, leading to many halls and chambers. The palace-keepers have great rings holding many keys, each of which opens a different door. But there is one key that fits all the locks, a master key that opens all the doors.

"The kavanot are keys, each unlocking another door in our souls, each accessing another chamber in the supernal worlds. But there is one key that unlocks all doors, that opens up for us the innermost chambers of the divine palace. That master key is a broken heart."

(Gabriel Dershowitz- Continued from page 1)

ment for the Jewish people's sins. There's a common saying: "Money is the root of all evil." And that's at least partially true. How many people let the lure of wealth negatively affect their decisions? How many people are willing to sin just so they can make a few more dollars? To many, money represents the ultimate goal in life; disregarding the fact that our purpose in this world is to get closer to Hashem. In short, money is often associated with negative traits such as greed and jealousy. So, Moshe inquired, how could something that foments so much evil possibly bring the Jews closer to Hashem?

Hashem answered Moshe by showing him a coin made of fire. Fire, like money, can be used for tremendous good or great evil. While it has caused innumerable deaths and damage, it also allows humans to survive in the cold days of winter. Likewise, money is a double-edged sword. As discussed above, money can elicit negative actions in otherwise good, well-intentioned people. But like most things, with the right intention money can be elevated to the status of cheftsa shel mitzvah - an item used for a mitzvah. Without money, shuls, yeshivas, and Torah study wouldn't exist on the scale that they do today. Without money, not all Jews would have an equal opportunity to learn and get closer to Hashem. By the Machazit Hashekel, the money was being used l'shem shamayim, causing something that usually has negative connotations to be a proper way of atoning for sins.

The episode of the Machazit Hashekel serves to remind of the innumerable good that money can provide, yet also offer a stark warning of the pitfalls associated with desiring it too much. May we all strive to use money only for good and to get closer to Hashem!

(Moshe Crane- Continued from page 1)

sword: even though money has the ability to be used in nefarious ways, such as corruption or breeding jealousy, it also has the ability to be used in immensely productive ways, like for tzedaka or Machazit HaShekel. Therefore, money was an appropriate way to fund the construction of the Mishkan.

This lesson is further seen through last week's Yom Tov, Purim. When Haman was trying to persuade Achashveirosh to allow his policy of killing all the Jews to go through, he offered a bribe of 10,000 silver Shekalim, which is the most evil use of money possible. The Gemara says that because Hashem knew that Haman would use money to try to get his way, Hashem countered Haman's malevolence by commanding that we give three half-Shekel coins on Purim; in other words, even though money can be used to pursue the greatest evil, it can also be used to pursue the greatest good.

The lesson here is obvious: many things have the ability to be dual-purpose, for both good and bad, both physically and religiously. In spite of the temptation to use our abilities and objects for bad purposes, we need to overcome that temptation and try to use it for good, for then maybe we may have the privilege of donating some more money to the construction of a new House for Hashem.

Good Shabbos!

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11th Grade

Effort is the Key

There is a pasuk at the end of the Parsha that says, "So Moshe came down from Har Sinai. And as Moshe came down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, Moshe was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant, since he had spoken with Him. Aaron and all the Israelites saw that the skin of Moshe's face was radiant; and they shrank from coming near him."(34:29)

After Moshe came down from Har Sinai with the second set of luchos, the Torah mentions that something had changed about Moshe's appearance in that his face was now glowing. Following his second meeting with Hashem, Moshe was on a higher level of kedusha than he had been before. The Maylitz Yosher asks why did Moshe's face shine only after he received the second set of Luchos, it should have started to shine by the first Luchos? Wouldn't the Luchos that were given by Hashem bring Moshe to a higher level of kedusha that the ones written by himself?

He answers that the reason why Moshe's face started to shine only after he received the second Luchos was because Moshe himself put in the effort. By the first Luchos, Moshe wasn't involved in the crafting and the writing of them, because that was all done by Hashem. But the second luchos Moshe did all the work. He spent forty days and forty nights crafting, writing, and understanding the Luchos and that's why his face started to shine.

This can be used as a lesson for us. In life we will never get anywhere if we are always waiting for someone else to do something for us while we sit on the side. It is said in the fifth perek of pirkei avos, "L'fum Tzara Agra", meaning the more effort we put in the more reward we receive. We must put in the effort whether it's in our davening or learning or even our daily activities and through that effort we can become better people. Have a great Shabbos!

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