

PORTION OF *KI SISA*

The Half a Shekel

“This shall they give – everyone who passes through the census – a half of the sacred shekel” (*Sh'mos* 30:13)

Connecting to what's already there

In the time of the Holy Temple, each person had to donate a *machatzis hashekel*. And everyone is asking, why only half?

Imagine I would have to create light. It would be a very heavy thing, but if the light is there and all I have to do is to connect it, it means I only have to do half of it. Something is already there, all I have to do is to plug it in.

Now listen to the deepest depths. Haman came to Achashverosh and said, “I’m giving you 10,000 shekels to wipe out the Jews.” The *Medrash* says that G-d says to the *Yidden*, “You give half a shekel and I’ll wipe out all the shekels of Haman.” You know what that means? Evil comes to you and says, “You can’t bring any light into the world with half a shekel. You have to create the whole thing on your own, which is not simple at all. Don’t kid yourself, you won’t make it in your lifetime.” So here I come and I say, “The world is filled with light. All I have to do is to connect to it, it’s right here.”

I want you to know, it’s also so true between people. If I have to create love and the other person has to create love, it’s very heavy, we will never make it. The world filled us with love. All you need is this half a shekel, this little connection, this little bit of plugging in.

Do you know what happened to us on Purim? *LaYehudim hayesa orah v'simcha v'sason Veyikar*. (*Esther* 8:16. On Purim we realized the whole world is filled with light. Every little good thing you are doing connects you to the highest light there is. Some people think I have to work like a dog and cut myself into pieces for two thousand years until I smell or feel a little bit of light. The light is right here, you just have to connect.

Holy Brokenness

G-d is everywhere. Sometimes it looks like He's nowhere. When you really understand something, it's clear to you that you don't understand it at all. When are you really close to somebody? When you realize how far you still are. When you love somebody very much, your heart is so full and yet it's so heart-breaking. When you are really happy, when you are smiling, you have tears in your eyes. And if you are really crying, you are also laughing in the inside. When you love your children, your heart grows so large, but in the same moment it is also heart-breaking. When you stand by the Holy Wall, your heart becomes whole and also begins to crack open.

Take a husband and wife who really love each other. They make each other whole and they break each other's hearts. Not in a sad way, but in a deep way.

You know why the Holy Temple was destroyed? Because the Holy Temple only made us whole, it stopped breaking our hearts. There was no other way. So G-d says, "If your heart is not broken with joy, I'm sorry, I'll have to break it with something else."

You know why we Jewish people count after the moon? The sun is beautiful, but the sun is always whole. The real light is the moon. The moon's light is full and also broken.

The Talmud, the book of all books, begins with page two. Page one is a blank piece of paper. It's a broken page. Nothing is written on it. When you learn with the deepest depths of your heart and soul, you kiss the blank paper.

You see, the world wants peace that makes them whole. They don't want that kind of peace that breaks each other's hearts.

So once a year there was a collection for the sacrifices of the Holy Temple. Everybody was giving a half a shekel, a broken shekel. And this is how we kept the Holy Temple going. You know what we are telling each other? It breaks my heart to be a Jew.

It breaks my heart to be able to buy something for the Holy Temple.

Golden Calf

Do I Believe in G-d?

I want you to know the depths of life. The Golden Calf was not so simple, not that I am telling you stories to justify, I am just telling you what happened.

Before Moshe Rabbeinu went up to Mount Sinai, he told the Jewish people, "I'll be back on the fortieth day." Everyone knows we got confused with the timing. We didn't know if it's exactly forty days besides this day of giving the Torah or is this day included in the counting.

Now listen to this. The first day the Brooklyn Bridge was built, thousands of people wanted to see the bridge so everyone started going onto it. Suddenly one person starts yelling that the bridge is falling in. Only one person yelled and people started jumping off the bridge. Twelve people were killed and many were injured, and it was all because one person had yelled. [Fact check: The bridge opened on May 24, 1883, but the incident happened six days later, on May 30th. According to the New York Times, "a woman tripped on the bridge and screamed. Other pedestrians, terrified that something was wrong with the bridge, stampeded." 12 people were indeed killed, and 35 were injured.] So you see what it is, everyone was waiting for Moshe to come down and keep his promise, and he wasn't coming down. One person got up and said, "He will never come back because he went up to heaven and that's it."

You also have to realize that a lot of people came out with us from Egypt who weren't part of our nation. When Moshe Rabbeinu proclaimed freedom to the world, any slave in Egypt who had a sense that they wanted to be free walked out with us, but they weren't really ready for it yet. They might have not wanted to be a slave, but not wanting to be a slave doesn't mean you are ready for freedom, it takes a lot more than that. Once they saw Moshe wasn't coming down, these people started saying, "We have different ways, if this doesn't work we'll just go back to our idols."

The question is why did G-d test them like this? Why didn't G-d make the timing clearer?

Here I want to share with you the deepest depths. Do we believe in G-d because it works? Are we believers because someone who is a representative of G-d is keeping his promise? If this is where I'm at, I'm not on the road yet. With all due holiness and respect to Moshe Rabbeinu, is my link to G-d as a human being off once I see that he is not coming down from the mountain?

You see what it is, whoever says their religion works is simply involved in pagan worship. A religion that works is paganism; it means that I am utilizing G-d in my religion to do something with it.

Our religion doesn't work, maybe it does, maybe it doesn't.

My worship doesn't depend on whether it works or not. My serving G-d has nothing to do with whether I'm going to hell or heaven. If I would hear a voice from heaven that all pagans are going to heaven and all Jews are going to hell, I would still be a Jew.

Ultimately the Golden Calf is all about me needing something that works. If I need something of G-d that works, then G-d becomes the Golden Calf. Don't kid yourselves, friends, it doesn't last.

And here I want you to open your hearts. When I pray and G-d answers, there is a little sense of pagan worship there. The test is if you pray to G-d and He doesn't answer. When did Moshe Rabbeinu teach us about prayer? Moshe Rabbeinu prayed to G-d many times to go into the Holy Land; it was one of the most powerful big prayers any man has ever prayed. And G-d says no. When Moshe Rabbeinu teaches *Yiddelach* how to pray, he says, "Look at me. I was praying to enter the holy land and G-d didn't answer, but even after G-d said that I won't go in, I still kept praying."

You have to pray. If G-d doesn't answer, it's between G-d and G-d. Moshe Rabbeinu is the one who teaches us that praying has nothing to do with being answered. The pagans of the world will always come and try to disprove the oneness of G-d by showing that it simply doesn't work.

The holy Rizhiner says something unbelievable. The holy Rizhiner says that before *Mashiach* is coming, the whole world will be pagans, but there will still be some people who will not be worship idols. Then, finally, the whole world will meet somewhere, they will bring fire down from heaven, but [we] *Yiddelach* won't, do you know why? Because the ultimate test is: are you worshipping G-d because it works, or are you really worshipping G-d because you know there is one G-d? This means that there is nothing in the world that can take away my belief in G-d.

To believe in G-d means that I don't see anything and I have nothing to hold onto, nothing.

So therefore, on Succos, we say, "*Hosha Na Shalosh Shaot Hosha Na,*" please, G-d, help me for three hours. The Rizhiner says that everyone has to go through three hours. I don't know how long those three hours are, but this ultimate test when even G-d doesn't work and everything is falling apart... everyone has to go through these three hours. The Rizhiner says that during those three hours it will be so hard to believe in G-d, it will literally be like walking up a wall. How can you walk up a wall? There is nothing to hold onto; that's how hard it will be.

This was one of the last things the Rizhiner said before he passed away. So someone asked him, "Why are you telling us all this?"

So the Rizhiner said, "I want you to tell your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren... please tell them I said so. Tell them to please hold onto each other."

How do you walk up a wall? You have to stand one person on top of the other, you have to get together because you can't climb it alone.