

# The Path To Follow

**Ki-Tisa**

**379**

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**Rabbi David Pinto Shlita**

## The Other Side Of A Coin

**I**t is written, "This they shall give – everyone who passes through the census – a half-*shekel* of the sacred *shekel*, the *shekel* is twenty *geras*, half a *shekel* as a portion to Hashem" (*Shemot* 30:13). Our Sages have said, "The Holy One, blessed be He, took what resembled a coin of fire from beneath the Throne of Glory and showed Moshe: 'This they shall give,' meaning they shall give a coin that resembles this one" (*Bamidbar Rabba* 12:3). This is surprising, for why did Hashem have to show Moshe a *shekel*? Did he not know what a *shekel* looked like, such that he had to be shown one? Furthermore, where do we find that the Holy One, blessed be He, hid a *shekel* under the Throne of Glory?

### The Atonement Money

When we reflect upon the nature of these *shekalim*, we realize that they were primarily meant to procure atonement for the Jewish people because they had sinned through the golden calf, as we read further on: "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a *shekel*, when they give an offering to Hashem to atone for your souls" (*Shemot* 30:15). The Torah is teaching us that these *shekalim* were offered for the maintenance of the Sanctuary and the service of the Tent of Meeting. They also procured atonement for the sin of the golden calf, as we read in the verse that follows: "You shall take the atonement money of the Children of Israel, and you shall appoint it for the service of the Tent of Meeting; and it shall be a memorial to the Children of Israel before Hashem, to atone for your souls" (v.16). This is what Rashi explains here: From the fact that the Children of Israel gave the half-*shekel* to maintain the Sanctuary, where the *Shechinah* dwelled, Hashem would forgive the sin of the golden calf.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: If the rich give according to their means and the poor give according to their means, then I will have provoked jealousy among them. This money will no longer bring atonement, since it will arouse jealousy! In that case, how will "to atone for their souls" be fulfilled, and when will the sin of the golden calf be forgiven?

This is why Hashem commanded both rich and poor to give but half a *shekel*, in order for a *shekel* to be complete only when both rich and poor person give half. In this way, the offering of one would complete the offering of another.

Just as Yom Kippur does not procure atonement unless everyone is united – as it is written: "For sins between man and his fellowman, Yom Kippur does not procure atonement until he has pacified his fellowman" (*Yoma* 85b) – likewise these *shekalim* did not procure atonement unless everyone was united. When people ask one another for forgiveness, unity immediately reigns among them and the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives all their sins. The Sanctuary and sacrifices could only exist and procure atonement if they stemmed from offerings that the Children of Israel brought in unity.

Furthermore, because each Jew gave a half-*shekel* for the maintenance of the Sanctuary and the offerings, they brought about the presence of the *Shechinah* in the Sanctuary, and Scripture accounted it to them as if they had become partners in Hashem's unity. Since they were united and the *Shechinah* only dwells where there is unity, and because they maintained the Sanctuary in unity, this permitted Hashem to make His *Shechinah* dwell among them.

This may be why the Torah states, "A half-*shekel* of the sacred *shekel*, the *shekel* is twenty *geras*." When two people each bring a half-*shekel*, it makes a complete *shekel*. This is also the explanation of, "This they shall give – everyone who passes through the census – a half-*shekel* of the sacred *shekel*." In other words, from the fact that everyone included in the census would give a half-*shekel*, with the rich giving a half-*shekel* and the poor giving a half-*shekel*, the complete *shekel* of the Sanctuary would come from both of them.

This sanctity has two aspects: One is the unity of the Jewish people, and the second is the presence of the holy *Shechinah* in the Sanctuary that was built with the offerings of the Children of Israel.

### Who Can Redeem His Own Soul?

This is what appeared difficult to Moshe. He was surprised that a half-*shekel* could atone for a Jewish soul. In fact the Sages state (*Tanchuma, Tisa* 10) that when G-d said, "Every man shall give a ransom for his soul" (*Shemot* 30:12), Moshe was surprised and asked who could redeem his own soul, since it is written: "Too costly is their soul's redemption and unattainable forever" (*Tehillim* 49:9). Hashem answered him, "It is not what you think. Rather, they shall give something like this." This is still surprising, for what was G-d telling Moshe, given that this was precisely what he was wondering about!

Hashem said to Moshe, "I will show you a coin of fire that I am taking from beneath the Throne of Glory." According to what our Sages have said, judgment is suspended by *tzeddakah* beneath the Throne of Glory, as it is written: "Thus said Hashem: Observe justice and perform *tzeddakah*" (*Isaiah* 56:1). He said to him, "When Jews give *tzeddakah*, I forgive them and they are exempt from punishment." All the power of *tzeddakah* lies in unity, with one person doing good for the other. The fact that the Children of Israel give *tzeddakah* all in the same way – the rich not giving more and the poor not giving less – will produce unity.

The Holy One, blessed be He, found nothing better than money to demonstrate unity and love, for the term *kessef* ("money") comes from the same root as *kissufim* ("yearning"). We find this yearning in regards to a love for Hashem: "My soul yearns [*nichsepha*], indeed it pines" (*Tehillim* 84:3). This is why Hashem wanted everyone to give a half-*shekel*, the term *shekel* evoking *shakul* (weighed). In other words, because both rich and poor are weighed in the same balance, love reigns among them and they can achieve a love for G-d. The Jewish people can then reach the level of *kessef* (money) – meaning *kissufim* (yearning) – for the *Shechinah* because they will possess love for both their fellowman and G-d, and they will be immediately forgiven.

What coin did Hashem show Moshe? It was a coin of fire, in order to show him that *tzeddakah* must resemble fire. When the Jewish people give *tzeddakah* for the Sanctuary and there is no jealousy among them, they become partners in His unity and their love for one another resembles a great flame.

Love is compared to fire, as stated in regards to a love for G-d: "Love is strong as death...its flashes are flashes of fire, the flame of G-d" (*Shir HaShirim* 8:6). He said to Moshe, "These *shekalim* will not procure atonement unless love reigns among you like a fire, for love among people leads to love for G-d by fostering unity."

### Why Did the Chatam Sofer Win His Court Case?

It is written, “You will see My back, but My face may not be seen” (*Shemot* 33:23).

The meaning and purpose of many things that happen in life often seems strange, astounding, and incomprehensible. It is only later on, in hindsight, that things become clear and a person can “understand” why events, which seemed so strange at the time, occurred to him.

Happy are those with faith. Happy is the person who, although he does not know the reasons for the events that take place in life, nevertheless knows and believes that everything has a reason and a purpose. This is also the plain meaning of the verse in this week’s *parsha*, as explained by Rabbi Moshe Sofer *Zatzal*, the Chatam Sofer: “You will see My back, but My face may not be seen.” “You will see My back” – only after the fact, once everything is done, can a person “see” in hindsight and understand what things mean. The holy Torah stresses, however, that “My face may not be seen,” meaning that as events are occurring, we cannot understand their reason or purpose.

This is the goal of man’s freewill, as well as the great reward that awaits him if he chooses to do good.

Regarding this subject, the book *HaChut HaMeshulash* recounts an amazing incident that occurred to the Chatam Sofer.

It was the year 5569, and a war had broken out between France and Austria. The city of Pressburg, where the Chatam Sofer was living at the time, was under siege.

A certain number of Jews in the city risked their lives by purchasing weapons from local peasants who had gathered them from the battlefield. These Jews, who were under French rule, sent these weapons to the Austrian emperor, who purchased them for a good price.

As these Jews were discussing how to share the money they made by the sale, a dispute arose among them. In fact their dispute eventually reached a rabbinical court, namely the Beit Din of Pressburg, which ruled in favor of one party. The happy winner then addressed the local civil court in order to give this decision legal weight.

When the local court heard the case, they realized that a serious criminal act had been committed. They immediately denounced the parties involved to the French authorities who governed the city.

A French military court accused the Rav of Pressburg of being responsible for selling weapons to the enemy without notifying the authorities. This accusation was made simply because the rabbinical court, headed by the Rav of Pressburg, had heard the financial case.

Since he served as the Rav of Pressburg, the Chatam Sofer was accused of spying for and aiding the enemy in time of war. He was therefore summoned to appear before a military court.

Great fear fell upon the entire Jewish community of Pressburg. The Chatam Sofer himself wanted to leave the city, but the leaders of the community believed that he should present himself in court, and they had faith that Hashem would help them save their revered Rav without any harm coming to him. Throughout the city, large sums were collected for the Rav’s defense.

When it came time for the trial, the Chatam Sofer presented himself

before the French military court. As soon as he entered the courtroom, he became filled with tremendous fear, for the appearance of the military judges shook him. Seated in a semi-circle and attired in a military uniform, each judge had a stern look on his face and a drawn sword by his side.

The head judge, a French general, immediately tried to ease the fears of the Chatam Sofer, gently explaining to him that he had nothing to worry about. The drawn swords were part of a military tradition meant to arouse fear in the accused.

The head judge then asked the other judges to place their swords back in the sheaths, and they waited a little for the Rav to clam down. The trial then began.

The case was centered on the testimony of the Chatam Sofer. His explanation on why the *dayanim* were innocent was extremely well-presented, and in the end the Chatam Sofer was found innocent on all charges and allowed to go.

At the end of the trial, the head French judge took the Chatam Sofer aside into a small room, and they spoke for a long time alone, something that was very unusual.

Years later, the Rav recounted what happened:

“I studied in Mayence during my youth, when I lived with a wealthy man who saw to all my needs. When Napoleon’s army conquered the city, some of his soldiers lived in the home of that man.

“One of these soldiers, a brilliant young officer, took a liking to me and promised to teach me what was necessary for my education. In exchange, he asked that I help him during his stay in the wealthy man’s home. That is what I did, for I served him during all the time that he stayed there, doing everything he asked.

“With time, this officer rose through the ranks and became a general. In fact he was the head judge in the case against me.

“When I entered the courtroom, that French general immediately recognized me as the young man he had taken a liking to when he was in Mayence. He therefore made sure that I would be found innocent. He later identified himself to me with joy, and we spoke together after the trial.”

The Rav used this story to explain Hashem’s words to Moshe, who had asked: “Show me, please, Your glory” (*Shemot* 33:18). Hashem replied, “You will see My back, but My face may not be seen.” It is only with time that we can understand what Hashem has done and why, for Hashem has already prepared salvation and deliverance for the Jewish people in advance.

## Guarde Your Tongue

### An Evil Group

It is written in *Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* that Rabbi Eliezer the great commanded his son the following things:

“My son, do not sit among those who speak ill of others, for when their words ascend to Heaven, they will be recorded in a book, and everyone in their company will be recorded as part of this evil group and habitual speakers of *Lashon Harah*.”

A person must therefore distance himself as much as possible from such an evil group.

– Chafetz Chaim

## Rabbi Yehoshiyahu Pinto – The Rif

In the Jewish community of Constantinople, there lived an extremely poor Jew. To earn a living, he would buy and sell old utensils, worn clothing, and other worthless things. He offered his merchandise to everyone for just pennies, and he would go from house to house buying and selling to Jews and non-Jews alike. In this way he was able to feed his family, albeit with great difficulty.

One day a business opportunity presented itself to him, after which he was able to purchase a large quantity of old clothes and worn utensils. It took him hours just to sort through this vast inventory. He made a pile of copper utensils, another pile of iron utensils, and a third pile of clothes. As the poor man was busy sorting, he found a small copper figurine that had served as an idol for its previous owners. Without saying anything, he took the figurine, placed it in the pile of copper utensils, and continued sorting through his inventory.

As he was sorting, he suddenly heard an unknown voice that was calling to him: "Jew, Jew...why are you ignoring me?" The strange voice filled his heart with dread. He looked around to see who was calling him and where this strange voice was coming from, but he could not find its source. A shiver went through his body, for at that point he was alone in his house and the mystery was only deepening. Where could this strange voice be coming from? A few moments later, he heard the voice once again: "Jew, Jew...why have you placed me on the floor in such a shameful way? Have pity on me. Lift me up out of compassion."

To his great surprise, he still could not determine where the voice was coming from, and so he continued sorting through his inventory. At that point, the voice made itself heard for a third time, but stronger and accompanied by weeping and screaming: "Have pity on me and do not destroy me! I will reward you for it. You won't regret saving me!"

He looked around carefully and discovered that the voice was coming from the pile of copper utensils. He rummaged through it and found the small figurine that he had thrown there earlier. As he was holding the figurine, it continued to implore him not to destroy it, asking him to rescue it from there and to place it in a respectable place. "If you place me on that chair," it told him, "you will earn twice as much today as normal."

The rag-dealer allowed himself to be convinced by the figurine, for he saw no harm in doing what it asked. He placed it on the chair and then proceeded to go and sell his merchandise at the market, as he usually did. As it turned out, the words of the figurine came true on that day: He made a great deal of money, attributing it to the fact that he had agreed to the figurine's request. On the following day, the figurine again asked the poor man for something, namely to clean it of the dust and dirt that covered it. "If you do that," it promised him, "You will earn twice as much today as yesterday." The success he had experienced on the previous day was still on his mind, and so he did what the figurine asked.

When he went to sell his merchandise, luck smiled on him once again. He sold twice as much as on the previous day, exactly as the figurine had promised him.

On the third day, the figurine asked him to place it in a special chest within his home, promising him once again that his reward would be great. Thus the merchant, who could no longer be described as poor, allowed himself to be seduced each day by the figurine's promises. In return for doing what it asked of him, he became extremely wealthy in a supernatural way.

The more that he did what the figurine asked of him, the richer he became with each passing day, and everyone who saw him was astonished by his wealth. He was blinded by the abundance of money that poured from his pocket in such a strange way, not realizing just to what point things had become so serious. A short time later, he built a special room for the figurine, and in the middle of the room he placed a pedestal in which a flame was constantly burning. In gratitude

for his wealth, he built a yeshiva in his home where ten *talmidei chachamim*, whom he supported financially, would study every day. At the end of each day, they would sit down to eat at his table, and he would also give them a good amount of money to return home with.

The man also gave large sums to synagogues and Torah institutions, as well as a great deal of money to the poor and unfortunate, a large number of whom ate at his home. It reached the point that everyone in town respected him enormously.

One day the *tzaddik* and kabbalist Rabbi Yehoshiyahu Pinto (the Rif) came to the city looking for the idol in order to destroy it. He had heard that an extremely wealthy Jew lived in Constantinople, and that his home served as a meeting place for Torah scholars. He also heard that this wealthy Jew gave a great deal of money to charitable causes. The Rif arrived at his home and realized that what he heard was true. The wealthy man warmly welcomed him, invited him to study with him, and offered him a lavish meal at the end of the day.

As the Rif looked at the man's face during the meal, something bothered him. It is said, "A man's wisdom lights up his face" (*Kohelet* 8:1), but the look on the man's face showed that he was completely ignorant. How could he have therefore attained all this wealth? The Rif asked this question to the Torah scholars who were in his home, and they told him that the man had previously been a rag-dealer. They said that he had suddenly become very rich, but nobody knew how.

At the end of the meal, the Rif went into another room and called his host. He began by complimenting him on his hospitably, but then he said: "Tell me how you acquired such great wealth. How did you go from being a poor rag-dealer to someone who is incredibly rich in such a supernatural way? This is certainly concealing something, so tell me what happened."

The Rif continued speaking to the wealthy man, explaining very clearly that he had to tell him the entire truth. He spoke to him with the firmness of sanctity. When the man began to fear for his future, he revealed his terrible secret to the *tzaddik*. When the Rav heard it, he said to his host: "Are you still the same kosher Jew that you were before you became rich? Do you still believe in the Creator of the universe and in His holy Torah with complete faith?"

"Of course I do," replied the man. "I'm a Jew and I believe in the Creator of the universe with all my heart and all my soul. I recite *Shema Israel* every day, and I love the *talmidei chachamim*, just as my deeds prove."

"And if you were offered wealth in exchange for practicing idolatry, would you worship an idol?" the Rif asked him. The man was stunned by the question: "Definitely not! Even if I were offered all the money in the world, I would never do such a thing!" The Rav then asked, "If so, then show me this figurine that brought you all this wealth."

Soon afterwards, they entered the room where the figurine was placed, and there the Rav saw the pedestal.

The *tzaddik* Rabbi Yehoshiyahu Pinto revealed to his host that his great wealth stemmed from the forces of impurity. At that point they agreed that the Rav would extirpate this force of impurity from the world.

The Rav therefore took the figurine from out of its chest and forcefully threw it to the ground. He then asked for a hammer and struck it numerous times. The figurine wept bitterly, until the Rav smashed it completely, reduced it to dust, and threw it into the sea.

When the Rav had completely extirpated this idol from the world, he turned to the wealthy man and said to him: "Know that every one of the numerous *mitzvot* you

*Continuation Page 2*



fulfilled were done with money that came from the idol, money that was forbidden to benefit from. However you did it through error, not deliberately, and Hashem will certainly not deprive you of your reward because of the past. Nevertheless, know that if you do not want to lose your merits, you must completely destroy all the possessions that you acquired through the power of idolatry. When you have burned all of these possessions, Hashem will help and support you in a permitted, not a forbidden way. He will enable you to attain all that you need, for He knows that everything you did was out of a love and fear of Heaven. He knows that you wanted to perform *mitzvot* with great love."

The heart of the wealthy man was torn by what the Rif had revealed to him,

## At The Source

### Half a Body

It is written, "A half-shekel of the sacred shekel" (*Shemot* 30:13).

Why did Hashem decree the giving of half a coin?

The Chida cites Rabbi Alkabetz in explaining that this teaches us the importance of unity among the Children of Israel, so that no one should think that he can distance himself from others and live his life alone. Every individual is but a "half," completely unable to attain perfection unless he is united with another.

A Jewish body, when separated and no longer attached to its brothers, is only half a body, a "half-shekel."

### Two Shabbats in a Row

It is written, "The Children of Israel shall observe Shabbat... Between Me and the Children of Israel, it is a sign forever" (*Shemot* 31:16-17).

The sign and covenant of the Jewish people with Hashem through the observance of Shabbat is not only demonstrated by Shabbat. In fact it is an eternal covenant, demonstrated even during the six weekdays. In the Gemara, Rabbi Yochanan says in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: "If Israel were to keep two Sabbaths according to its laws, they would be immediately redeemed" (*Shabbat* 118b).

We need to understand why two Sabbaths are required, not just one. If the quantity is important, then why not three Sabbaths, since doing something three times constitutes something fixed?

Rabbi Moshe Sherkin *Shlita* answers this question by noting that according to the Sages, Shabbat spreads its holiness and blessing upon the six weekdays. More specifically, Shabbat influences the three days that come before it and the three days that come after it. This means that in order for six consecutive weekdays to receive a blessing, two Sabbaths in a row must be observed, for the first will spread its blessing upon Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of the previous week. This not only means a blessing on material possessions and success, but also that we sanctify the weekdays by the merit of Shabbat and transform them into holy days that are devoted to the service of Hashem.

This is what the *Tanna* Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai meant: If the Jewish people observe two Sabbaths according to its laws, it will demonstrate that even the weekdays are sacred for them, and that all their days are used for the sake of Torah, *mitzvot*, and holiness. In that case, they will be at such a level that they will be immediately redeemed.

### The Weekdays as Well

It is written, "You shall observe *et haShabbat* [the Sabbath], for it is holy to you. Whoever profanes it *mot yumat* [shall surely be put to death]" (*Shemot* 31:14).

There is a well-known principle which states that the term *et* signifies an addition. In that case, what is the verse adding here by stating: "You shall observe *et haShabbat*?"

In *Yismach Israel*, Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer *Zatzal* writes that we can explain this verse according to a statement found in Scripture: "When I appoint the set time, I shall judge with fairness" (*Tehillim* 75:3). Our Sages have explained that when a man is judged, he will be asked: "Why did you not study Torah?" If he says, "I was busy

namely that the abomination he had brought into his home was the cause of his great wealth. Without hesitating, he rushed to do what the Rif had said, and in an instant he torched all of these possessions. Everything acquired through idolatry was therefore instantly devoured by fire.

The inhabitants of the city remembered the kindness that the man had demonstrated to them when he was rich, and how charitable he had been with them. In such a tragic instance, they offered to help him, and they encouraged and supported him. The blessing of the Rif therefore took effect, for although the man had lost all his possessions, he never lacked anything for the rest of his life.

with earning a living or working to feed myself and my family," he will then be asked: "Why did you not study Torah on Shabbat and the festivals?" When he has no answer to give, the gravity of neglecting Torah study during the week will be attributed to him as well. This is because Shabbat and the festivals prove that earning a living did not prevent him from studying Torah, since he could not earn a living on Shabbat, and yet he neglected Torah study on that day as well.

Hence the verse can be understood in the following way: "You shall observe the Sabbath" – we must observe Shabbat all while studying Torah; "*et*" – which includes the study of Torah, so that we are not punished for the weekdays when we did not study Torah. Otherwise we are warned, "Whoever profanes it *mot yumat* [shall surely be put to death]" – *mot yumat* (two deaths), meaning that we are punished for neglecting Torah study on the weekdays as well.

## In the Light of the Parsha

### Destined to Open the Way to Repentance

It is written, "They exchanged their glory for the likeness of a grass-eating ox. ... He said that He would destroy them, had not Moshe, His chosen one, stood in the breach before Him to turn away His wrath from destroying" (*Tehillim* 106:20-23).

We need to understand why Hashem became so angry with the Children of Israel that He wanted to destroy them. They had not committed idolatry on their own initiative, for it was the Satan who deceived them, as the Sages teach: "After 40 days, the Satan came and confounded the world. He said to them, 'Where is your teacher Moshe?' They answered, 'He has ascended on high.' He said to them, 'The sixth [hour] has come,' but they ignored him. 'He is dead,' but they ignored him. He then showed them a vision of his coffin" (*Shabbat* 89a).

In fact they said, "Rise up, make for us gods that will go before us" (*Shemot* 32:1), from which we learn that they wanted to make an idol. This is what the Psalmist referred to by exclaiming, "They exchanged their glory for the likeness of a grass-eating ox." When the golden calf was made, G-d wanted the Children of Israel to pay attention and not worship an idol, which is why He brought an image of an ox that eats grass. If it eats grass, we cannot say that it created grass. Thus the Children of Israel were to reflect upon the fact that if it ate grass, and if grass existed before it, then it could not have created Heaven and earth. Because they did not reflect upon this, the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to destroy them.

We find a similar idea in a parable recorded in the Midrash: A group of thieves were in prison, and one of them dug a tunnel through which they escaped. Only one thief chose not to escape. When the governor learned of it, he struck him with his rod and said: "You fool! You had an opening before you, and you did not escape?" (*Kohelet Rabba* 7:24).

Thus in the future, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to the wicked: "The possibility of doing *teshuvah* was before you, and you did not repent?" G-d said, "I created an opening, and yet you made an ox that eats grass? In order for you to stop worshipping an idol, since you did not stop on your own, I will punish you for it."