

א בִּיסַל תּוֹרָה!

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THE PARSHA NEWSLETTER
OF MAIMONIDES SCHOOL

י"ד אדר תשפ"ה · כי תשא

מחצית השקל The Unification of the

By Hodaya Sapir '25

Hashem begins with Hashem telling משה that when he takes a census of בני ישראל everyone 20 years and older should each pay Hashem a מחצית השקל, and both the rich and poor should pay that amount. הַעֲשִׂיר לֹא-יִרְבֶּה וְהַדֵּל לֹא יִמְעִיט מִמַּחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל לְתֵת. מִשֶּׁה (30:15) "אֶת-תְּרוּמַת ה' לְכַפֵּר עַל-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם". Why did משה have to specifically use a מחצית השקל to count בני ישראל, why couldn't he just count them normally and why did everyone have to give the same amount?

According to רש"י, numbers are subject to the influence of the "evil eye", and therefore if you count people, they will get diseases. We find that this happened in the days of דוד when he counted the people without a שקל which led to a plague breaking out amongst them.

רבינו בח"י explains that we do not count separate individuals because we do not want to single them out and bring judgment upon them. An individual may not have enough merit to pass that judgment. However, when counting as a community, even if judgment is brought upon us, there are sure to be enough good deeds in the community to ensure that they pass the judgment and are found worthy of ה' mercy. Some add that when Jews are united, blessings are abundant, but when we divide the nation into individuals, there will be individual scrutiny.

ספורנו explains that counting people comes from the fact that human beings are not the same each time and that counting people is a reminder of a person's

sins. Therefore, they gave a מחצית השקל to qualify for atonement. This also explains why the poor and rich had to pay the same amount because a person's payment is not dependent on the amount of money offered to God.

אור החיים explains that they were told to give a מחצית השקל in order to draw people specifically to what was to be accomplished. He goes on to explain that if a rich person gave more than מחצית השקל or a poor person gave less, the whole purpose of the מחצית השקל would be denied. The תורה wanted to stress this element, which is why it gives the details about the amount first.

This מחצית השקל that was given was also used as money to support the בני ישראל. משכן all came together to support the משכן, they weren't divided into individuals and it wasn't based on whether they were rich or poor. Everyone contributed equally which showed unity. Even today we continue doing so by not counting fellow Jews. May we continue to show unity in this way and stay strong together as one nation, despite individual differences.

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THE PARSHA NEWSLETTER
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י"ד מרץ תתתתכ"ה · פורים

What Should Be Done When People Go to Shul?

By Eitan Orkaby '27

When describing the תרומה - the tax of בני ישראל, the תורה says "הָעָשִׁיר לֹא-יִרְבֶּה וְהָדָל לֹא יִמָּעֵיט" "the rich should not have too much and the poor not too little" (שמות ל"ט). This פסוק teaches us to make sure not to tax the rich too much but to make sure to tax the poor very well. After describing how much the tax should be, the next step would be to give the tax collectors instructions on how and when to take the tax. The tax collectors are told "וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת-כֶּסֶף הַכֹּהֲנִים" "מֵאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" "and you shall take the money the כהנים from בני ישראל" (שמות ל"ז). What is this כפרים business and when do the tax collectors take the money?

To understand this we must first look at a very holy holiday, יום כיפור. On this day all of בני ישראל are supposed to be praying to Hashem to atone for their sins. It is also the custom to pray in a Shul for the day, and some even stay there outside of Prayer. This would then explain the word כפרים in the פסוק. Both of the words כיפור and כפרים have the same root, כפר, connecting then two. Therefore, the tax collectors are clearly being commanded to take the Jews' money while they are praying in Shul, so as to make sure to take as much tax as necessary.

Another very important law that is brought down by the תורה, quoting of course the גמרא in זבחים י"ט עמוד, is the law of כהנים washing their hands before entering the מועד אהל, nowadays what we consider a Shul. The law goes as follows "בְּבָאֵם אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד" "וְיָרְחֻצוּ-יָמֵיהֶם" "when they come to the מועד אהל they shall wash themselves with water so as not to die" (שמות ל"ב). Does this law still apply nowadays?

אהל makes it very clear that the entering into the מועד is specifically at שחרית, or the beginning of Prayer. This, once again, points to the fact that the מועד אהל refers, at least nowadays, to a Shul. And lest one think that this law only applied in the times of the מועד אהל, the תורה makes it very clear that "וְיָרְחֻצוּ יְדֵיהֶם וְרַגְלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יָמָתוּ וְהָיְתָה לָהֶם תִּקְעוּלָם לֹו וְלִצְרָעוֹ לְדוֹרֹתָם" "and they shall wash their hands and feet and they will not die, and it shall be a law for all time for them, for him and his offspring, throughout the ages (even nowadays)" (שמות ל"ב"א).

We see from these two laws that the best time to collect taxes is while everyone is praying in Shul, and if a כהן walks into Shul before washing themselves they should be barred from entering the Shul until they wash their hands and feet. Even if the כהנים uses soap they should be barred entry, until they use water like the תורה says. Therefore, the next time you find yourself next to a כהן who has smelly feet you should tell him that he should go wash them else he be kicked out of the Shul.