

GETTING IT HALF-RIGHT

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Everyone shall give this - everyone who passes through the counting - a half shekel of the holy shekel.

Be'er Yosef: The gemara observes that the parshah stipulates three different contributions. Shekalim were contributed for the purchase of the korbanos; for the silver adanim/ bases in the mishkan; and to defray the maintenance costs of the mishkan. Rashi here elaborates. The first two collections obligated everyone to participate, and to contribute equal amounts. Any other collection depended on the good-will of the donor, who was free to give whatever he wanted. Now, the mandatory and standardized yearly contribution towards the korbanos makes intuitive sense. The Torah insisted that every person have a share - indeed an equal share - in the obligatory offerings. But why demand universal donation for the purchase of the adanim - something that was not demanded in regard to any other item in the mishkan?

R. Chaim Volozhin wrote² about the symbolism of the mishkan. He first establishes that the mishkan is a microcosm of all the spiritual worlds. He then opines that it also models the proper structure and organization of the individual Man. In this he is joined by others, like the Zohar, Rabbenu Bechaye (who observes that the verb for "doing" is used 248 times from the beginning of Terumah till the last one in Pekudei, corresponding to both the number of "doings" / mitzvos in which we are commanded, and the parts of the human body), and the Maasei Hashem.

In the idealized structure of the perfect Man, something must serve as his base, his foundation.

Indeed, the gemara³ reports on attempts throughout history of finding a small number of cardinal principles that encompass the entire Torah. The final reductionist opinion cited is that of Habbakuk, who gave us the famous maxim⁴, "The tzadik lives with his emunah." The navi identifies emunah as the foundation upon which Man builds his spiritual edifice.

Now when we consider all other parts of the mishkan, we realize that people differ wildly in their achievement, in the madregah they attain. People are therefore encouraged to vote their conscience in their donations. Emunah, however, is the exception. A set of truths are required beliefs of each and every Jew. Everyone must accept, for example, the Divine authorship of the entire Chumash, from beginning to end.

We have discovered, then, why the adanim called for equal contributions by the entire nation: they represent emunah, the foundational element of our avodah. To a very large extent, we all share a

common emunah platform, a group of beliefs common to our faith. We demonstrate that by collaborating on their production.

We can readily understand why the Torah designates a half-shekel, rather than an entire one. To maintain our emunah it is imperative to remember that when we look out at the world, we stand in the middle of things, in a work in progress, but not a finished project. No mortal has ever contemplated all of Hashem's actions in this world - past, present and future. We never have a complete picture. Thus, when the apparent lack of justice in this world gnaws at our emunah and undermines it, we can remind ourselves that we lack the necessary information with which to understand Hashem's justice. The integrity of our emunah calls for our accepting that we only have half the analytic work done. There are gaps in our comprehension, and we should not be surprised if some things do not make sense to us. This incompleteness is represented by the half-shekel.

The adanim-collection produced the required funds to manufacture the silver bases that held and supported the kerashim/ uprights, which formed the walls of the mishkan. Specifically, each keresh was supported by two adanim. This detail fits nicely with our development. Our bedrock emunah was strengthened by hearing two dibros directly from Hashem, rather than an intermediary. Through these dibros we retain a firm grasp on two principles of our emunah - His existence, and the non-existence of any other deities.

The Baal HaTurim⁵ writes that the institution of 100 daily berachos was sourced in the 100 adanim. Why should the adanim generate 100 daily berachos, rather than the kerashim or hooks - both of which would have generated much smaller numbers? Modeling berachos after the adanim makes sense according to our approach. The theme of berachos in general is that all things, great and small, pleasant or otherwise, happen as a result of His Will. This belief is also a fundamental part of our bedrock emunah - and thus related to the adanim is the faith-support of the rest of Man's structure.

Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Yosef, Shemos30:13-15
 2. Nefesh HaChaim 1:4, note 3.
 3. Makos 24A
 4. Habbakuk 2:4
 5. Shemos 38:27
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