

THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN ITS PARTS

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

The Torah states regarding the half a silver coin (machtzis ha'shekel), "This shall they give...a half shekel of the sacred shekel, the shekel is twenty geras (in weight), half a shekel as a portion to Hashem...The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease from half a shekel...to atone for their souls." Every Jewish male of the age of twenty and above was required to give a half a silver coin, which was used to purchase the communal offerings (korbanai tzibur) that brought about atonement. Regardless of one's financial status, one needed to give the half a silver coin - not more and not less. What is the significance of every Jew needing to give the identical half-silver coin regardless of his financial status?

Rambam rules in the Laws of Repentance that one who removes himself from the community has no share in the world to come. He writes, "One who withdraws from communal ways, even if he did not commit any sins, but separated from the Congregation of Israel and does not join with them in the performance of mitzvos and does not concern himself with their sufferings and does not join them in their fast days but goes in his own path as though he were of another nation and is not part of them (the Jewish people) has no share in the world to come." If this individual performs all the mitzvos meticulously but separates himself from the Jewish people by not sharing in their success to be his own and their failure is his failure, why does he not merit a share in the world to come?

Whenever the Torah mentions the liability of spiritual excision (koreis) it expresses itself by saying "this soul will be cut off from Israel" or "this soul will be cut off from its people". If spiritual excision is in fact being excised from G'd why does the Torah not state, "this soul shall be cut off from G'd?" Other than the holy Patriarchs, G'd does not have relationships with individuals unto themselves. Rather His relationship with the existence is only with his chosen people. An individual can only have a relationship with G'd within the context of being part of the Jewish people. One who decides to separate himself from the whole (community), will no longer have a relationship with G'd and thus has no share in the world to come (which is having a relationship with G'd). Although his mitzvah performance may be meticulous and outstanding it does not engender a relationship with G'd.

A community "tzibur" is one in which each individual negates his individuality as an independent being in order to be identified only as part of the whole. Regarding the communal offerings, the needy person as well as the wealthy person must give only half a silver coin in order to emphasize this point. An individual only has value if he is complemented by another in the community. In order for the offerings to be effective within the context of atonement, they needed to reflect the negation

and recognition that one is not complete unless one is complemented by his fellow. Therefore, the Torah does not state that each member of the Jewish people should give a whole coin, but rather a half-coin in order to emphasize the point that it is only through complementing one another that one achieves wholeness.

The Torah states regarding the specifications of the Holy Ark, "They shall make an Ark...two and a half cubits in length; a cubit and a half its width; and a cubit and a half its height." Baal Haturim explains that the reason the specifications of the Ark have half measures and not whole measures was to indicate that in order for one to have the capacity to acquire and retain Torah, one needs to break his character traits to be worthy of becoming a receptacle for the Torah. The concept of "half" connotes negation which is an expression of humility. Regarding the Ark, the significance of "half" is not the complementation of another but rather the breaking of one's character traits. For one to have a relationship with G'd one must negate himself. This will enable him to have the capacity to submit. Similarly in order for the communal sacrifice to be most effective, the members of the community must demonstrate negation by acknowledging that each person is not complete without the participation of his fellow.

2. The Inextricable Relationship Between G'd and His People

The Torah states, "G'd spoke to Moshe saying, When you take a census (ki sisa) of the Children of Israel ...this shall they give...a half shekel of the sacred shekel..." The term "ki sisa (census)" literally means, "to elevate." The counting of the Jewish people in this manner was an indication of their special value to G'd. The Midrash states, "This is similar to a king who had many regal garments. The king commanded one of his subjects saying, 'Please take extra care of this particular silk garment because it is the most dear to me. It is the garment that I wore on the day of my coronation. It is attached to my loins and I pride myself with it.' Similarly, G'd had spoken to Moshe regarding the Jewish people, 'Take special care of the Jewish people because they are attached to My loins. Just as one's sash is attached to his loins, identically the House of Israel is attached to Me.' Why are the Jewish people compared to the king's special regal garment? G'd said, 'The Jewish people had accepted My Kingship upon themselves after the splitting of the Sea. They had said, 'G'd shall reign for all eternity.' Therefore, they are the equivalent of the special garment worn by Me on the day of My coronation. Because of My enormous love for them, I descended from above to the terrestrial level with My Divine Presence to dwell amongst them in the tent that is made of goat hides. "

The Midrash explains that G'd regards the Jewish people as being precious to Him because they coronated Him by declaring at the splitting of the Sea, "G'd shall reign for all eternity." Chazal tell us that at the time of the splitting of the Sea, G'd's Presence was so palpable that the even the lowly maidservant was privy to a level of revelation that the prophet Yechezkel was not. The Jewish people were able to point to G'd and say, "This is my G'd and I will exalt Him..." If G'd was so revealed and obvious at the splitting of the Sea, why does He consider their declaration of "G'd shall reign for all eternity" so special if it was not possible to deny His majesty. When the Jewish people declared

"G'd shall reign for all eternity" at the Sea they not only acknowledged Him as being the King, they also accepted upon themselves to be His subjects with that declaration. Their relationship of subject to King at that moment was a precursor to Sinai where they declared, "Naaseh V'nishma (we will do and we will listen)" which was an expression of total negation to G'd. They accepted upon themselves to be negated to His Will regardless of the extent of obligation. They were true subjects who lived for the sake of their Master. Although one does acknowledge G'd when He is revealed because His Presence cannot be denied, to subordinate oneself to His Will as a subject is another dimension of recognition and internalization of reality. This was the uniqueness of the declaration of the Jewish people at the splitting of the Sea.

We pray every day in the blessing for the Davidic Reign (es tzemach David avdecha) in the Amidah (Silent Prayer) that G'd should bring the Moshiach, speedily in our day. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin states based on a verse in Ecclesiastes, "When Moshiach will come the days will have no value." Meaning, G'd's existence will be so evident that man will no longer have free choice. Consequently, the value of man's actions will not accrue any benefit to the individual. The primary focus of humanity will be to address and advance their spiritual dimension. Rambam writes in the Laws of Repentance that the basis for one to be deserving of reward is based on one's ability to choose between right and wrong. However, if one is compelled to do good because he no longer has an evil inclination then he is no longer deserving of reward. If the Jewish people were at an advanced spiritual level, in which they were fully dedicated to do the Will of G'd as His subjects, then the coming of Moshiach is the optimum setting for them bring about G'd's Glory to its fullest because they have no interest in reward or personal advancement. However, if the Jewish people are in a deficient spiritual state, the coming of Moshiach would be an eternal detriment to them. They would have forfeited the opportunity of gaining reward for eternity. Seemingly, praying for the coming of Moshiach if one is not at the most advanced level would not be something advantageous to the individual.

The supplication for the coming of Moshiach is in fact the true expression of being a dedicated subject to the Master. Because G'd's Presence is not experienced or felt by mankind, it becomes a setting for a desecration of His Name. We are pained that our King's Glory and Honor is being desecrated. We are willing to forego whatever spiritual opportunity or spiritual growth and advancement for the sake of His Glory. This is the ultimate sacrifice of a servant to his master. It is only the Jewish people who can negate themselves to such a degree that they are willing to sacrifice their own existence for the sake of the King. Therefore, G'd said to Moshe to take special care of His people.

3. The Circumstance of Silence

The Torah states regarding the Golden Calf, "They have made themselves a molten calf...they said, 'This is your god, O Israel.'" Rashi cites Chazal, "They did not say this is our god, but rather this is your god. From this we see that it was the rabble (eirev rav) and not the Jewish people who initiated the

Golden Calf. It was only later that the Jewish people strayed after them."

The Torah tell us that when Moshe descended the mountain and found the Jewish people engaged in the worship of the Golden Calf, he smashed the Tablets containing the Ten Commandments. He stood at the entrance of the camp of Israel and said, "Whoever is for Hashem, join me!" All of the Levites gathered around him. Moshe said, "Every man, put his sword on his thigh...let every man kill his brother, every man his fellow..." The Levites responded to Moshe's call. They killed all of those who worshipped the idolatry.

Although the majority of the Jewish people did not worship the Golden Calf; nevertheless, they were all culpable for its sin. As Chazal tells us based on the verse, every punishment that the Jewish people will receive until the end of time has within it a part to atone for that sin. The Jewish people will continuously atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. If the majority of the people were not involved in the actual idolatry, why is the entire nation liable?

Sforno explains, "Although the majority of the Jewish people were not involved with the act of idolatry, they had remained silent and did not protest when this desecration of G'd was taking place in their midst. When the Levites responded to Moshe's call and killed all of the idolaters who were involved with the Golden Calf, the Jewish people once again remained silent and did not protest the killing of the idolaters. Their silence at that moment was an atonement for the initial silence when their fellows were engaged in idolatry. It was because of their initial inaction to protest the sin of the Golden Calf that made the entire Jewish people liable for it."

Chazal tell us that the reason that G'd had commanded the Jewish people donate gold to the building of the Mishkan was so that this gold should atone for the gold that they had given for the Golden Calf. If the Jewish people would give the gold, despite its precious value, selflessly and whole-heartedly for the glory of G'd, it would atone for the selfless giving of gold for the idolatry. Rambam writes in the Laws of Repentance that complete repentance (teshuvah shleima) is if one is confronted with temptation in the identical circumstance as his original sin and does not succumb, despite having the same desire. Meaning, "It is only with the same woman, the same location, and the same ability..." Since this individual had the ability to transgress as he had initially but chose to suppress his inclination, he is fully atoned for his sin.

Identically, the Jewish people who had initially remained silent and did not protest the desecration that was taking place in their midst regarding the Golden Calf, remained silent when the evil was being purged from their midst. Their silence was an indication that they had fully recognized and appreciated the wrong of their initial inaction. The Levites, who were not tainted with the sin of the Golden Calf had initially protested against it; however, because they were a small minority their protests were ignored.

4. Similar But Not the Same

The sin of the Golden Calf was one of the gravest moments in the history of the Jewish people. G'd

had redeemed them from Egypt with revealed miracles and wonders in order for them to stand at Sinai to receive His Torah and become His chosen people. At Sinai they Jewish people had experienced the most intimate level of prophecy. G'd had communicated with them face to face. Although they had experienced G'd's Presence in a revealed and obvious manner at the time of the splitting of the Sea, the level of revelation at Sinai surpassed what they had previously experienced. Chazal compare the Sinai event to a bride (Jewish people) being taken in marriage by her groom (G'd). Forty days after experiencing and hearing the word of G'd (Ten Commandments), the Jewish people engaged in idolatry by casting the Golden Calf. Chazal explain that the sin of the Golden Calf was the equivalent of a bride committing adultery under the marriage canopy (chupah). Because of the severity of the transgression that had taken place, G'd wanted to destroy the Jewish people. However, because of Moshe's supplications, they were spared. Despite the fact that they were forgiven, the sin of the Golden Calf had severely tainted them until the end of time.

The Torah tells us that when the Jewish people left Egypt after the tenth plague, Pharaoh "sent out the people." If G'd was the One who actually took out the Jewish people from Egypt, why does the verse state that Pharaoh had "sent out the people." Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that Pharaoh had sent out hundreds of thousands of Egyptians to accompany the Jewish people when they left Egypt. This was the rabble to whom the Torah refers. He had done so because he had suspected that the Jewish people, after leaving Egypt would not return. Pharaoh had told this large contingent of Egyptians to accompany the Jewish people into the desert to guarantee their return. He threatened them by saying that if they were not to return, the rabble would assume their position as slaves in the place of the Jewish people who were absent. When the Jewish people had passed the point of return in the desert, the rabble understood that they were not going to ever return to Egypt. They thus decided to continue along with the Jewish people and not return to Egypt to become slaves. They were the ones who initiated the worship of the Golden Calf that brought about the spiritual diminishment of the Jewish people until the end of time. Moshe, being the leader of the Jewish people could have rejected the rabble and not allowed them to join the exodus. Yet he remained silent and allowed Pharaoh to execute his plan. Why did Moshe allow the rabble to come along? Seemingly his acquiescence to allow them to join led to the greatest spiritual tragedy of all time.

When the Golden Calf was being worshipped, Moshe was in heaven receiving the Torah. G'd said to Moshe, "You must go down because your people who you have taken out from Egypt have become corrupt." Rashi cites Chazal who explain, that the reason G'd used the term "your people" rather than "My people" is because He was referring to the rabble who Moshe had permitted to accompany the Jewish people out of Egypt. G'd had said to Moshe, "You did not consult with Me regarding if they should accompany you or not." Moshe had justified his initial decision to allow the rabble to leave Egypt together with the Jewish people for the sake of bringing them under the wings of the Divine Presence through conversion. If Moshe could have consulted with G'd beforehand, why did he not do so?

The Gemara in Tractate Nidarim tells us that one of the reasons the Jewish people were destined to be enslaved in Egypt was because Avraham, our Patriarch, had failed when he had an opportunity to convert a group of pagans to monotheism and he did not. After Avraham's victory over the four mightiest kings who had taken the Sodomites captive, the King of Sodom approached Avraham and said, "Give me the people and the possessions shall be yours." Avraham's response to the King of Sodom was, "I will not take from you as much as a thread or a bootstrap." At this moment, Avraham, as the victor, had the opportunity and right to take the people of Sodom and convert them from paganism to monotheism, but he did not. G'd said to Avraham, "Because you allowed these people to remain pagans, and not bring them under the wings of the Divine Presence your children shall be exiled to a land that is not their own..."

Moshe, as the Redeemer of the Jewish people, understood that the atonement for the sin of Avraham was finally completed after the 210 years of exile and bondage. Appreciating the initial failing of Avraham that brought about the Egyptian experience, Moshe was not about to repeat the same mistake as Avraham had made. Moshe was now in a position to either reject the rabble of Egypt and allow them to remain pagans or allow them to become part of a monotheistic people. The obvious choice was to allow them to join. If Moshe's justification for his decision was so cogent and compelling then why did G'd rebuke him?

Moshe and Avraham's situations are not identical. Avraham had missed the opportunity to save the Sodomite community from going into oblivion by not converting them to monotheism. He was held culpable because it was only a question of converting pagans into monotheists. However, regarding the rabble of Egypt, allowing them to accompany the Jewish people to Sinai would introduce and expose them to a foreign element that could impact and destabilize G'd's Chosen people. Therefore, Moshe's decision was flawed. He should have consulted with G'd to prevent this serious failing.

5. The Unending Edomite Exile (from Tetzaveh)

The Torah states, "(G'd said to Moshe) Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed/crushed olive oil for illumination (Menorah)..." Chazal tell us that the only oil that qualified for the kindling of the Menorah was the first droplet that was extracted from the olive. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains the verse on an allusionary level based on the Zohar, "The Jewish people were redeemed from the first three of their four exiles in the merit of the Patriarchs. In the merit of Avraham, our Patriarch, they were redeemed from the Babylonian exile. In the merit of Yitzchak, our Patriarch, they were redeemed from the Persian exile. In the merit of Yaakov, our Patriarch, they were redeemed from the Greek exile...." It is interesting to note that the Greeks did not wish to destroy the Jewish people but rather they sought to uproot and eradicate Torah study and its observance. The Patriarch in whose merit the Jewish people were able to defeat the Greeks was Yaakov, who was the personification of Torah. As the Torah states regarding Yaakov, "He is the perfect man who dwells in the tent (of Torah)." Thus, they reestablished themselves as G'd's people through the observance of the Torah and its study.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues, "The redemption of the Jewish people from the fourth and final exile, the Edomite exile (Roman), will come about only in the merit of Moshe. However, Moshe, will not allow his merit to be utilized to bring about redemption until the Jewish people are fully engaged in Torah study and the observance of Its mitzvos with the purest intent."

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the "pure, pressed olive oil" of the Menorah symbolizes the manner in which one must engage in Torah study in order to be worthy of Moshe's merit. Just as only the purest droplet of oil qualifies to kindle the Menorah, so too one must study Torah with a pure intent. The Torah must be studied for its own sake (l'shmah). If one engages in Torah study with an ulterior motive it will not have the same value as if one studies it with a pure intent. In addition to its purity, the olive oil must be "pressed/crushed (kasis l'mohr) for illumination" Just as the olive was to be crushed in order to extract the pure oil for illumination, so too must one be willing to sacrifice and deprive himself from the material for the sake of Torah study. As the Torah states, "This is the Torah, (when) a man dies in the tent..." It is only when the Jewish people will engage in Torah in this manner, will Moshe allow his merit to be used to bring about redemption.

If Yaakov our Patriarch, who is the personification of Torah allowed his merit to be used to extricate the Jewish people from the Greek exile, why will Moshe, who is the pillar of Torah, not allow his merit to be used until the Jewish people meet his criteria of purity? Yaakov, although he was the Patriarch who embodied Torah and truth as it states, "Give Truth to Yaakov (Teetain emmes L'Yaakov)..." his relationship with the Jewish people was that of a father to a son because he was a Patriarch. Although absolute truth (Torah) represents something that is unwavering, precise, and exacting, Yaakov as the Patriarch had a relationship with the Jewish people that was based on kindness. Moshe's relationship with the Jewish people was not within the context of a Patriarch, but rather he was the conduit of Torah. Moshe possessed qualities that guaranteed the immutability and eternity of Torah. Moshe was unwavering regarding matters of justice and thus did not compromise to any degree. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that Moshe's position was if there is a mountain that stands in the way of establishing a law, the law must pierce the mountain. Meaning, truth supersedes everything and must be maintained. As it states, "Moshe is true and his Torah is true."

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah states, "One who says 'I have toiled (in Torah) and have come upon it' -should be believed. One who says, 'I have not toiled and I did come upon it' -should not be believed." One can only come upon the truth of Torah, only through sacrifice, which is the toil and dedication to comprehend its truth with the purest intent. Therefore, Moshe, being the embodiment of truth will not compromise to any degree on its standard. Thus, he will not allow the Jewish people to utilize his merit to bring the final exile to an end, unless they engage in Torah study in the most pure and dedicated manner. Text Copyright © 2012 by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky and **Torah.org**.

Rabbi Kalatsky is the founder of the [Yad Avraham Institute](#), a New York-based learning center whose mission is to disseminate Torah to Jews of all backgrounds and walks of life.