

ALL FOR ONE

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"This they shall give...one half a shekel...a donation to Hashem" (Shemot 30:13)

The first of four special additional readings in the public recitation of the Torah on Shabbat is called Shekalim. Jews worldwide read from parashah Ki Tisa the command for each Jew to bring a half shekel for a census taken by Moshe Rabenu. Our sages teach that 3 half shekels were collected from each eligible individual to be used for different holy communal purposes. The Rabbis ask, "How come a half was given and not a whole?"

The great Rabbi of Sefat in 500 years ago, Maharam Moshe Alshekh zt'l said that Hashem wanted to teach our people that when a Jew stands alone he is not complete and that only when he joins together with others can he fulfill his full potential. Even one who feels he is insignificant is valuable to the community. For example, 9 adult males who need a tenth for a minyan in order to add the holiest portions to public prayer are complete as a special unit of ten as soon as the tenth man participates. The tenth man's wealth, strength or intelligence are not a factor. He makes it happen by joining the group. He makes it complete.

Unity is a primary factor in the success and power of our people. The Midrash tells of a man who was weak and sick and approaching death. He called his sons to his bedside for last instructions from the head of the family. He gave each son a straw and asked them to break the brittle weed in half. They did. Then he gave each one a straw and asked that they pass them all to one son. He then requested that the young man break the bundle in half but he was not able to comply. The patriarch of the family then asked that each of the other boys take a turn and try to crack the bundle in half. None of the healthy bunch was able to do the simple task. "My sons", he said, "when you are united no one can hurt you. Please stay together in all that you do". He also pointed out that when numbers are lined up in a row each new addition to the line increases the total value by so much. But when numbers are written one on top of the other there is no gain to each adjacent numeral.

The season leading to Purim and Pesah begins with the reading of Parashat Shekalim. Our salvation from trouble and exile is contingent on our unity. The Torah was not given to an individual - only to a nation. The verses that narrate that famous event point out that it was only after the Jews were united like one man with one heart did Hashem gift us with His greatest possession the Torah. The lesson is as important today as it was then. We want salvation. The prompt to Heaven is unity. May we all learn the lesson and put it into action and behavior and bring the final redemption speedily in

our days Amen.

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