

## Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

### פרשת כי תשא

**כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקדיהם ונתנו איש כפר נפשו לה' בפקד אתם ולא יהיה בהם נגף בפקד אתם**

**“When you take a head count of the Children of Israel according to their numbers, every man shall give to Hashem atonement-money for his soul when counting them, so that there will not be a plague among them when counting them” (30:12)**

The Mechilta comments in Parshas Mishpatim: "R' Yishmael said: Come and see how Hashem has mercy on mankind, for a person is able to monetarily redeem himself from a heavenly death penalty." The Mechilta cites the half shekel donation as the source for this concept, as this posuk refers to the donation as "atonement-money for his soul." This is in contrast to a death penalty handed down by a court, which cannot be annulled for any amount of money. The Torah warns us in Parshas Masei (Bamidbar 35:31) that a person sentenced to die cannot be redeemed with money. The way out that Hashem provides for us is tzedaka, as Shlomo HaMelech said (Mishlei 10:2), "Charity saves death." The atonement that this donation provided was one of the purposes of the half-shekel that the Jews had to give. In fact, we find that the half-shekel donation did indeed save the Jewish people from death. The Gemara in Megilla 13b says: "Reish Lakish said: Hashem foresaw that Haman would pay shekalim to destroy the Jewish people. Therefore, he caused the shekalim of the Jews to precede those of Haman." The shekalim that were given were meant as a preemptive atonement, which would be used to save the Jewish people five hundred years later. (See Tosfos and Hagahos HaBach on Megilla 16a, who calculate that the 10,000 kikar given by Haman to Achashverosh equals the total number of half-shekels given in the wilderness.) Today, as well, when a person gives tzedaka, it has tremendous potential to help the donor and could even save his life.

The Gemara in Shabbos 156b records a story regarding the daughter of R' Akiva, about whom astrologers had predicted that she would be killed by a poisonous snake on her wedding day. This troubled R' Akiva greatly. On the night of her wedding, she was removing a brooch and stuck it in the wall, unwittingly putting it right through the eye of a poisonous snake that had just appeared there. The next morning, when she reached for her brooch, she found a snake hanging there. R' Akiva asked her what she had done that merited this miracle. She told her father that a poor man had come to the door earlier on her wedding day. Everyone had been so busy preparing for the wedding that nobody paid him any attention. She noticed him and gave him some of the food that was being prepared for the wedding. The charity that she had given had saved her from death. What is the significance that she pierced the snake through its eye? Since she had mercy with her eyesight and looked kindly upon the poor man, the snake that was meant to kill her was struck through its eye.

**זה יתנו כל העבר על הפקדים מחצית השקל בשקל הקדש עשרים גרה השקל מחצית השקל תרומה לה'**

**“This shall everyone who passes through the census give; a half shekel of the sacred shekel - the shekel is worth twenty geras - half a shekel as a portion to Hashem” (30:13)**

The Midrash Tanchuma records the following statement: "R' Meir says: Hashem showed Moshe a coin made of fire from under the Throne of Glory and said: This shall they give." What is the significance of showing Moshe a coin made of fire?

R' Elimelech of Lizhensk explains that Hashem wanted to teach a very important lesson

about money by comparing it to fire. Fire can be very beneficial through the warmth that it provides but it can also be dangerous if misused and can cause great destruction. Similarly, money also has a tremendous upside potential. If money is used wisely, it can bring great benefit to a person. However, the flip side of the coin is that if money is wasted or spent inappropriately, it can be harmful and cause problems.

The posuk in Mishlei (13:8) teaches: "The atonement for a man's soul is his wealth and poor is he who has listened to no warning." Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch comments, "The justification to live in time and eternity is gained by dispensing charity. A man's real wealth, accordingly, is the money he has *used* for the benefit of his soul. Whatever you accumulate will be forfeited; whatever you use in accordance with the commandments will remain your property forever. And who is really property-less? The man who may have money but is unable to interpret the warnings which reach him through God's instructions or through the fate which God sends him in order to teach him how to use his wealth in compliance with the commandments. Although, outwardly, he may be the owner of wealth, he remains [inwardly] poor. Our proverb warns us: His wealth will grow wings; and once this has happened, he has missed his opportunity to earn those possessions which will never fly away" (From the Wisdom of Mishle by SR Hirsch, Chapter VIII). Rav Hirsch also points out that the posuk in Mishlei uses the words כפר נפש, the same words used to describe the half-shekel, seeming to indicate that this lesson is one of the reasons for the half-shekel donation.

### **כל העבר על הפקדים מן עשרים שנה ומעלה יתן תרומת ה'**

**"Everyone who passes through the census, from twenty years of age and higher, shall give the portion of Hashem" (30:14)**

The Baal HaTurim writes that the numerical value of **שנה ומעלה מן עשרים** is equal to that of **לעונשים מן עשרים**, "from the age of twenty, [one is liable] for punishments." The half-shekel served as an atonement for one who deserved death. Since one is not held accountable for sins that warrant death until he is twenty years old, the half-shekel collection only applied to those aged twenty years and above.

In a letter from R' Moshe Feinstein to his son, R' Reuven Feinstein, shortly before he turned twenty (Igros Moshe Yoreh Deiah 3:96), he writes that when a person reaches this auspicious age, he should focus on his Torah study, but also be careful to work on his character. He should be very careful to avoid anger and pride. He writes that when a person has a strong desire to improve his midos, Hashem will help him. He also instructed his son to make sure to honor his mother, which is something that may be difficult for young men to follow.

### **ועשית כiyor נחשת וכנו נחשת לרחצה ונתת אתו בין אהל מועד ובין המזבח ונתת שמה מים**

**"You shall make a copper laver and its base of copper for washing; place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and put water there" (30:18)**

Why does the Torah say to "put water there"? Would it not have made more sense to say that you shall "put water in it"? The Meshech Chochma answers that the Kohanim did not necessarily have to wash their hands and feet from the Kiyor, but could do so from any vessel in the Mishkan. However, regardless of what vessel they used, the washing had to be done between the Mizbeiach and the Heichal, in the area where the Kiyor was located. The word "there" refers to the location mentioned in the posuk. It is important for water to be placed in that location, not necessarily in the Kiyor itself. We see from this that the Torah uses very precise wording and if we analyze pesukim, we can see new halachos based on a certain choice of

words.

Based on this posuk, the Rambam writes (Hilchos Tefillah 4:3) that one must wash his hands and feet before praying every morning. The Torah Temima writes that prayer is a replacement for the service in the Bais HaMikdash and many laws regarding prayer reflect this purpose (see Orach Chaim 98:4). Since the Kohanim had to wash their hands and feet before serving in the Bais HaMikdash, the Rambam deemed it appropriate that we, too, should have to wash our feet in addition to our hands before praying. However, we do not follow the opinion of the Rambam and we only wash our hands before davening.

**ביני ובין בני ישראל אות הוא לעולם כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים ואת הארץ  
וביום השביעי שבת וינפש**

**“Between Me and the Children of Israel it is a sign forever that in a six-day period Hashem made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refereshed” (31:17)**

The Gemara in Beitzah 16a says: "Reish Lakish said: Hashem gives each person an extra soul when Shabbos begins and takes it back after Shabbos is over." The source for the neshama yeseira, the extra soul, is the word "וינפש" is short for "וי אבדה נפש", "woe for the soul that is lost," referring to the fact that the neshama yeseira is removed after Shabbos. The use of וינפש as a shortened form of this exclamation is troublesome as it refers to resting on Shabbos, not the end of Shabbos. Why is this word used to support the statement of Reish Lakish?

The Baal Shem Tov answers that a person should realize that he is on a higher spiritual plane on Shabbos and that he feels differently. But he must also understand that this higher level only lasts for one day and that he should take advantage of every moment of Shabbos. Therefore, even when Shabbos has just begun, a person should think "וי אבדה נפש" and remember that he only has a limited time to make use of the special inspiration provided by Shabbos and should not wait until it is too late to remember that every moment of Shabbos is precious.

What is this neshama yeseira? Rashi on the Gemara explains that a person physically feels rested and happy and he can eat and drink and be satisfied. The cares of the work week fall away and a person can focus on his spiritual needs. This special feeling envelops a person on Shabbos.

People who truly understand Shabbos can really feel the impact that the neshama yeseira has on them. This point is illustrated by a story about the brother of the Maharal. He was once learning the halacha about a person who is stranded in the desert and cannot remember what day is Shabbos. The halacha states (Orach Chaim 344:1) that from the moment when the person realizes that he has lost track of the days, he should count as if that day is Sunday and keep every seven days as Shabbos. This halacha baffled the Maharal's brother. He exclaimed: "How can it be that a person does not know when Shabbos is? Doesn't he feel the neshama yeseira?" While we may not be at that level, we should attempt to act differently on Shabbos than we do during the week and thereby feel differently on Shabbos. The level of feeling the neshama yeseira is something that we can attain if we work on ourselves and utilize every single Shabbos.

We should recognize the importance of the neshama yeseira. The very fact that it is referred to in the Torah shows how important it is. The very first thing we do after Shabbos is over is to make havdalah, which includes the blessing made on besamim. The reason why we smell spices at the conclusion of Shabbos is to alleviate the pain caused by the loss of the neshama yeseira. (Mishna Berura 491:3) Perhaps another way to feel the neshama yeseira is to focus on what we are missing when Shabbos ends. If we feel the loss of the neshama yeseira at

havdalah, we will appreciate it more when we receive it again the following week.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

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