

RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Ki Tisa for your Shabbos Table

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DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

Reasons to Give

Parshas Ki-Sisa begins with the *mitzva* of מחצית השקל, the mandatory payment of a half-shekel. The מחצית השקל was given for two purposes – to fund the public *korbanos* in the *Beis Ha'mikdash*, and as a means of counting the people. Rather than count the nation directly, each individual would donate a half-shekel, and these half-shekels were then counted to determine the population.

This method of counting the people is very significant. It teaches us that we “count” only when we give. In order to have our place in *Am Yisrael*, to make a difference, and to really matter, we need to contribute something. If our goal is only to receive the benefits of being part of *Am Yisrael* without investing, without giving or donating, then we do not truly “count.”

Further insight into the Torah's perspective on giving can be gleaned from the Rashba's comments in one of his responsa (1:18) regarding the question of whether a *beracha* is recited on the *mitzva* of מחצית השקל. When the people gave their half-shekel donation, did they recite a *beracha* over this *mitzva*? The Rashba writes that no *beracha* is recited before donating the מחצית השקל, because the money that one donates is not really his. The *pasuk* says (Divrei Hayamim I 29:14) – “For everything is from You, and it is from Your hand that we give

to You.” When giving the half-shekel, one does not actually do anything, because the money he gives was not really his to begin with. Everything we have belongs to Hashem, and so the donations we make are not really our donations.

The *Peirush Ha'tefilos Ve'ha'berachos* (cited in *Otzar Pelaos Ha'Torah*, p. 756) disagrees, and writes that people did, in fact, recite a *beracha* over the *mitzva* of מחצית השקל. The text of the *beracha* was ברוך אתה... אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וציוונו לתת מחצית השקל. Even this source, however, presumably agrees with the Rashba's basic point – that when we give *tzedaka* or donate to an important cause, we are not actually giving our money, as we are but stewards over Hashem's property, entrusted with the mission to direct the funds to where they need to go. However, this is precisely the *mitzva* – to direct Hashem's money to the right places – and so a *beracha* is warranted, because we are fulfilling a *mitzva*.

This is the mindset we must have when it comes to charitable giving – כי ממך הכל ומידך נתנו – לך. Everything we have is Hashem's property, which He has entrusted to us for the purpose of utilizing it the right way, and ensuring that it gets to where it needs to go.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

Looking at Ourselves in the Mirror

The Torah here in Parshas Ki-Sisa (30:17-21) discusses the *kiyor* – the copper basin and faucet from which the *kohanim* would wash their

We are All Kohanim

Every morning, right when we wake up, we are required to wash our hands. According to one opinion, we wash because our hands might have touched something that necessitates washing for cleanliness.

The Rashba, however, in one of his responsa (1:191), gives a different explanation. He writes that each morning, we are to acknowledge that we have been created to serve and bring honor to Hashem, and so אננו צריכין להתקדש בקדושתו וליטול ידינו – “we must bring upon ourselves His sanctity, and wash our hands like a *kohen* who washes.”

According to the Rashba, each morning, we are like a *kohen* preparing to enter the *Beis Ha’mikdash*. As God proclaimed before *Matan Torah*, ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים – we are to become a “kingdom of *kohanim*” (Shemos 19:6). Every one of us is a *kohen*. The world is our “*Mishkan*,” and our “*avoda*” is קידוש שם שמיים, to bring glory to God through our conduct. The obligation of נטילת ידיים in the morning applies to each and every one of us, not only to rabbis, not only to kollel students, and not only to the outstanding *tzadikim*. Each person is a *kohen*, and each morning, when we open our eyes and get out of bed, we prepare to serve God in the “*Mikdash*” – in shul, in the office, at home, in the gym, in the mall, on the highway, on the bus, at a *simcha*, wherever we are. At all times, we must see ourselves as *kohanim* in the *Beis Ha’mikdash*, charged with the role of serving Him and bringing glory to His Name

hands and feet each day before entering the *Mishkan* to perform the service. Later, in Parshas Vayakhel (38:8), we read that the *kiyor* was made from מראות הצובאות, mirrors that the women generously donated for the construction of the *Mishkan*.

Rashi comments that Moshe at first refused to accept the mirrors, figuring that, as they were used for vanity, to enhance physical appearance, they had no place in the sacred *Mishkan*. God, however, told Moshe that to the contrary, He regarded these mirrors as the most precious of all the donated materials. The women of *Benei Yisrael* used these mirrors in Egypt to encourage their husbands to continue begetting children, despite the torment that they endured. These mirrors, then, are the symbol of hope and optimism, instruments of positivity and faith, and so they were cherished more than any other of the materials donated for the *Mishkan*.¹

Rav Soloveitchik offered an additional insight into the significance of these mirrors. The *kiyor* was situated in the courtyard outside the *Mishkan*, in between the *Mishkan* and the *mizbei’ach* (altar). Thus, when a person approached the altar, he saw his reflection in the *kiyor*. Before serving God, we need to look in the mirror, and see who we really are, as opposed to the person who we sometimes deceive ourselves into thinking we are. The mirror doesn’t lie; it shows us exactly what we look like. *Avodas Hashem* requires honesty and authenticity, being true to ourselves, knowing precisely who and what we are. When we approach Hashem, we must do so without any delusions or self-deception. Like the mirror, Hashem knows exactly who we are, and there is thus no sense in trying to fool ourselves as we stand before Him. And so as we come to the “*mizbei’ach*,” when we serve Hashem, we are to take a good look at ourselves in the mirror, and acknowledge the truth about ourselves.

¹ A recent parallel to these women’s strength and optimism was the remarkable birthrate among Jewish survivors in the Displaced Persons camps after World War II. After the horrors these survivors endured and witnessed, it would be understandable for them to despair about the future of *Am Yisrael*. But they did not despair, and, in fact, the period of the D.P. camps saw the greatest population explosion in Jewish history. Many of us are here only because of survivors who, following the tradition of the women of *Benei Yisrael*, refused to despair, and maintained their faith in the future even amid horrific suffering.