

The Price of Selling Joseph

The Jerusalem Talmud (-Shekalim 2:3) teaches, "*Rebbi Berekhiah, Rebbi Levi in the name of Rebbi Simeon ben Laqish: Because they sold Rachel's firstborn for twenty pieces of silver; each of them shall redeem his firstborn with twenty pieces of silver. Rebbi Phineas in the name of Rebbi Levi: Because they sold Rachel's firstborn for twenty pieces of silver and each of them received a tibah (2 silver dinarim: 4 dinarim is a selah, which is the biblical shekel, this a tibah (2 dinarim) is a half of shekel)), each of them shall give a tibah as his shekel.*"

Meaning that the act of selling Joseph obligated (one opinion says that this only obligated the amount given in these two mitzvot, while another opinion says that it obligated the actual two mitzvot) Israel with two forms of payments, the Redeeming of the Firstborn Son and the annual Giving a Half-Shekel. Commentaries explain the correlation between the act of the Brothers selling Joseph into slavery with the obligation of these two mitzvot:

- (a) The *Half Shekel* is called (-Exodus 30:12), "*each man must give G-d a monetary ransom for his soul.*" In addition to this, it is taught (-Zohar, Vol II, Addenda, 276a, in explaining that the that Shabbat, which is, (-Deuteronomy 5:15), "*Observe the Sabbath day... You must remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that Gd, your God, took you out from there,*" and our slavery in Egypt was (and our exile for generations is) decreed upon us because of our selling Joseph into slavery, hence, Shabbat is an ongoing atonement for the selling of Joseph), "*an ongoing sin,*" therefore, we are continuously obligated to bring a, "*ransom for his soul,*" by giving annually the *Half Shekel*.
- (b) *Redeeming the Firstborn Son* is because of (-Exodus 13:15), "*The L-rd slew every firstborn in the land of Egypt... Therefore, I slaughter [for a sacrifice] all males (animals) that open the womb, and every firstborn of my sons I will redeem.*" And this is connected with the sale of Joseph, who was the firstborn to Rachel, which caused a danger in Egypt upon all firstborns of Israel, and (Nezer Kodesh, on Bereishis Rabbah 84:18), "*G-d performed a miracle, and therefore we must redeem them (our firstborn son) for (all) generations.*"

Questions: (i) Why did the sin of selling Joseph obligate Israel (according to all opinions) with two payments, that of Redeeming the Firstborn and the of the *half-Shekel*?

(ii) The Jerusalem Talmud writes of both payments in its explaining the reasons for the mitzva of *Half-Shekel*. "*It is written (-Exodus 30:13), 'This is what everyone who passes through the line of those counted (כל-העבר על-הפקודים) - The verse reads hapekudim הפקודים "the census" as Mishnaic Hebrew הפקודים means "the Commandments". Thus, the teaching is, "This they shall give, everybody who violated the Commandments." must give, a half-shekel'... One said, because they sinned in the middle of the day they shall give half (middle of) a shekel; but the other said, because they sinned in the sixth hour they shall give half a shekel; which is worth six grams (the equivalence of a Half-Shekel)... Because they transgressed the Ten Commandments, each of them shall give ten gerah (a whole shekel is 20 gerah)...,*" and in continuation with this, the Jerusalem Talmud then continues with, "*Because they sold Rachel's firstborn for twenty pieces of silver; each of them shall redeem his firstborn with twenty pieces of silver (The firstborn is redeemed by 5 sheqalim. 5 sheqalim are 20 denarii -silver coins).*" Thus, we need to understand, how does the teaching of the reason for the Redeeming of the Firstborn Son, fit into the teachings of the reason for the *Half-Shekel*? And more so, the teaching of Joseph being sold as being the reason for the Redeeming of the Firstborn Son is stated prior to, "*Because they sold Rachel's firstborn for twenty pieces of silver and each of them received a tibah (2 silver dinarim: 4 dinarim is a selah, which is the biblical shekel, this a tibah (2 dinarim) is a half of shekel)), each of them shall give a tibah as his shekel*"?! Thus, we must say that the last two statements are not two statements, but one, in which, we must first understand that the sale of Joseph is the reason for the Redeeming of the Firstborn Son, in order to then be able to understand how the sale of Joseph becomes the reason for the *Half-Shekel*. What is the meaning of this?

(iii) It is understood that the *Half-Shekel*, which is a, "*ransom for his soul,*" is the atonement for a grave sin, that of the sale of Joseph. However, the Redeeming of the Firstborn Son is the concept of (-Exodus 13:2), "*Sanctify to Me every firstborn,*" redeeming (meaning that the firstborn is redeemed from having to remain only in the Holy Temple, by being exchanged for the 5 selaim given in his place to the kohain). How can be that the sin of selling Joseph should lead to that of, "*Sanctify to Me every firstborn*"?

Note: In Footnote 15 the Rebbe explains the question: "*Even though their actual saving was in a miraculous manner, and therefore they are acquired to G-d ("Sanctify to Me"), nevertheless, being that this in itself that they needed a miracle was because of a negative thing (the sale of Joseph), thus, it is not understood why would this being saved lead to a greater elevation than that of if Joseph would not have been sold.*"

(iv) Concerning the reason for the *Half-Shekel*, "*and each of them received a tibah,*" commentaries ask that there were only 9, and not 10, who sold Joseph. Benjamin was not with them. Reuben was not present when they sold him, as it was his day to tend to Jacob. Thus, the mathematics of each receiving a tenth of the "*twenty silvers*" does not match up? The commentaries give two different answers to this:

- (a) Even though Reuben was not present (-Yefas Toar on the Bereishis Rabba ibid), "*nevertheless, the brothers put*

aside his portion, not thinking that he would disagree with their action (albeit, this doesn't necessarily mean that Reuben accepted his two coins, nevertheless the brothers apportioned for each 2 silver coins)." And especially according to the teaching (-Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 38) that when Reuben returned and his brothers told him what they had done with Joseph, "*Reuben heard... and remained silent.*" Thus, Reuben is counted as the 10th.

- (b) Joseph himself is counted in as part of his being sold, for he was (-Taklin Chadatin on the Jerusalem Talmud ibid), "*The cause* (for his being sold) *through the jealousy* (he caused, tattle-telling on them to Jacob, telling his dreams, etc.) *at the beginning*"

Nevertheless, these answers are not *smooth*. In the preciseness of Torah, how could we count Reuben or Joseph as equal parts of the twenty silver coins received for the sale of Joseph, when Reuben and Joseph were against the sale?!

Explanation: The difference between these two *payments* for the sale of Joseph, *Redeeming the Firstborn Son* and the *Half-Shekel*, is: By the *Redeeming the Firstborn Son* we are speaking of the *worth* of Joseph, the amount for which he was sold: *5 Shekalim*. by the *Half-Shekel* we are speaking of the amount that each of the brothers had received for the sale: *Half of Shekel*. Thus we understand that there the two *payments* are for two different details of the sale of Joseph: The *half-Shekel* is for a, "*ransom for his soul,*" for the blemish the sale of Joseph caused within the brothers, in that which they enjoyed (received payment) from the sale of Joseph. The *Redeeming of the Firstborn Son* is the payment for what the sale of Joseph as a slave had upon Joseph, and hence, we must *Redeem of the Firstborn Son*.

Thus, we have the answer to the question of how the negative sale of Joseph could cause the elevation of the of *Redeeming the Firstborn Son*, "*Sanctify to Me*". Being that while the brothers' selling of Joseph was a sin to them, nevertheless, concerning Joseph himself, this caused an elevation that is expressed in his being a *firstborn*, as we will now explain.

The Zohar (-Vol II 184a) states, "*G-d caused this* (that the brothers should sell Joseph) *so that the decree* (G-d made with Abraham) *of the Covenant Between the Pieces* (Genesis 15:13: "*Your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and the people will enslave them and oppress them for 400 years.*")"

This explains to us why it Joseph had to sold specifically by his brothers. Seemingly, the *Covenant* could have come about through others capturing and selling Joseph to Egypt, so that, "*The hands of his brothers not be upon him.*" However, for the *Covenant* to be doable, G-d arranged that Joseph's brothers sell him, so that the brothers rule over Joseph, and by throwing him into the pit and then selling Joseph the brothers become, "*as a master selling his sale,*" before Joseph's descent to Egypt, Joseph becomes, "*a slave to his brothers.*"

Note: The Rebbe points out in *Footnote 26*, that even though the brothers sold Joseph, so therefore, Joseph is not more their slave, nevertheless, the Rebbe quotes from the Talmud (-Gittin 43a), "*The Sages taught, 'In a case of one who sells his slave to gentiles, the slave is emancipated, but nevertheless requires a bill of manumission from his first master.'*" The Rebbe concludes with, "*And this is not its place.*" Meaning, that the Rebbe is leaving the issue unclosed.

The outcome of this that Joseph became a slave to his brothers is that later when Israel descended to Egypt, the Egyptians were not able to complete dominance over Israel --as they had over all their other slaves, in which (-Rashi, Exodus 18:9), "*Not a single slave was able to run away from Egypt.*" To the contrary, being that the Egyptians became slaves to Joseph, and Joseph was (Ohr Hachamah on the Zohar ibid, "*a slave to the Children of Israel,*" therefore, the outcome is that, "*Israel ruled over all of them.*"

With this explanation we understand that albeit the bad intentions of Joseph's brothers, nevertheless, the deeper intention of the sale of Joseph emphasized in the Torah was (-Genesis 45:5-7), "*for it was to preserve life that G-d sent me before you... to make for you a remnant in the land, and to preserve [it] for you for a great deliverance.*"

Thus, the outcome of the sale of Joseph was a dichotomy: The brother's intentions was that Joseph become a slave, which led to Israel's exile of Egypt. However, "*G-d caused this...*" the will and intention of G-d was, that through the sale of Joseph there be the empowerment for the redemption from Egypt.

This then explains the connection between the selling of "*the firstborn of Rachel,*" and the *Redeeming the Firstborn Son*: The Talmud rules (-Gittin 43b), "*one who sells his slave to gentiles, or (even) to (a Jew) outside of the Land of Israel, the slave is emancipated.*" The reason is, since the slave, who is partially obligated in the fulfillment of mitzvot, would be restricted in his ability to fulfill them in his new situation, either because he would be under the authority of a gentile or because he will no longer be in the Land of Israel, the Sages penalized his original owner that he should become a freeman.

Therefore, the selling of Joseph caused that Joseph should become an acquisition of the brothers, who were obligated to do mitzvot, circumcision, etc. (*Footnote 29* discusses whether the Patriarchs, and so too the sons of Jacob, as Noahides took upon themselves the entire Torah and Mitzvot as an oath. This is followed by the discussion on whether Noahides have a

biblical obligation to keep an oath. And especially an oath to G-d concerning doing something for G-d. The Rebbe leaves this concept unclosed with, "And here is not its place.") And in the Holy Land the Egyptians had no dominance over him. And thus, it remained that all of Israel were above any Egyptian dominance.

From this also flowed forth the concept of the "Firstborn," that the *Firstborn* is, "he is Mine (G-d's)," and (-Hachinuch, Mitzva 18), "It is from the roots of this commandment that G-d, may He be blessed, wanted to make us merit to do a commandment with the beginning of His fruit, in order that all should know that everything is His."

Now, we can also understand why the Sages emphasize, concerning the atonement for the selling of Joseph, that in the selling of Joseph 10 brothers participated, even though Reuben, and definitely Joseph, did not agree to the sale: In order that the selling of Joseph should be able to influence upon Joseph for the good, and to cause the elevation of redemption, that the Egyptians not be able to have any dominance over him, the power of a *tzibbur* (10; quorum; minyan; congregation) was needed.

We are taught (-Sanhedrin 39a), "the Divine Presence dwells in any place where there are ten (adult male Jews)." A *Divine Presence* that is above and beyond the world, and even of angels. Thus, it is from this *Divine Presence* that dwells where there are 10 from which it flows forth the empowerment that Joseph, and through him, all of Israel, remain above Egypt, above the Egyptians and the limitations of exile.

Note: In *Footnote 35* the Rebbe points out, "And this is what the verse states (Vayigash 45:8), 'you did not send me here, but G-d, and He made me a father to Pharaoh.' For the empowerment that was given to him through his being sold (by his brothers) that Egypt cannot rule over him, was not from the brothers alone, but from "but G-d," the *Divine Presence* that was drawn through them."

Therefore, when, "G-d caused this," it was not enough that there be 9 who sold Joseph, but 10 were needed, the participation of 10, Reuben or Joseph, as stated above. And nevertheless, explicitly there could only be 9, for were there to have been explicitly 10, the immediate revelation of, "the *Divine Presence* dwells," would have denied the possibility from the start that there ever be, "As a slave he was sold."

Note: In *Footnote 36* the Rebbe explains this point: The Zohar (-ibid) explains that Joseph brothers, of their own right, "were all righteous, and there was no suspicion (from Jacob) upon them." The Rebbe's father explains that the Zohar is referring even to after the action of them selling their Joseph -- meaning, not just when he sent Joseph to check upon his brothers. This all was but, "G-d caused this," in order that Israel should have dominance, "upon all of them." Therefore, if there would have been the, "the *Divine Presence* dwells," in revelation, then also the intention of the, "G-d caused this," would have been revealed here below (Israel's dominance and redemption), and then it would not have been possible to have sold Joseph as a slave.

Thus, in order that (-Psalms 105:17), "Joseph was sold as a slave," at least as it reveals itself externally (ibid, verse 19), "Until His word came," there was explicitly only 9 brothers participating. However, being that concealed within this there was the participation of 10 brothers, this brought about that the internal truth of what was taking place is that Joseph, and through him all of Israel, rose above the dominance of Egypt.

This gives us also insight as to why the "ransom for his soul," for selling Joseph is the *Half-Shekel*, from which no individual offerings in the Holy Temple can be purchased, but only Communal Offerings. The atonement for the selling of Joseph happens through revealing the internal intentions of Joseph's being sold: The empowerment of the tzibur ("the *Divine Presence* dwells") that was drawn within the selling of Joseph, and brought about the elevation of redemption, the opposite of the concepts of slavery and exile.

This is one of the concepts hidden in the term *Half-Shekel*, rather than calling it *Ten Gerah*. That the Jew feel alone he is but a *half*. In order for him to be whole he must unite with another Jew, other than himself. (*Footnote 38*: And also the notion of a *tzibur*, ten Jews, is hidden within the *Half-Shekel* which is made up of Ten Gerah.) This feeling of being but a *Half-Shekel* brings to connecting with, bonding, unity of Israel, and Love of a fellow Jew, atones and rectifies the sin of selling Joseph, which was caused by the opposite of love for a fellow Jew (-Genesis 37:4), "so they hated him."

Note: In *Footnote 39* the Rebbe explains something interesting, and says that it can at least be explained as such in a humorous manner: The *Babylonian Talmud*, as we have it today, is missing upon the first *Order of Mishnayot*: *Seeds* other than *Tractate Brochot*. Likewise, we are missing the *Babylonian Talmud's* teaching on *Tractate Shekalim*. The custom has become that while we leave the *Order of Seeds* blank, we print in the *Babylonian Talmud* the *Jerusalem Talmud's* teaching on *Tractate Shekalim*. The Rebbe is offering an explanation for this custom: Being that the entire concept of *Shekalim*, the mitzvah of *Half-Shekel* is about love and unity of Israel, thus, we use this tractate to unite the *Jerusalem* and *Babylonian Talmuds*.

With this, we will also understand why, before the *Jerusalem Talmud* states that the selling of Joseph is the reason for the *half-Shekel* it first states that the selling of Joseph caused the concept of *Redeeming the*

Firstborn Son. It is only because we understand that the selling of, "*Firstborn of Rachel*," brought forth the concept of "*Firstborn*" for all of Israel, "*he is Mine* (G-d's)," that makes possible the second concept, that of the *Half-Shekel*, from which we purchase Communal Offerings, atoning for the selling of Joseph.

Lesson : We mentioned earlier that the commentaries have two ways of counting which was the 10th brother participating in the selling of Joseph: *Reuben* or *Joseph*. From each of these we can learn a lesson in how to love a fellow Jew.

Reuben: The depths of loving a fellow Jew is to not detach oneself, and even to unite, with one who is not behaving properly. Reuben expressively did not agree with the behavior of his brothers. Reuben wanted to save Joseph and to return him to his father. Nevertheless, post facto Reuben did not detach himself from his brothers. Rather, "*And Reuben heard... and remained silent.*" And after this, Reuben participated in helping them to deal with Jacob, (-Genesis 37:31-32), "*And they took Joseph's coat... And they sent the fine woolen coat, and they brought [it] to their father...*" all together.

The lesson being, that even when speaking of, "*your fellow*," who is the category of, "*a general creation*," and outwardly seems to belong to the category of, "*distant from G-d's Torah and of His service*," still, first and foremost, one must act with, "*Love your fellow as yourself.*" Not to despair and to forsake him. But, to find the way to influence him and to, "*Bring him close to Torah.*"

Joseph: This lesson is followed by an even greater novelty, in accordance with the second opinion, that the 10th is Joseph: Even when speaking of one who is causing him pain, and even great pain, as the pain that Joseph suffered in being sold by his brothers, nevertheless, his is to feel towards that person a love for a fellow Jew. And this is not concerning *after the fact* that he should not bear anger towards him. Rather, even at the time of the action, the Mishna establishes (-Ethics of Our Fathers 1:6), "*and judge every man to the side of merit.*" Even more than this (-ibid 4:10), "*Be humble before every man .*" And it is self-understood that one is not to run away from this person, and leave him alone, just like Joseph, who allowed himself to be counted as a participant, in his own being sold.

This is especially so, when one contemplates upon the teaching of the *Alter Rebbe* (-Igeres HaKodesh Epistle 25), that everything that happens is *Divine Providence*, and albeit the other has *Freedom of Choice* and deserves a punishment for the choice that he made, "*Nevertheless, as regards the person harmed, this [incident] was already decreed in heaven.*" Thus, in truth, it is specifically the harmed who is to blame for the damage that the other caused him. Just like Joseph, who according to these commentaries, was the cause of his being sold.

More than this: Being that (-Brochot 60b: Note: in *Footnote 47* the Rebbe questions as to why the *Alter Rebbe* doesn't quote this teaching in the above mentioned *Epistle*), "*All that G-d does is done for the good,*" thus, the harmed has within this damage done to him a goodness, just as the Zohar explained concerning Joseph's being sold, that this in itself brought about the redemption.

Therefore, one is not to be angry on the other. To the contrary. And through behaving to the other in a manner of "*Love your fellow as yourself*," he diminishes, and even nullifies, the damage he is suffering from.

And through multiplying our love for a fellow Jew, to the pint of unconditional love, we will nullify the reason for exile, baseless hatred, and then automatically the outcome of this baseless hatred, the exile itself, will be nullified. And as Maimonides states (-Laws of Teshuva 7:5), "*And immediately they are redeemed,*" with the coming of our righteous *Moshiach*, speedily in our days, tangibly and practically so.