



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 16 | Ki Sisa | Sichah 1

## The Fire Within

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## 1.

### WHY THE FIRE?

On the verse, “This they shall give... a half-shekel,”<sup>1</sup> our Sages comment (cited by Rashi in his commentary on the Torah): “Rabbi Meir said: Hashem extracted a sort of fiery coin from beneath the Throne of His Glory and showed it to Moshe, saying “This they shall give’ — a coin like this shall be given.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, we find a multiple of instances<sup>3</sup> in which Hashem showed Moshe a model to illustrate His instructions:

a. “Moshe was stymied by the construction of the *menorah*, until the Holy One, blessed is He, showed him a *menorah* of fire.”<sup>4</sup>

b. “Moshe was stymied by {how to determine} the renewal of the moon... so with His finger, Hashem showed him the moon in the sky and said to him, ‘When you see a moon like this — sanctify {the month}.’”<sup>5</sup>

c. In the case of the prohibition of consuming crawling creatures<sup>6</sup> — “These are impure to you” (and other examples).

This requires clarification: In these cases, we can understand why Hashem had to illustrate these objects for Moshe, as they involve details and intricate designs. For example, the *menorah* contained goblets, knobs, and flowers, all of which had to be made from “one hammered mass,” yet, they had to be located in their proper place on the *menorah*, in their distinct forms, etc. Similarly, with regard to the “birth” of a new moon, the Jews needed to know precisely, “what size it should appear in order to be fit for sanctification”<sup>7</sup> (and they had to know with certainty that what they had seen was indeed the moon, and had to be able to describe its position in the sky. These were the criteria by which the witnesses

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<sup>1</sup> *Shemos* 30:13.

<sup>2</sup> *Talmud Yerushalmi Shekalim* 1:4.

<sup>3</sup> *Menachos* 29a.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Rashi on *Shemos* 25:40.

<sup>5</sup> Rashi on *Shemos* 12:2.

<sup>6</sup> {In the Hebrew original, “*shrotzim*,” pl.; “*sheretz*,” sing,}

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

{to a new moon} were examined, as the *Gemara* describes. [The same was true of the {non-kosher} crawling creatures; they did not know how to identify all of them.]

Conversely, Moshe should have had no difficulty in identifying a half-shekel, as it was already mentioned in the section about Avraham’s servant Eliezer.<sup>8</sup> It should have been sufficient for Hashem to instruct Moshe that the Jewish people should give a half-shekel. Why did Hashem have to show him a “fiery coin?”

*Tosfos* in *Menachos*<sup>9</sup> explains why the *Gemara* does not include the half-shekel in the list of items (*menorah*, sanctifying the moon and crawling creatures) that had presented Moshe with difficulty: “For Moshe to have been stumped about {any specific details of} the half-shekel was not even possible, because he would not have had any {general} idea of what it was, had Hashem not shown it to him.” This is completely incomprehensible: Why would Moshe be unfamiliar with (the measurement of) a half-shekel? Even if he had not known what it was, Hashem could have described its measurement and weight **verbally**.

Additionally: Even if we were to say that the precise measurement of a half-shekel could only be conveyed by a tangible model, why did it have to be with a “**fiery** coin?” It would have been more appropriate to show Moshe a silver coin, the half-shekel the Jewish people would actually have to give, similar to Hashem having showed Moshe the moon in the sky (as well as the crawling creatures).

[It makes sense that Hashem would have shown Moshe a *menorah* of fire, for there was no such prior *menorah* in existence,<sup>10</sup> whereas a half-shekel was a coin with a tangible weight and measure.]

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<sup>8</sup> *Bereishis* 24:22, and **in Rashi’s commentary**.

<sup>9</sup> Loc. cit., s.v. “*Shloscha*.”

<sup>10</sup> Though Hashem could have created a golden *menorah* to show to Moshe, the *menorah* in the *Mishkan* had to be produced by Moshe (i.e. the Jewish people), and, “The Holy One, blessed be He does not perform miracles in vain” — producing a golden *menorah*, only to destroy it (for it would not be permissible to use it outside the *Mishkan*).... Most importantly, it says, “that you are being shown **on the mountain**” regarding the *menorah* {and the only way to do this is with a *menorah* of fire}, but this is not the case for the half-shekel.

We also need to clarify: *Tosfos* in *Chullin*<sup>11</sup> resolves the question presented by *Tosfos* in *Menachos* (i.e., why is the half-shekel not mentioned among the *mitzvos* that “stymied Moshe”): “Though Hashem showed it to him, he was not baffled {about the actual coin}; rather, he wondered what could a person possibly give to atone<sup>12</sup> for his soul?<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Hashem showed him...” The two resolutions offered by *Tosfos* seem to contradict each other. According to *Tosfos* in *Menachos*, Moshe would have been utterly baffled by the half-shekel “for he would not have had any idea of what it was, if Hashem had not shown it to him.” Conversely, according to *Tosfos* in *Chullin*, Moshe “was not baffled”; he would have known the **precise** definition even if Hashem had not shown it to him, and Hashem showed it to him for a separate reason.

## 2.

### RAMBAM’S SOURCES

We can understand this by prefacing with a teaching of Rambam regarding the *mitzvah* of giving the half-shekel: “In this *mitzvah*, we are commanded to give a half-shekel every year, as the Exalted One says, ‘Each man shall give a *kofer*-offering<sup>14</sup> for his life,’ and He says, ‘This they shall give.’”<sup>15</sup> Seemingly, why does Rambam need to cite both verses; why is the verse “This they shall give” insufficient? This question is especially poignant in light of the clear description of the commandment of giving the half-shekel in the second verse: “This they shall give, everyone who goes through the counting: half a shekel.” (Whereas the verse, “Each man shall give a *kofer* offering for his life” does not contain the actual commandment to give the half-shekel; it just says that if you wish to “Take the sum of the children of Israel,” then “they shall give” a “*kofer* offering for his life” so that “there will be no plague among them when they are counted.”)

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<sup>11</sup> 42a, s.v. *Zos*.

<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Shita Mekubetzes comments in *Menachos*: “His only difficulty was: how can such a miniscule thing atone for the sin of the Golden Calf?”

<sup>13</sup> {In the Hebrew original, “*nafsho*”; lit. “his soul,” but also “his life.”}

<sup>14</sup> {Lit., “ransom.” This term will be explained in sec. 7.}

<sup>15</sup> *Sefer Hamitzvos*, positive *mitzvah* 171.

### 3.

#### WHAT WAS THE HALF-SHEKEL'S PURPOSE?

The explanation for all this is as follows: There are two laws relating to the *mitzvah* of giving a half-shekel:

- a. It must be given in one payment, as Rambam writes: “One must not pay the half-shekel in several instalments, a little today and a little tomorrow; rather, one has to contribute it all at once in a single payment.”<sup>16</sup>
- b. We must give a coin valued at “half of a silver shekel” (obviously precluding giving the equivalent amount in other denominations).

The Rogatchover Gaon<sup>17</sup> explains the reason behind Rambam’s ruling that the half-shekel must be given at once: Giving the half-shekel functioned as an offering, and it has the status of an atonement. Atonements cannot be made incrementally. (As the *Gemara* states regarding an object stolen from a convert, “If he returned it to him in halves, he did not fulfill his obligation. What is the reason? The Merciful One labeled the stolen item with the term ‘guilt.’”<sup>18</sup>)

We can view this (that half-shekel constitutes an offering and atonement) in two ways:

- a. The half-shekel was an atonement since it was used to purchase the communal offerings throughout the year, which served as atonements.
- b. The very act of giving the half-shekel served as an atonement, in the form of an individual offering.

We can posit that this is the basis for the dispute between Rashi and Rambam. Rashi writes, “Concerning that offering {of the half-shekel}, it says, ‘to atone for your souls,’ because the sacrifices are brought for the purpose of

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<sup>16</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Shekalim* 1:1.

<sup>17</sup> *Tzafnas Pane’ach Hashleima*, 3A.

<sup>18</sup> *Bava Kamma* 110a. {This teaches us that just as a guilt-offering cannot be offered at night or in halves, so, too, the stolen item cannot be returned at night or in halves.}

atonement.”<sup>19</sup> The term “to atone for your souls,” in the plural, is used in the context of giving the half-shekel. This denotes a communal atonement, for the half-shekel was used to purchase communal offerings, the purpose of which was to achieve atonement.

Conversely, Rambam derives the idea of atonement from the clause, “each man shall give an **atonement offering for his life**,” written in the singular. This does not refer to the atonement conferred by communal offerings, but to the status of the half-shekel as “an offering on its own”<sup>20</sup> — giving the half-shekel itself elicits atonement.

Conceivably, this also explains another difference between Rashi and Rambam. Rashi’s view is that a person must intentionally give the half-shekel for the purpose of the communal offerings. Rambam implies that a person’s intent is unrelated to purchasing offerings, demonstrated by the fact that in the first chapter of his *Laws of Shekalim*, Rambam discusses only the commandment and how a person gives the half-shekel. (He does not say that since the communal offerings must be bought with newly donated funds, “it is a positive biblical commandment for every Jewish man to give a half-shekel every year.” In addition, he does not even mention that the half-shekel funds were used to purchase communal offerings.) Also, the fourth chapter begins **an entirely new and independent topic: “What is done with the Temple fund?”**<sup>21</sup> It was used to purchase the daily offerings, the additional offerings, and all other public offerings...” Meaning, the purpose of purchasing the communal offerings was not pertinent to the actual giving of the half-shekel. (Rather, the half-shekel had the status of an offering of atonement on its own.) The fact that the communal offerings were actually purchased with the Temple funds (the half-shekel contributions) is a separate, unrelated concept.

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<sup>19</sup> Commentary to *Shemos* 30:15.

<sup>20</sup> *Tzafnas Pane’ach Hashleima*, *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> {A reference to the money collected via the half-shekel contributions.}

## 4.

### TWO SIDES OF THE COIN

On this basis, we can understand why Rambam cites the aforementioned two verses in *Sefer Hamitzvos* — we derive a different aspect of the *mitzvah* of half-shekel from each one. From the verse, “Each man shall give a *kofer* offering for his life,” Rambam derives that the half-shekel served as an atonement, similar to the offerings. From the verse, “**This** they shall give” — the term of “this” denoting that a single entity was given — {he derives} that the half-shekel was not given in the form of a sum total of ten (distinct) *gera* (which would have made it possible to give them in installments), but rather as one half-shekel — (in the Rogatchover’s terms) a “solitary measure,” and not a “compound measure.”

This is the basis of two laws — one concerning the *gavra*,<sup>22</sup> the giver; and the other concerning the *cheftza*, the half-shekel. From the clause, “Each man **shall give** a *kofer* offering for his life,” we derive a law concerning the *gavra*, i.e., the donor must give the half-shekel all at once, not in installments, as mentioned earlier. From the clause, “**This** they shall give” (that the item itself should be given), we derive a law concerning the *cheftza*, i.e., the obligation, “this they shall give” — the entity of a half-shekel — is fulfilled by giving a **coin** worth a half-shekel, and not by giving the monetary equivalent to the measure and weight of the half-shekel.

[We might say that this is also evident in the precise wording of Rambam: “He must give it: a) all at once, b) in a single payment.”]

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<sup>22</sup> {*Gavra*: lit. “person” is a term used in Talmudic literature to refer to laws or concepts that are person-centric, consisting of instructions to a person to do, or refrain from doing, a specific action. *Cheftza*, lit. object, refers to laws or concepts that are object-centric, consisting of instructions that a particular state of being for the object should be pursued or avoided.}

## 5.

### QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

On this basis, we can understand that the clause, “This they shall give,” means that “Hashem extracted a sort of fiery coin from beneath the Throne of His Glory and showed it to Moshe, saying, “‘This they shall give’ — a coin like this shall be given.” We can also understand why Hashem specifically showed Moshe a **fiery** coin.

The difference between fire and the other fundamental elements of Creation is as follows: The other elements (wind, water, and earth) are measured by their **quantity**, the space they occupy, or their worth and value (measured by physical parameters or quantity of value and worth). Fire is not measured by its space nor is it confined to a specific area in space; the essence of fire is more qualitative, and even a small fire can spread and grow.

Therefore, had Hashem shown Moshe a half-shekel of silver, the material with which this *mitzvah* was fulfilled, it still would have been unclear what the Jewish people were to give: Were they commanded to give the value of a silver half-shekel, and as long as they gave an equivalent value, they could have given it in any form? Did it have to be given specifically silver, equivalent to the weight of a half-shekel? Or did it have to be a coin which weighs half the weight of a silver shekel?

For this reason, Hashem showed Moshe “a sort of fiery coin” (whose “weight” was half of a shekel), to demonstrate that the *mitzvah* did not require a specific quantity — the value, or even the weight of a half-shekel of silver — but rather “the object itself,” the entity of a half-shekel coin itself.

In other words: The parameter of this *mitzvah* was not a person’s contribution must be of a certain weight of silver equivalent to the value of a half-shekel (at most this would be a (tangential) condition — that the silver should be in coin form). Rather, the primary parameter of the *mitzvah* was: “**This** they shall give” — to give **this** coin, a half-shekel.



This point was best expressed by showing Moshe “a fiery coin,” since fire is not measured by value or worth, as discussed earlier. Fire’s measure is the very existence of fire {i.e., its quality}. Obviously, the Jewish people could not give an actual fiery coin. So “this” refers to the **unique** property of the fiery coin, as it finds expression in a coin of silver.

## 6.

### TOSFOS CLARIFIED

On this basis, we can understand that the two resolutions offered by *Tosfos* (above in section 1) are not contradictory, but rather correspond to the two aspects in the giving of the half-shekel mentioned above {in section 4}: *Tosfos* in tractate *Menachos* says, “For he would not have had any idea (what sort of coin they should bring), had Hashem not shown it to him.” If Hashem had not shown a fiery coin to Moshe, he would not have known (and not merely been baffled by) the rule that “**This** they shall give,” i.e., the specifications of the **cheftza** of the coin, as elucidated earlier.

*Tosfos* in tractate *Chullin* explains that Moshe’s query related to the act of giving by the *gavra* — “What could **a person possibly give to atone for his soul?**” — since this was not a sacrifice.

## 7.

### WHO BY FIRE

On this basis — that Moshe was astonished because he was unaware that the half-shekel was considered a sacrificial offering (as *Tosfos* explains in *Chullin*) — what emerges is that by Hashem “showing him a fiery coin,” He also included (not only instruction regarding the specifications of the *cheftza* of the half-shekel, but) also clarification regarding the giving of the *gavra* (as an atonement — an offering).

The explanation is as follows: Atonement consists of two elements:

- a. Atonement that is achieved via offerings, “To atone for your souls”;
- b. “A *kofer* for his life.”

“**Atonement**” (by means of offerings) denotes (based on the translation of *kapara* — forgiveness) that a person is forgiven, and the contamination of sin is **neutralized**. “A *kofer* for his life” does not imply that a sin’s effect is neutralized; rather, *kofer* means a “**redemption** of the soul,” giving something in its stead. Thus, **the soul** is exchanged,<sup>23</sup> and consequently redeemed, as it were, like a new entity.

These two elements correspond to the two ways of purifying utensils from impurity. Immersion in **water** serves to purify a utensil from impurity. The meaning of purging in fire, “returning a utensil to the kiln” — as the *Gemara* states, “The **primary** ‘immersion’ is in fire”<sup>24</sup> — is like the effect of fire in general, which achieves the effect of reinventing the utensil as a brand new entity.

This is the difference between the atonement accomplished by offering sacrifices and the “*kofer* for his life,” by means of the half-shekel: The sacrifices would (generally) atone for unintentional sins (and at minimum), but certainly not for sins incurring *kareis*<sup>25</sup> or capital punishment. In contrast, the purpose of giving the half-shekel annually, just as it was when given the first time, was to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf, which affects the very essence {of a Jew’s connection with Hashem} — entailing capital punishment. Therefore, a “*kofer* for his life” was required, in order to generate an entirely new form of existence.

This (too) was expressed when Hashem showed Moshe a “fiery coin.” The meaning of the atonement of the half-shekel is comparable to (purging in) fire — it generates an entirely new existence.

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<sup>23</sup> In the same vein as *Shemos* 21:29-30: “...also its owner shall be put to death, insofar as ransom (*kofer*) shall be levied upon him, he shall give the redemption of his soul...”

<sup>24</sup> *Sanhedrin* 39a.

<sup>25</sup> {Lit. “Excision.” Premature death, carried out by the Heavenly court.}

## 8.

### WORTH ITS WEIGHT

Although the reason that Hashem showed Moshe a “fiery coin” was to explain that giving the half-shekel was **not** about its value or worth, but rather, “This they shall give” (as elucidated earlier) — Rashi nevertheless says that the “fiery coin” weighed the same as a half-shekel — “He showed him a sort of fiery coin **whose weight** was half a shekel.”

From the fact that Hashem wrought a miracle within a miracle — not only did He show Moshe a “fiery coin,” but the coin of **fire** had a measurable **weight** — we understand that Hashem also taught Moshe something regarding the weight, which he would not have known on his own if Hashem had not “shown him... a fiery coin **whose weight**...”

In other words: The significance of giving the half-shekel was (not only the actual “fiery coin,” but also) that the half-shekel should resemble a “**fiery** coin” that **had a specific weight**.

## 9.

### WITHOUT A WILL, IS THERE A WAY?

This will be further clarified by pointing out that Moshe’s difficulty— “What could a person possibly give to atone for his soul?” (as cited earlier from *Tosfos*) which prompted Hashem to show him a fiery coin — is taken from the *Midrash*. The *Midrash* explains there that this {directive} (“They shall give... a *kofer* for his life”) was one of three things which “Moshe heard from the mouth of the Almighty and was shocked, and retreated backwards”:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe, “Instruct the children of Israel... My offering, My food for My fire offerings,” Moshe said, “Who can supply enough offerings? If we were to offer all the animals of the field... it would not suffice for Him.” The Holy One, blessed is He, said to him, “I do

not make requests on My terms, but on their terms.” When the Holy One, blessed is He, said, “Let them make me a Sanctuary and I will dwell among them,” Moshe said, “Who can build a Sanctuary that can contain His presence? Behold, heaven and the higher heavens cannot contain You, etc.” The Holy One, blessed is He, said, “I do not make requests on my terms, but on their terms.”<sup>26</sup>

This requires clarification: Since Moshe had already heard that “I do not make requests on My terms, but on their terms” in the context of the *Mishkan*, why was he “shocked” and puzzled when he heard that “each man shall give a *kofer* offering for his life?”

Seemingly, we cannot say that Moshe was puzzled upon being informed that the “*kofer* for his life” would be for the sin of the Golden Calf, affecting the core essence of a Jew, as mentioned — for we find a similar incident in which Hashem commanded Moshe to sacrifice a bull during the days of the *Mishkan*’s inauguration, “to atone for the Sin of the Calf, which was a bull.”<sup>27</sup>

The explanation is as follows: In the case of the *Mishkan*, it is clear that the efforts of the Jewish people were “on their terms,” since their participation in the process was out of the goodness of their hearts — “everyone whose heart impels him to give”<sup>28</sup> — “everyone whose heart motivates him shall bring it.”<sup>29</sup> The same is true of the offering of the bull — for the law regarding offerings is that “He must bring it of his own free will,”<sup>30</sup> and an offering being conditional on the good will of its donor emphasizes that it is “on their terms” — according to “the abilities of the Jewish people.”

However, the *mitzvah* of the half-shekel took the form of a **mandatory requirement** for everyone to give, whether willingly or not. In addition, it was ruled that “payment is obtained by **force** from those who have not yet paid.

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<sup>26</sup> *Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:3.

<sup>27</sup> Rashi to *Shemos* 29:1.

<sup>28</sup> *Shemos* 25:2.

<sup>29</sup> *Shemos* 35:5.

<sup>30</sup> *Vayikra* 1:3.

Anyone who refuses to pay is subjected to **a levy**; a pledge is taken from him **forcibly**, even the garment he is wearing”<sup>31</sup> —

[True, there is also a law with regard to offerings {which must be given willingly} that if need be, “we compel him until **he says ‘Yes, I want to do it.’**” However, regarding an offering, a person had to **verbalize** that “I want to do it.” Although this statement seems to be extracted by force, nevertheless, it conforms with the truth, since at his innermost core, every Jew wants to fulfill Hashem’s will (as Rambam explains).<sup>32</sup> In contrast, we don’t find a requirement for a person to verbalize, “I want to do it” when he gave the half-shekel, i.e., it was possible to give it unwillingly. Now, since giving itself is merely an external act performed by one’s hand, and a person’s inner soul is not apparent in this action, therefore]

— how can **such** giving be considered “a *kofer* for his **life**,” since “his strength,” the “abilities of the Jewish people” are **absent!**

To resolve this dilemma, Hashem showed Moshe “a fiery coin, weighing half a shekel,” which He took (as described in the *Midrash*) “from beneath the Throne of His Glory,” as will be explained.

## 10.

### THE FIRE OF THE SOUL

The (inner) reason why, regarding the half-shekel, we don’t “compel him until he says ‘Yes, I want to do it’” (which is particularly difficult in light of the explanation in section 3 that the half-shekel had the status of an offering) could be because the half-shekel was brought to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf, which, as mentioned, affected the core essence of the Jewish people. It tore them away from Hashem at the deepest level, may the Merciful One save us. So

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<sup>31</sup> Rambam, Laws of *Shekalim*, 1:9.

<sup>32</sup> Laws of Divorce, end of ch. 2.

compelling him until he says, “Yes, I want to do it” (i.e., an open expression of the soul’s innermost will) would not have been effective here.

Therefore, “Hashem showed him a fiery coin” which “The Holy One, blessed be He, took from beneath the Throne of His Glory”: By dint of the {influence of the} inner dimension of the soul, as it is found within the body, the giving of the half-shekel could not be reflective of a person’s “own strength,” as explained. However, this could be achieved by dint of the **core-essence** of the soul (which is completely beyond expression, since the core-essence of the soul is the essence of **all faculties**, including even a person’s external actions).

This is the meaning of “(The Holy One, blessed be He) **showed him**” — Hashem revealed, from Above to below, how the “fiery coin” is drawn from “beneath the Throne of His Glory” — the fire of the soul, the core essence of the soul, as it is rooted Above, “beneath the Throne of His Glory,” as our Sages say, “Souls are hewn from beneath the Throne of Glory.”<sup>33</sup>

Hashem revealed and lowered this {dimension} into the “weight” {of the half-shekel} — so that the core-essence of the soul influences and permeates all the faculties of the soul here **below**, to the extent that it affects {the tangible element of} weight, etc. In other words, the “fiery coin” — the core-essence of the soul — is not distinct from the faculties that are engaged in practically giving the half-shekel; rather, the fiery coin itself — “**whose weight** was half a shekel” (and as discussed earlier, the core essence of the soul is the essence of all the faculties).

Therefore, even when a Jew gives the half-shekel without declaring, “I want to do this,” in a manner of “weight” — a physical, unenlightened giving, lacking desire and passion that weighs and drags a person down, requiring toil and even compulsion to give — the ultimate truth ({expressed in, and} accomplished by the half-shekel) is that for a Jew, even **this** kind of giving is bound with the “fire of the soul.” The truth and core of his faculty of action and

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<sup>33</sup> *Raaya Mehemna, Tzav 29b.*

his giving is a revelation of {a spiritual plane} “beneath the Throne of His Glory,” namely, the “fiery coin,” his soul’s core-essence.

## 11.

### TWO SIDES OF THE COIN, PART 2

On this basis, we can understand the commonality between the two aspects of the half-shekel that were described earlier — the rule that “each man shall give a *kofer* offering for his life” (which relates to giving {by the *gavra*}, defining it as a “*kofer* offering for his life,” i.e., an offering), and “this, they shall give” (which relates to the *cheftza*, defining the half-shekel not by value or worth, but as a coin that is half of a silver shekel). Both express the same point that the giving of the half-shekel derives from the fire (from beneath the Throne of Glory) and the core-essence of the soul.

Since the core-essence of the soul is loftier than any expressive revelations or division, we can understand that giving that derives from the core-essence of the soul shares those traits: It is given all at once, without division, and the measure of the coin is not determined by quantity (which is assessed by value and weight), but is an qualitative, essential point.

For this reason the atonement achieved by the half-shekel is in the form of “fire” (of a higher degree than the atonement via offerings, as explained in section 7), which transforms the individual into a new existence, since by the revelation of the core-essence of a person’s soul, all of his faculties are changed to the extent that he becomes a new being.

## 12.

### THE FIRE WITHIN

“The Holy One, blessed be He, took a fiery coin... and showed it to Moshe” after Moshe “was shocked and retreated backwards”: Only when Moshe — representing Divine wisdom — was shocked, etc., unable to grasp how a superficial action could lead to atonement, Hashem was moved to demonstrate, reveal, and express from Above to below, the level of “fire” in the soul, integrating it with “weight,” i.e., as the core-essence of the soul is openly expressed in the soul’s faculties, including in the *mitzvah* **actions** of a Jew.

This explanation also provides a lesson to be applied in every individual’s divine service: It is possible for a Jew not to find any pleasure or experience any passion in learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*; his observance could become perfunctory, like a body without a soul. It might even reach a point where his observance becomes an inconvenience and burden. He has to force himself to fulfill Hashem’s will, and this {internally} coerced observance is not even performed as a servant, but as someone who has no choice —

Such a person must know that when he reflects about this {dismal spiritual situation of his}, making an honest assessment — and so the Moshe within him — *chochmah* of his soul — **trembles** at the fact that he lacks all passion and feeling for serving Hashem and in fulfilling Hashem’s will — this {realization} itself arouses {the inspiration alluded to by the phrase} “He showed him a fiery coin, etc.” In turn, Hashem helps him, eliciting and showing him the aspect of “Moshe” in his soul, i.e., the fire in his soul, and the core-essence of his soul, his {revelation} is elicited into “its weight,” into all his soul faculties, including practical action, in a **revealed** manner.



### 13.

#### EVERY JEW HAS THE FIRE

Conversely, we can derive another lesson: Upon meeting someone who, at the moment, does not behave in the manner befitting a child of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, every Jew is responsible to draw that person closer to Torah and *mitzvos*. There are those who will protest and say: Why should we tell this Jew that he must put on *tefillin* now, or say the *Shema*, and the like? At this moment, he is not at that stage; he does not understand what it means; and he has no desire to do it. What value is there in persuading him to put on *tefillin*, when the only reason he consents is because he is too polite to refuse — but the *mitzvah* act itself means nothing to him?

The proper sequence should be — they claim — that first of all, we must explain things to him line by line, helping him understand {Torah and *mitzvos*} one day at a time, until he logically grasps that he must fulfill the *mitzvos*. At that point, he will begin fulfilling *mitzvos* on his own, as he will have developed a desire and pleasure in doing so.

In response to this {sophistry}, we learn a lesson from the half-shekel: When a Jew performs a *mitzvah*, even as a “weight,” devoid of any pleasure and desire, even if compelled, Hashem shows us that in truth, this is a fiery coin. The *mitzvah* he performs derives from the “fire” of his soul's essence. As such, in truth, he performs the *mitzvah* with desire and pleasure.

On the contrary — by influencing another Jew to perform a *mitzvah*, even if only by compulsion, since in truth, this *mitzvah* is connected to that Jew's soul fire, it will eventually bring “the fiery coin” to be **revealed** in {the dimension of} “weight,” in practical action, and it will become the person's manifest desire and pleasure. In the end, he will fulfill *mitzvos* with the full intensity and fire of his soul.

This will also hasten the restoration of the sacrifice offerings (which were purchased with the funds of the half-shekel), in the third Holy Temple, in the

holy city of *Yerushalayim*. Regarding this renewal, it states, “You will rebuild it with **fire**,”<sup>34</sup> and, “I will be for it, says Hashem, a wall of **fire** around,”<sup>35</sup> speedily in our days.

-From talks delivered on *parshas Shekalim*, *parshas Zachor*, and *parshas Parah*, 5733 (1973)

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<sup>34</sup> *Nachem* prayer — *Talmud Yerushalmi, Brachos 4:3*

<sup>35</sup> *Zechariah 2:9*.