

# Parshas Shekalim: Two Sides of a Coin

 Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson  
From the Sichos in English Collection

In the beginning of the Torah portion of Ki Sisa, G-d tells Moshe that when taking a census of the Jewish people, he should direct them to give a half-*shekel* each as an “atonement offering.” G-d indicated the exact type of half-*shekel* coin to be used by saying, “This is what they shall give...”<sup>1</sup>

“G-d took out a model coin of fire from under His Throne of Glory and showed it to Moshe, saying, ‘Such a coin shall they give.’”<sup>2</sup> *Tosafos*<sup>3</sup> explains that “Moshe was perplexed, thinking to himself, ‘What can a person possibly give that will serve as atonement for his soul?’ G-d therefore showed him a ‘coin of fire.’”

Why did Moshe find it difficult to comprehend how a half-*shekel* coin could serve as atonement? G-d amply rewards a Jew for performing His precepts. Consequently, it is eminently possible for a Jew to be granted forgiveness as a reward for fulfilling the precept of the half-*shekel*.

Moreover, how did the revelation of a “coin of fire” to Moshe answer his question as to how a half-*shekel* coin could possibly bring about atonement?

The reward for the performance of a *mitzvah* — such as for fulfilling the precept of the half-*shekel* — may emerge in one of two ways:<sup>4</sup>

- a) The performance of the precept itself is such that its intrinsic nature is the cause of a given reward — the reward is a direct consequence of the deed.
- b) The intrinsic nature of the precept has no direct correlation (at least rationally) to the given reward; it is only that G-d desired that a particular reward be granted for the performance of a specific *mitzvah*.

Just as there exists a whole category of commandments — *chukim*, suprarational precepts — that are not performed out of a logical imperative, so, too, there may exist various precepts that are suprarational in the sense that their *reward* is well beyond the deed itself.

This latter category is true of the reward for performing the precept of the half-*shekel*. Logically, there seems to be nothing within the intrinsic nature of donating a half-*shekel* that could effectuate atonement for a spiritual entity as lofty and rarefied as the donor’s Divine soul. Moshe was therefore unable to fathom the logical connection between the precept of the half-*shekel* and its subsequent reward.

On the other hand, Moshe could not assume that the reward of atonement totally defied logic and was indeed suprarational, for the Torah does not designate this precept as a *chok*, a suprarational statute.

G-d clarified this to him by showing him a “coin of fire,” and saying, “This is what is to be given.” This revelation to Moshe stressed that the physical coins given by the Jewish people were “coins of fire.” In actuality, they were

not mere physical coins, but also spiritual entities — entities capable of bringing about the soul's atonement.

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This insight provides us with an invaluable lesson in our own daily spiritual service. When a Jew gives a coin to a pauper, he is not merely giving a physical coin, he is [also] giving a spiritual and holy “coin of fire.” Indeed, this is true not only of charity, but of all other precepts as well. The object with which one fulfills any *mitzvah* is not merely physical but also spiritual — a “coin of [spiritual] fire.”

The performance of *all* the precepts therefore demands the intensity and fervor associated with a coin of fire, so that ultimately this fire will burn constantly within the individual's heart,<sup>5</sup> never to be extinguished.

Based on *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 229-233.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. *Shmos* 30:13.
2. *Yerushalmi*, *Shekalim* 1:4; *Tanchuma*, *Sisa* 9, *Naso* 11; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:3 quoted in *Rashi* on this verse. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XVI, p. 381, and additional sources cited there.
3. *Chulin* 42a (*Tosafos*, s.v. *Zos*); see also *Midrashim* cited in *Likkutei Sichos*, *loc. cit.*, fn. 2.
4. See *Shelah*, *Bayis Acharon* 12a-b.
5. See also *Likkutei Torah*, *Sukkos*, p. 78cff.

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