

Parshas Shekalim

This *Shabbos* we add the reading of *Parshas Shekalim* to the regular reading of the *parsha*. It opens the holiday season of *Purim* and *Pesach* which are described by the *Gemara* as, "...going from redemption to redemption." The technical reason we read *Shekalim* on or right before *Rosh Chodesh Adar* is related to the requirement to give the annual half shekel contributions to the service in the *Bais HaMikdash*. It is because the month of *Adar* is the time that the campaign would open and all Jews would begin to make their contributions to the fund for the *korbanos*, sacrifices, ahead of the deadline on *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*. However, this explanation doesn't suffice to explain how this reading prepares us mentally to experience these two holidays of redemption.

Raish Lakish (Megilla 13a) comments that *Hashem* preempted *Haman's* offer to *Achasveirosh* of a payment of 10,000 silver talents for the right to destroy the Jewish nation by having the campaign begin 14 days before *Haman's* target date on the 14th of *Adar*. *Tosfos* adds that the amount that *Haman* offered was equal to the amount of 600,000 (the number of obligated Jews at the time of the first collection) half shekels. If *Haman* matched the half shekel of all of the Jews, how did the Jews' half *shekel* negate the impact of *Haman's* offer?

The purpose of the *mitzvah* השקל מחצית השקל is to be an equalizer and unifier of the Jewish people. We are told that in this donation all must give the same amount, rich and poor. When it comes to contribute to the daily sacrificial service all are equal, the wealthy and the poor man. The poor man's struggle is to come up with his half *shekel's* השם עבודת השם are equally valued. The wealthy man's challenge is to give just a half of a shekel and not be given any special accolades for doing what everyone else is doing too. This way we all express our devotion to *Hashem* in a uniform and egalitarian way.

When *Haman* gave his 10,000 talents of silver, it was to destroy and to lump a nation together for genocide. He sought to unify our people in a most horrific way; that all would be destroyed without any special recognition to class or station in life. Our מחצית השקל separates us into individual people, each one doing what is right and contributing to the greater good. It isn't even the financial giving that is so valuable; it is the encouragement we give each other to do what is right.

This is the idea that *Parshas Shekalim* is intended to bring to the fore. Our redemption is dependent on our unity around the service of *Hashem*. When communities gather in respect and commitment to do the will of *Hashem*, then we are worthy of redemption and we can be saved from the perils of *Galus*, exile. May we merit that *Hashem* bring us to the great moment of redemption במהרה בימינו אמן.