



פרשת משפטים  
שבת מברכים אדר  
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שבט תש"פ

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## Whose slave are you?

Parshas Mishpatim begins with the laws of the Eved Ivri, the Jewish slave. The Eved Ivri is to work for 6 years and goes free in the 7th year. If the Eved loves his master and does not wish to go free in the 7th year, his master must take him to a door or doorpost and bore a hole into his ear.

Why is the Eved punished for choosing to remain with his master? And why is the punishment connected specifically to the ear?

Rashi explains; At Har Sinai Hashem declared that the Jewish people are My slaves. When the Eved chooses to remain a slave in the custody of his master, we pierce the ear that heard Hashem's declaration, and nonetheless went and acquired a master for himself other than Hashem.

If this is the reason we pierce the slave's ear, we should do so at the start of the 6 years when he first sells himself and acquires another master. Why do we only do it at the end of the 6 years and only when he chooses to remain with his master?

A person may only sell themselves as a slave in desperate circumstances, when they are poor and have no way to repay their debts.

Whilst taking another master even in these circumstances is still wrong, his actions, driven by desperation are nonetheless understandable. Our sages teach that poverty can cause a person to act in a way that is against the will of Hashem, even doing things that they would never otherwise do.

Such a slave does not treat his sale lightly. He values and appreciates the fact that he is Hashem's slave alone and does not really want to acquire a master for himself other than Hashem. He just feels that he has no other choice.

With this perspective, as soon as the 6 years are over and they are able to go free, they will jump at the opportunity to be free and once again be exclusively a servant of Hashem - fulltime.

By choosing to remain a slave even when they have the opportunity to go free (and no longer having financial pressures), the slave demonstrates that they have a different attitude altogether.

Voluntarily choosing to remain in the service of an earthly master shows that they do not truly value

being a slave to Hashem alone and are not bothered to have another master. Post-facto we see that even their initial sale was tainted by this perspective.

This is why the ear pierced only at this point in time and only when they choose to remain in servitude.

Whilst the laws of slaves are no longer practically observed, they teach us a lessons in our personal Avodas Hashem.

As servants of Hashem, our primary occupation should be to serve Him through the study of Torah and the fulfilment of the Mitzvos.

But we can't do this fulltime. Even according to Torah, we need to work to earn a livelihood. But it should not be in a manner that it detracts from our servitude to Hashem. Our pursuit of parnasa and involvement in worldliness, even when required, should not become a master - a Balabos - over us.

How do we know if we have the proper perspective? The test is on Shabbos.

The 6 days of the week when we are pursuing our parnasa, parallel the 6 years of the slave's service.

When Shabbos comes, like the slave in the 7th year, we have the opportunity to 'go free' and be liberated from our 'service' of the week. On Shabbos when we no longer have the responsibility of parnasa, we can devote ourselves as servants of Hashem alone; forgetting about our businesses and immersing ourselves in Torah, Tefillah and Avodah.

But if a person is enslaved to worldly matters, even when the Shabbos brings the opportunity to be free, they will choose to remain enslaved; thinking about their businesses and materialism instead of devoting the day to Torah and Avodah. They are effectively saying "I love my master and will not go free" even when they have the opportunity to.

The true servant of Hashem knows that even though we need to work for a living, this is not because we are subservient to it. Hashem is the one who provides our parnasa and our work is merely making the Keili. As soon as Shabbos comes, they relish the opportunity to liberate themselves and devote themselves to completely to serving their real Master.

# The weekly Halacha analysis

## Giving Machatzis Hashekel - Part 1

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

In addition to the Mitzvah of giving Matanos L'evyonim on Purim, there is a custom brought in Shulchan Aruch<sup>1</sup> of giving a half coin as a remembrance of the Machatzis Hashekel.

In the times of the Beis Hamikdash, each person would have to give a half-Shekel of silver. These coins would be used to buy the communal sacrifices, so that each Jew would have a share in the Korbanos. This yearly contribution was a Biblical Mitzvah. After the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed and the sacrifices no longer able to be brought, the Biblical Mitzvah of Machatzis Hashekel ceased.

The custom of giving Machatzis Hashekel before Purim is in keeping with the requirement of making a Zecher Lamikdash – a remembrance of the Temple practises.

The earliest source that refers to the custom of giving a Machatzis Hashekel is Mesechta Sofrim<sup>2</sup> which states; "Since Hashem knew that Haman would weigh 10,000 Kikar of silver (to be able to destroy the Jewish people), Hashem told Moshe that the Jewish people would give their Shekalim beforehand (to counter Haman's coins). Therefore the Jews should give their Shekalim before Shabbos Zachor."

The Minhag of giving Machatzis Hashekel is detailed in the writings of a number of Ashkenazi Rishonim. Most of the Rishonim<sup>3</sup> do not record this Minhag. The Mechaber does not record the Minhag in the Shulchan Aruch, however the custom is brought by the Ram"o<sup>4</sup>.

When giving the Machatzis Hashekel one should say that this is being given as a Zecher - a remembrance of the half-Shekel. One should not say that this "is" the Machatzis Hashekel<sup>5</sup> so that it does not look like one is actually pledging towards the Korbanos.

### How many coins

The Mordechai<sup>6</sup> initially writes that one should give a half of the fixed coin used in their place of residence – suggesting that 1 half coin suffices. He then continues that because the Parsha<sup>7</sup> of the donations to the Mishkan uses the word Terumah 3 times, one should give 3 coins.

The Vilna Gaon is recorded as stating that one only needs to give 1 coin, especially in a place where the half-coins are very valuable.

### Half a coin or of currency?

It is preferable that the coins that are given for Machatzis Hashekel should be called 'a half' for example a half-dollar (USA) or half-sovereign (old UK currency). The Australian 50c coin is equal to half a dollar but is not "called" a half-dollar. The Ram"o writes that in his land, one

should give "half Gedolim" (Gedolim-Polish – large Polish coins) since this is the only coin called a half.

The Vilna Gaon would give a half-Polish coin of gold, as this was the only coin called a 'half'<sup>8</sup>.

If one does not have coins that are called 'half' in their location, they should give coins which are half of the currency denomination of the place in which they live. E.g. 50c coin in Australia. The currency denomination used should be a significant amount and not half cents and the like<sup>9</sup>.

Alternatively, one may give 3 whole coins having in mind that half of each coin is for Machatzis Hashekel and the balance is for Tzedaka<sup>10</sup>.

The Biur Halacha records a practise that people would give a small amount for "Machatzis Hashekel" and the Gabbaim would give them 3 silver half-Ruble coins to use as they are both silver and are called a 'half'. He writes that this practise is not ideal since the coins are recycled and not given as a genuine gift.

### Silver weight

The Biblical Machatzis Hashekel was a silver weight based on the Shekel used for consecrated items. The Rambam<sup>11</sup> writes that this was the equivalent of 3 Drahm of silver. The Poskim give different measures of this weight ranging between 8.6 to 9.6 grams of pure silver. At current silver prices this is between \$7.65 - \$8.54 AUD.

Some Poskim<sup>12</sup> write that each of the 3 coins should have a minimum value of the half-Shekel of silver. Others suggest that it is sufficient if the combined value of the 3 coins comes to this amount.

The vast majority of Poskim do not write that there is a requirement to give the value of silver. Since this is only a Zecher, it is sufficient to give 3 coins as per above. On the contrary, trying to imitate the half-Shekel for the Korbanos by being precise on the weight could appear like one is actually pledging towards the sacrifices.

### When

The Mahari"l writes that the Minhag is to give the Machatzis Hashekel coins at Mincha on Taanis Esther. Mesechta Sofrim<sup>13</sup> records that the Machatzis Hashekel should be given before Parshas Zachor. Magen Avraham<sup>14</sup> records that the Minhag is to give Machatzis Hashekel on the morning of Purim before leining the Megillah. The Mishna Berura<sup>15</sup> rules that the custom nowadays is to give Machatzis Hashekel before Mincha and to give Dmei Megillah on the morning of Purim.

### What age

The Mahari"l writes that the obligation of Machatzis Hashekel is from age 20 and up. This follows the view of Rav Ovadiah Bartenura<sup>16</sup> that the Biblical

Mitzvah of Machatzis Hashekel was for those over the age of 20. This is derived from the Posuk<sup>17</sup> in Ki Sisa "all who enter into the records, from the age of 20 and above, shall give the Terumah to Hashem". This is the Psak of the Ram"o.

Tosfos Yomtov writes that this is subject to a Machlokes. The Rambam<sup>18</sup> rules that Machatzis Hashekel had to be given by everyone over Bar Mitzvah. Tosfos Yomtov explains that only the initial half-Shekel used for the building of the Mishkan was for those over 20. The Machatzis Hashekel given each year for the Korbanos is a separate Mitzvah and applies from the age of 13. This is also the view of the Ramban in his commentary on the Torah. Most Poskim<sup>19</sup> follow this position concerning the custom of Machatzis Hashekel.

All of the above is Min Hadin. Elya Rabbah<sup>20</sup> records that the custom nowadays is for a father to give on behalf of all of his sons, even those below Barmitzvah. If a father gives on behalf of his child even once, he must continue to do so each year<sup>21</sup>.

Magen Avraham<sup>22</sup> writes that one is not obligated to give on behalf of women and one's daughters. He takes the view that women did not give the Biblical Machatzis Hashekel and did not have a personal share in the Korbanos. This is derived from the verse ונתנו איש כופר, that each man should give an atonement the half-Shekel. However other argue and maintain that women are obligated in Machatzis Hashekel<sup>23</sup>.

Darkei Moshe quotes Mahar"l Brin that even a pregnant woman must give Machatzis Hashekel on behalf of her fetus. This is alluded to in the Posuk<sup>24</sup> כל העבר עליהפקדום. The word עובר can also be read as Ubar, meaning a fetus.

1. Ram"o OC 694:1
2. 21:4
3. Including the Rif, Rosh and Rambam
4. OC 694:1
5. Shu"t Maharsham 2:74
6. Megillah Chapter 1 Siman 777
7. Shemos 25:2-3
8. Biur Halacha 694 ליתן
9. Biur Halacha ibid. Although Aruch Hashulchan writes that in Russia one could give 3 half-Kopek coins even though they had a low value
10. Tzitz Eliezer 13:72 quoting Maharsham
11. Hilchos Shekalim 1:6
12. Kaf haChaim 694:20
13. ibid
14. 694:2
15. 694:4
16. Shekalim 1:3
17. Shemos 30:14
18. Pirush Hamishnayos Shekalim
19. See Aruch Hashulchan 694:8
20. 686:4
21. See Mishna Shekalim 1:3
22. 694:3. This view is brought in Tehillah Ledavid 47:9
23. Daas Torah, Shevet Halevi 7:183. This opinion is based on the Yerushalmi Shekalim 1:3. The Alter Rebbe rules in OC 47:10 that women are obligated to say the Korban Tomid each day as they are obligated to daven in place of the Korbanos. This seems to suggest that women did have a share in the Korbanos and likely participated in the Machatzis Hashekel.
24. ibid