

Lessons from the Chassidische Parsha

The teachings of the Alter Rebbe in Torah Ohr and Likkutei Torah

Two experiences of love

ד"ה זה יתנו וגו'

פרשת כי תשא

Ki Sisa 5782

זה | יתנו כל-העבר על-הפקדים מחצית השקל בשקל
הקדש עשרים גרה השקל מחצית השקל תרומה לה':

*"This is what they shall give, all who go through the counting;
half a Shekel of the holy Shekel, one Shekel is 20 Geira; half a
Shekel shall be an offering to Hashem"*

Parshas Ki Sisa opens with the Mitzvah of giving the half Shekel - Machatzis Hashekel. In Temple times, the half Shekel contributions were used to purchase the communal sacrifices.

In the absence of the Temple and the Korbanos, we no longer observe this Mitzvah in the physical sense. However, the spiritual lessons and application of this Mitzvah is eternal; applying to every Jew, at every time and in every place.

In the Maamarim of the Chassidische Parsha, the Alter Rebbe explains the spiritual Avodah of this Mitzvah. Particular focus is on the question why the Torah tells us the weight of the full Shekel (20 Geira) if we are only obligated to give half a Shekel (10 Geira)?

One of the constant Mitzvos is to love Hashem. The source of this Mitzvah comes from the Shema where we recite ואהבת אלקיך, "And you shall love Hashem your G-d."

Grammatically, the word ואהבת can have two meanings. The first interpretation is a directive or instruction - And you *shall* love - i.e. a commandment for us to love Hashem. The same word can also reflect an assurance for the future - And you *will* love Hashem.

The first interpretations suggests a love that we are able to attain on our own. The second suggests that the love will come automatically by itself, without any effort on our part.

Chassidus explains that both meanings are true because they describe two different experiences of love of Hashem.

The lower form of love is a love which is created through meditation. The nature of the human psyche is that when we focus on an object in our mind, thinking about it in a deep and personal way, this will arouse an emotional response towards that object. By meditating on the greatness of Hashem and the truth of His oneness, our hearts are inspired with a love for Hashem and a desire to draw close to Him.

But this earthly, created love, is limited by the natural limitations of human intellect and the extent of our reflection.

A more powerful love is the experience of love which Hashem grants to a person. This love is deeper and stronger than any

love which can be achieved through our understanding. It is a love which transcends rationale.

The former type of love is within our ability to create. And so each one of us is commanded to develop this type of love for Hashem through meditation.

The second type of love is bestowed from above and not everyone merits this revelation. Since it is not within our control to generate, there is no commandment for us to attain it. All we have is an assurance that eventually it will come to us.

The Shekel was a silver coin. In Kabbalah, silver (כסף) represents the emotion of love. The word כסף is related to the terminology of נכסוף נכספת (Breishis 31:30) meaning "you have yearned" or "desired".

Each of the two experiences of love is connected to the number 10; The lower form of love which is spawned by intellect permeates all 10 facets of the Neshama; the three intellectual qualities and seven layers of emotions. The love bestowed from above comes via the 10 Divine Sefiros.

When we have the full experience of both levels of love, this creates a total experience of Ahavah. This is the full Shekel of silver that weighs 20 Geira, alluding to the two sets of 10 of the two types of loves.

But we cannot be commanded to give a full Shekel, because achieving the whole Shekel is not within our control. Instead we are expected to give half a Shekel, to achieve the lower form of love which is within our reach.

Even those who the Torah describes as כל העובר על הפקודים must give a half Shekel. Literally this phrase means "those who are being counted". However it can also mean "all those who have transgressed the commandments". Even when we have sinned and feel unworthy or incapable, Hashem tells us that we are capable of arousing a love for Him and expects us to deliver the half that we can.

On a simple level, the lesson is that even if we cannot reach the ultimate heights, Hashem wants us to give the small amount that we are able to do and that this is of incredible importance and value.

Eventually we will have the full Shekel when Hashem reciprocates our half Shekel with His half Shekel, the powerful experience of love and delight that comes from Above. Then the second explanation of ואהבת will be fulfilled.