



Yisrael Were Saved from the Shekalim of the Wicked Haman by Announcing the Collection of Shekalim on the First of Adar

This Shabbas Kodesh, we bless the month of Adar Sheini. Thus, it is fitting that we explore the significance of the title **Shabbas Shekalim**. It signifies that the sages instituted the reading of the passage in parshas Ki Sisa pertaining to the mitzvah of donating “mAchaszit-hashekel”—one half shekel—on this special Shabbas. Here is the pertinent Mishnah (Megillah 29a): “ראש חדש אדר שחל להיות בשבת קורין בפרשת שקלים, חל להיות בתוך” —if Rosh Chodesh Adar falls on Shabbas, we read the passage discussing the “shekalim”; if it (Rosh Chodesh Adar) falls on a weekday, we read that passage on the Shabbas preceding Rosh Chodesh—namely, the Shabbas on which we bless the new month of Adar.

The rationale for this practice is explained in the Gemara: “באחד באדר משמייעין על השקלים ועל הכלאים” —on the first of Adar, they (Beit-Din) announce the (obligation of) “shekalim” and the (prohibition of) “kilayim.” On the first day of Adar, the court officials would announce that every Jew was required to donate a half-shekel to the Temple treasury for the purchase of “korbanos-tzibbur”—communal sacrifices; with those funds, the “korbanos-tzibbur” for the entire year to come, beginning on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, would be purchased. Thus, every member of Yisrael would have an equal part in those offerings. Similarly, they would announce that all visible “kilayim” (sprouts from different species of seeds growing together) be uprooted from the fields of grain. Therefore, either on Shabbas Rosh Chodesh Adar or on the Shabbas blessing the month of Adar, the passage pertaining to the “shekalim” is read to commemorate those announcements.

Then, the Gemara asks (ibid. 29b): “בשלמא על הכלאים דזמן זריעה היא, אלא על השקלים מנלן. אמר רבי טובי אמר רבי יאשיה, דאמר קרא זאת עולת חודש בחדשו, אמרה תורה חדש והבא קרבן מתרומה חדשה, וכיון דבניסן בעי אקרובי מתרומה חדשה, קדמינן וקרינן באחד באדר כי היכי דליתו שקלים למקדש.” It is understandable why they reminded the people of the prohibition against “kilayim” (on the first of Adar), because it is a time of sowing. But from where do we know that it is the fitting time to announce the collection of the “shekalim”? Rabbi Tavi said in the name of Rabbi Oshiyah: Because the passuk says: “This is the olah-offering of the new moon at its renewal.” The Torah says (regarding Nissan, the first month of the year): Renew a month by bringing the (communal) korban from a new donation (a new collection of “shekalim”). And since in Nissan, we must offer from the new donations, we advance (the reading of parshas Shekalim) and read it on the first of Adar, so that they bring “shekalim” to the Mikdash (prior to Nissan).

The “MAchaszis HaShekel” Is a Wonderful Reminder of the Importance of Unity

Now, Chazal teach us that HKB”H orchestrated that the announcement related to the “shekalim” be specifically on Rosh Chodesh Adar to save Yisrael from Haman’s evil decree. Here is the pertinent passage in the Gemara (ibid. 13b): “גלוי” וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם, שעתיד המון לשקול שקלים על ישראל, לפיכך הקדים שקליהן לשקליו, והיינו דתנן באחד באדר משמייעין על השקלים.” It was revealed and known to the Creator of the world,

that Haman was destined to weigh out shekalim for the purpose of destroying the Jews; therefore, He arranged for the Jews to have their shekalim precede his shekalim. And thus, we learned in a Mishnah: On the first of Adar, they (the Sanhedrin) announce the obligation to donate the shekalim.

The Bnei Yissaschar (Adar 2, 6) teaches us that the Torah reading on Shabbas Shekalim served as a substitute for Yisrael for the actual donation of the “mAchaszit-hashekel.” He writes that even though our sins caused the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, and the “shekalim” are no longer collected or required; nevertheless, the reading of the passage of “shekalim” in Adar is viewed by the Almighty as if the “shekalim” are being collected in the Beis HaMikdash. They provided the salvation counteracting the “shekalim” offered by Haman. (Haman promised Achashveirosh 10,000 “shekalim.”)

In this essay, I would like to soar to the heights by explaining the deeper relationship between the donation of the “mAchaszit-hashekel” for the korbanos-tzibbur and the divine salvation provided by HKB”H from the “shekalim” offered by the wicked Haman. The sources for this explanation are the sefer Binah L’Itim (Part 1, Drush 1 for Purim) and the Yismach Yisrael (Parshas Shekalim 6), who cites his father, the great Rabbi Yechiel of Alexander, zy”a.

They both rely on an explanation for the mitzvah of “mAchaszit-hashekel” presented by the Alshich hakadosh in parshas Ki Sisa (Shemos 30, 13) in the name of Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz (the author of Lecha Dodi). Giving only half a shekel reminds every Jew that he is incomplete without his fellow Jew. This practice promotes unity; it teaches us that we need each other; we are only whole when we join together. Therefore, every Jew only brings a half.

Haman Argued that Yisrael Lacked “Achdut”

Next, we will introduce what is brought down in the Shu”t (Responsa) of the Chasam Sofer (O.C. 196) in the name of the Manot HaLevi’s commentary on Megillas Esther. He explains the rationale for the mitzvah instituted by our blessed sages to give gifts on Purim (Esther 9, 19): “משלוח מנות איש לרעהו”—**sending delicacies to one another.** He refers to the passuk in the Megillah (ibid. 3, 8): “ויאמר המן למלך אחשורוש, ישנו עם אחד—מפוזר ומפורד בין העמים בכל מדינות מלכותך”**Haman said to King**

Achashveirosh, “There is a certain nation, scattered and separate among the nations throughout the provinces of your kingdom.”

We can suggest that Haman was accusing Yisrael of lacking unity. This is what he was insinuating with the words “ישנו עם אחד”—it is their role in this world to be united. In reality, however, they are **“scattered and separate among the nations throughout the provinces of your kingdom.”** They are in disarray; their communities are rife with disputes. Since they lack unity, they can be defeated and dealt with easily without fear of divine repercussions.

To correct this crucial flaw, Esther urged Mordechai (ibid. 4, 15): “ותאמר אסתר להשיב אל מרדכי לך כנוס את כל היהודים”—to gather the Jews together and reunite them as one, as a single body with a single purpose. In the merit of this unity, Esther managed to enter the king’s quarters and instigate the downfall of Yisrael’s enemy, the wicked Haman. After this miraculous turn of events, our blessed sages instituted the mitzvah of: “משלוח מנות איש לרעהו”—exchanging gifts with one’s fellow Jews—aimed at promoting unity and eliminating the separation and discord within Yisrael.

This then is the message of the statement: **“It was revealed and known to the Creator of the world, that Haman was destined to weigh out shekalim for the purpose of eradicating the Jews.”** Haman promised to give Achashveirosh 10,000 shekalim. He figured that since Yisrael neglected the vital lesson of the “mAchaszit-hashekel”—that every Jew is only a half and requires his fellow Jew to become whole—he could eradicate Yisrael, chas v’shalom, by giving shekalim in their stead. **“Therefore, He (HKB”H) arranged for the Jews to give their shekalim in advance of his shekalim. And thus, we learned in a Mishnah: On the first of Adar, they (the Sanhedrin) announce the obligation to donate the shekalim.”**

Let us elaborate. Haman planned to eliminate the Jews on the 13th of Adar. HKB”H, however, arranged for them to donate their shekalim on the 1st of Adar, the day on which the mitzvah of “mAchaszit-hashekel” was announced publicly. As explained, in the absence of a Beis HaMikdash, this is accomplished by reading the pertinent passage from the Torah either on Shabbas Rosh Chodesh Adar or on the preceding Shabbas. This practice inspired Yisrael to heed

the lesson of the “mAchaszit-hashekel” and correct their crucial flaw. By reestablishing unity in their communities, they refuted Haman’s accusation that they were in disarray and not unified. As a united people, they defeated their archenemy, the descendant of Amalek. This is the gist of their sacred remarks.

They Announce the Obligation of Shekalim and the Prohibition of Kilayim -- the Unity of Yisrael versus the Separation and Chaos of the Wicked

It is with great pleasure that we will now explain the conclusion of the statement in the Gemara: **“And thus, we learned in a Mishnah: On the first of Adar, they (the Sanhedrin) announce the obligation of shekalim and the prohibition of kilayim.”** Why did Chazal include the mention of “kilayim” in this announcement? That prohibition seems totally unrelated to the subject of “shekalim.” After all, the main point here is that HKB”H arranged for the shekalim of Yisrael to precede and trump, as it were, the shekalim of Haman. So, why was the announcement regarding the prohibition of “kilayim” included here?

We find a wonderful explanation in Ahavas YoNasan (Haftarah Parshas Shekalim), authored by the great Rabbi YehaNasan Eybeschütz, zy”a. He brings down the explanation of the Alshich hakadosh mentioned above that the mitzvah of “mAchaszit-hashekel” is designed to promote “achdut”—unity—among Yisrael. It is meant to inculcate in every Jew the understanding that he is only a half and requires his fellow Jew to be complete. Yet, it is important to note that it is critical to unite specifically with tzaddikim; in fact, it is prohibited to unite with reshaim; they must be avoided at all costs.

Thus, the two things are indeed related and were included in the same announcement: **“על השקלים ועל הכלאים”**. Yes, the mitzvah of “mAchaszit-hashekel” teaches us to unite with other Jews; however, that it strictly on the proviso that they are righteous and worthy. We must be extremely wary of “kilayim”—comingling with reshaim. In the words of Rabbi Eybeschütz, it is imperative to unite and associate with your own kind, namely other tzaddikim and not reshaim. This is why they announced the “shekalim” and the “kilayim” together; they were emphasizing that we should not associate with those who are not of the same kind.

Let us expand on this idea. The announcement included both “shekalim” and “kilayim,” because the two are related to one another. In the words of the wisest of all men (Koheles 7, 14): **“זה לעומת זה עשה האלקים”—G-d has made the one in accordance with the other**—there is a balance in the world between the positive, good forces and the negative, bad forces. If, on the side of kedushah, unity exists among Yisrael, in keeping with the lesson of the “mAchaszit-hashekel,” then Jews have the power to withstand the yetzer and remain separate from reshaim. If, however, there is a lack of unity within Yisrael, then the yetzer possesses the capacity to influence them to associate with reshaim. Conversely, if there is unity among reshaim, chas v’shalom, that prevents them from uniting with and being influenced by tzaddikim.

This is precisely what transpired in the times of Achashveirosh. Mordechai HaTzaddik advised Yisrael not to participate in Achashveirosh’s feast, because he feared that they would be corrupted by the ideas of Haman HaRasha. This is explained in the Midrash (Esther Rabbah 7, 13):

The wicked Haman contrived a serious accusation to present against Yisrael . . . Haman said to Achashveirosh, “The G-d of these people hates immorality. Place prostitutes before them and make them a feast. Decree that they must all attend, eat, drink, and do as they please”—as it states: “To do according to each man’s pleasure.” Upon seeing this, Mordechai took a stand and made a pronouncement. He told them not to go and eat at Achashveirosh’s meal . . . They did not heed Mordechai’s words; they all went to the festival hall . . . They ate, drank, became inebriated and behaved immorally. Immediately, the Satan stood up and badmouthed them to HKB”H . . . Immediately, HKB”H said to the Satan: “Bring Me a scroll, and I will inscribe on it annihilation.”

We see that Haman had the power to decree the annihilation of Yisrael, because they strayed by associating and partying with the reshaim at that vile feast. As explained, G-d created a balance between the forces of good and the forces of evil. So, by associating with reshaim, they could no longer unite with one another. Hence, Haman was able to argue: **“ישנו עם אחד מפוזר ומפורד”**—this people lacks unity and harmony.

This illuminates for us the profound words of Chazal: **“It was revealed and known to the Creator of the world,**

that Haman was destined to weigh out shekalim for the purpose of eradicating the Jews.” The Jews’ association with reshaim at that ill-fated feast—preventing them from uniting with one another—made them vulnerable. **“Therefore, He (HKB”H) arranged for the Jews to precede their shekalim to his (Haman’s) shekalim. And thus, we learned in a Mishnah: On the first of Adar, they (the Sanhedrin) announce the obligation to donate the shekalim and the prohibition against kilayim.”** The “shekalim” impress upon us the importance of associating with tzaddikim; whereas, “kilayim” impress upon us the danger of associating with reshaim. Clearly, the two go hand in hand; the two lessons together saved Yisrael from Haman’s malevolent plan.

The Amazing Connection between Mechiras Yosef and the MAChaszit-HaShekel

Following this line of reasoning, we will proceed to explain why HKB”H arranged for Yisrael to donate their shekalim in advance of Haman’s shekalim. We find an incredible chiddush in the Midrash (ibid. 7, 25) associating Haman’s decree with the cheit of “mechiras Yosef.” They expound on the passuk in the Megillah (Esther 3, 15):

“The couriers went forth hurriedly by order of the king, and the edict was distributed in Shushan, the capital city. The king and Haman sat down to drink.” Rabbi Chanin said: If a man says that the All Merciful forgoes what is due Him . . . the truth is that He is long-suffering, but in the end collects His due. He (HKB”H) said to the shevatim, “You sold your brother while eating and drinking, so will I do to you.” Thus, it is written: “And the king and Haman sat down to drink.” . . . If it was so with someone who was forgiving (Yosef) who said (Bereishis 45, 8), “It was not you who sent me here but G-d.” And, yet, see how far that offense casts its shadow; for, until the times of Mordechai, the punishment for “mechiras Yosef” is still being exacted. How much more so then with one who is not forgiving.

According to the Midrash, HKB”H tells the tribes that he will do to them as they did to their brother—i.e., negotiate their sale amidst food and drink. Just as the brothers sold Yosef while partaking of food and drink, so, too, Haman and

the King negotiated the sale of the Jews while eating and drinking. Until the times of Mordechai, the punishment for “mechiras Yosef” was still in force.

The great gaon Chida writes in Ahavas David that this explains very nicely why the miraculous geulah of Purim was orchestrated at the hands of Mordechai and Esther. For, they were both from shevet Binyamin, who did not participate in the sin of “mechiras Yosef.” This means that Haman’s decree was primarily on account of the shevatim who were involved in the sale of Yosef. That being the case, we must stipulate that the tribes of Reuven, Yosef and Binyamin—who took no part in the sale—were included in the decree due to the concept of shared responsibility. As the Gemara (Shevuos 39a) teaches in relation to the passuk (Vayikra 26, 37): **“וכשלו”** **“איש באחיו - איש בעון אחיו, מלמד שכל ישראל ערבים זה בזה”**—**“and a man will stumble over his brother”: Man will stumble because of his brother’s iniquity; this teaches us that all Jews are responsible for one another.** So, while it is true that Mordechai and Esther were spared, because they were from shevet Binyamin, what about the rest of Yisrael, who were blameworthy for “mechiras Yosef,” how were they saved from Haman’s decree?

The Sin of “Mechiras Yosef” Is Aroused by Separation

We can propose a worthy idea based on what the Chida asks in his commentary Bris Olam on Sefer Chassidim (11). Seeing as Yosef already forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery, why were they still held accountable and subject to Haman’s decree? Let us refer to Midrash Mishlei (Chapter 1): **“אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי, לא נמשכו עשרה הרוגי מלכות אלא בחטא מכירתו”** **“של יוסף. רבי אבין אומר, בכל דור עדיין החטא קיים”**—according to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, the ten martyrs were killed as retribution for the sin of “mechiras Yosef”; Rabbi Avin adds that a taint of that sin remains in every generation.

In parshas Acharei Mot (Vayikra 16, 30), the Meshech Chochmah explains that the sin of “mechiras Yosef” was due to a lack of unity among the brothers. So, whenever Yisrael are guilty of sins in matters involving man and his fellow man—characterized by discord and disputes—the sin of “mechiras Yosef” is reawakened. The Gemara teaches (Berachos 7a) that when the passuk states (Shemos 34, 7): **“פוקד עון אבות על בנים”**—

the sins of the fathers are visited on the children—this holds true when the children continue to follow in the same sinful ways as their predecessors.

So, even though Yosef forgave the other shevatim for the cheat of “mechiras Yosef,” it is only effective if Yisrael learned their lesson and do not continue to exhibit hatred of their brothers. As stated, that was not the case in the times of Achashveirosh. Yisrael were described as **“מפוזר ומפורד”**—**in disarray and separated**. Due to their lack of unity and harmony, the cheat of “mechiras Yosef” was evoked.

To remedy this ominous situation, HKB”H introduced the cure ahead of the ailment. He arranged for Mordechai and Esther from shevet Binyamin to be appointed and accepted as the leaders of Yisrael. Because they were not involved in the cheat, they possessed the power to prevail upon Yisrael to unite. This was the message Esther sent to Mordechai: **“לך כנוס את כל היהודים”**—**go, gather all of the Jews**. By encouraging them to unite and set aside their differences, Yosef’s forgiveness of his brothers was once again in effect.

In light of what we have learned, we can make sense of a teaching in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Shekalim 2, 3). HKB”H commanded that every Jew donate a half-shekel, because that is how much each brother received for the sale of Yosef. The passuk states (Bereishis 37, 28): **“וימכרו את יוסף לישמעאלים בעשרים כסף”**—**they sold Yosef to the Yishmaelim for twenty pieces of silver**. Now, twenty pieces of silver are twenty dinarim, which are equivalent to five shekalim (four dinarim per shekel). Since ten brothers were involved in the sale, each brother received a “mAchaszit-hashekel” for the sale of Yosef. Therefore, to atone for the cheat of “mechiras Yosef,” every Jew is obligated to donate a “mAchaszit-hashekel.”

Thus, we can suggest that HKB”H orchestrated it from above that every one of the shevatim would receive a half-shekel to hint to them that the tikun for the cheat of “mechiras Yosef” is “achdut.” It is crucial that all of the shevatim, all of Yisrael, understand that every individual resembles a “mAchaszit-hashekel.” The survival of Yisrael depends on it. Therefore, HKB”H commanded that a “mAchaszit-hashekel” be brought to atone for the cheat of “mechiras Yosef.”

The Month of Adar Corresponds to Binyamin Who Was Not Involved in the Sale of Yosef

I would like to propose my own explanation for why HKB”H orchestrated that they announce the collection of the “mAchaszit-hashekel” specifically on the first of Adar. As we know, the Tur (O.C. 417) writes that the twelve calendar months correspond to the twelve shevatim. According to one opinion, the order of the twelve months aligns with the birth-order of the shevatim. Thus, since Adar is the twelfth month of the year—because the year begins with Nissan—it corresponds to shevet Binyamin, the youngest of the shevatim, who had no part in “mechiras Yosef.”

Hence, we can suggest that it was ordained by HKB”H that Haman’s lot fall on the month of Adar corresponding to shevet Binyamin. Additionally, it was ordained by HKB”H that they would announce on the first of Adar the collection of the “mAchaszit-hashekel” that atones for “mechiras Yosef.” Thus, HKB”H arranged for the shekalim of Yisrael to preempt the shekalim of Haman. This prevented him from decreeing the extermination of Yisrael on account of the cheat of “mechiras Yosef,” since the sin had already been atoned for by the reading of the passage of the mitzvah of “mAchaszit-hashekel.”

This explains magnificently the institution to announce the collection of the “mAchaszit-hashekel” on the first of Adar to purchase the korbanos-tzibbur that would be offered in the Beis HaMikdash for the new year beginning in Nissan. For, before Moshe Rabeinu passed away, he blessed shevet Binyamin as follows (Devarim 33, 12): **“לבנימין אמר ידיד ה' יושכון לבטח עליו חופף עליו כל היום ובין כתפיו שכן”**—**of Binyamin, he said, “May Hashem’s beloved dwell securely beside Him; He hovers protectively over him all day long, and He dwells between his shoulders.”** Rashi comments: **The Beis HaMikdash was built on the pinnacle of his land.**

Our blessed sages comment in the Sifre: **Why was Binyamin privileged to have the Shechinah dwell in his portion? All of the other shevatim participated in the selling of Yosef; but Binyamin was not involved in the sale of Yosef. HKB”H said: “Should I tell these to build the Temple? No! When they pray to Me, I will not show them mercy. I will not**

have My Shechinah dwell in their portion, because they did not show their brother mercy."

Based on this, we can comprehend the teaching in the Gemara (Yoma 9b) that the second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of the sin of "sin'as chinam"—baseless hatred. We have learned that HKB"H chose to have the Beis HaMikdash built in the territory of Binyamin, because he was not involved in the sale of Yosef, who was sold into slavery on account of his brothers' hatred. It was precisely for this reason that when "sin'as chinam" became prevalent, HKB"H elected to destroy the Beis HaMikdash.

This explains beautifully why HKB"H commanded that a "mAchaszit-hashekel" be donated to purchase the "korbanos-tzibbur" for the Beis HaMikdash. As we have learned, the Beis HaMikdash was built in the territory of Binyamin, because his hands were untainted by the cheit of "mechiras Yosef." But when "korbanos-tzibbur" are offered in the Beis

HaMikdash on behalf of all of Yisrael, the cheit of "mechiras Yosef" might be evoked. Therefore, HKB"H commanded that those korbanos be purchased with the half-shekels donated by every Jew as his atonement for the sale of Yosef. Thus, the "korbanos-tzibbur" could be offered without any protest.

This also explains beautifully why they instituted the announcement of the collection of the "mAchaszit-hashekel" on Rosh Chodesh Adar. Since the month of Adar corresponds to shevet Binyamin who was guiltless in the matter of "mechiras Yosef," this would inspire all of Yisrael to emulate him. By having every individual donate a "mAchaszit-hashekel" to the treasury for the korbanos, they would all cleanse themselves of the guilt of "mechiras Yosef." This, too, was the strategy employed by Mordechai HaTzaddik, a descendant of Binyamin. He gathered together all of the Jews in Shushan to demonstrate their unity. Thus, everything was meant to accomplish the same goal.



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