

Good Shabbos Everyone. The intimate circle of friends of the Ksav Safer (1815-1871; Rav of Pressburg and son of the venerable Sage the Chasam Sofer, of blessed memory) were among the elite of the Torah world. This distinguished group of rabbis and friends once gathered for a seudas mitzvah - (a meal celebrating a mitzvah) at which various rabbis addressed the assembled guests.

When the Ksav Sofer's turn to speak came, he told his audience that he had with him a treasured possession that he was ready to reveal for the first time. Everyone watched in awe as the Ksav Sofer took from his pocket an authentic machatzis hashekel (a half shekel coin) that was used in the time of the Beis Hamikdash. The coin was over two thousand years old!

(← sample coin)



The discussion soon changed to the various ancient laws regarding the machatzis hashekel. The coin was passed from hand to hand, each person examining and caressing it gently with a nostalgic longing to be in contact even for a moment with the glorious bygone era or Jewish history, which all Jews hope will return soon.

The evening wore on and after a while the Ksav Sofer, not having seen the coin for what suddenly seemed a very long time, asked that it be returned to him. He asked the people on his right, but they didn't have it. He asked the people on his

left and they didn't have it either. Everyone began searching for it, and soon it became obvious that it was nowhere to be found. A stony silence fell on the room.

One of the rabbis present rose and said, "Rabbosai (honored rabbis), we simply cannot leave this room before this precious coin is found. Perhaps everyone should empty his pockets. Who knows, maybe someone inadvertently put the machatzis hashekel in his pocket with some of his other coins."

A nervous stillness pervaded the room. No one was ready to accuse any of the distinguished guests of theft — nonetheless, the coin had to be somewhere. Among the distinguished rabbis around the table sat an elderly rav. R' Yehudah Asad (1794-1866; Rav of Aszod. Hungary), who was a good bit older than the others present. He became very pale and slowly rose from his seat, as all eyes turned to him. "Honored rabbis," he began, "It is true, the suggestion of checking everyone is a good idea, but I must ask you that we wait before we check any pockets or take any action. Let us wait twenty minutes."

The eyes that had turned to him with respect now betrayed surprise. He caught the others' reaction and calmly added, "I cannot explain just yet, but please be patient, wait just twenty minutes." In deference to his seniority they agreed. It was the last thing they had expected him to say, but they had no choice but to abide by his wishes.

The time passed with quiet conversation and speculation as to why R' Yehudah had made such an unusual request. As the twenty minutes came to an end, the saintly R' Yehudah got up again and addressed the now apprehensive guests. "I beg your indulgence. Perhaps you consider this strange, maybe you even suspect me of taking the coin, but please let us wait just ten more minutes - I beg you. I will not ask for any more time."

The rabbis and guests were perplexed and impatient. Not only was it late, but they wished to resolve the matter. Yet, once again, because of their respect for R' Yehudah, they agreed to wait ten more minutes. Time passed slowly but after just a few minutes, the door of the room swung open and in ran the waiter wildly shouting that he had found the machatzis hashekel among the dishes and silverware while he was cleaning the kitchen- Obviously the coin had been placed momentarily on the table and was swept off by mistake with the dirty dishes and silverware. Laughter and joy erupted, as everyone thanked the heroic waiter profusely. The Ksav Safer was ecstatic as he beamed in relief. In the bedlam, someone went over to R' Yehudah, and soon a crowd gathered around him. "How did you know?" someone asked. "What was your reason for waiting?" R' Yehudah smiled softly and said in an apologetic voice, "My friends, it was surely not my intention to reveal to you what I now must, but under the circumstances I know you will understand."

And from his pocket he took out an authentic machatzis hashekel. After the collective gasps had subsided he continued, "As you see, I too have a machatzis hashekel of my own. However, when I saw the joy that the Pressburger Rav had in displaying his machatzis hashekel, I didn't want to show my own, for that might. Heaven forbid, diminish the pleasure he had felt in possessing such a coin. However, once the coin was missing and the suggestion was made that everyone empty his pockets, my own machatzis hashekel would have been found, and it would have been almost impossible try to explain that I had one before I came here. (Because the coin is rare.) Thus, I asked for the delay and prayed that somehow the lost one would be round and that Hashem would spare me the agony and embarrassment of trying to explain something that would be so difficult to believe," (Rabbi P. Krohn, The Maggid Speaks p. 40)

In this week's parsha Ki-Sisa, the Torah tells us about how Hashem commands Moshe Rabeinu (our teacher) to take a census of the Jewish people. The method of taking the census was for the Bnai Yisroel - the Jews to give a half shekel coin as they walked by in a processional. Why were the Jews commanded "davka" to give a half-shekel rather than giving a whole shekel? This is perhaps to teach us the importance of "achdus" - unity among Jews. One Jew gives a half and second Jew gives his half and together they have: one - "achdus" - unity. Rashi explains the power of unity in parshas Shelach. He quotes Sages saying that one person has the power to lift only 1/3 of the weight he could lift if another person helped him and the two lifted together. Spiritually speaking the same is true. When one helps another Jew, there is "achdus" - unity, and the two can elevate themselves spiritually more than if they had acted alone. We see this concept in the story. R' Yehuda Asad, of blessed memory did all that was possible to avoid dispute and fighting among Jews. We can learn from his efforts and all work toward "achdus" - unity among Jews. **Good Shabbos Everyone**

In memory of Shusha Malka bas R' Avrohom ob'm

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