


**CHABAD**  
  
**RESEARCH UNIT**

שבת..... *for Friday nights* ..... קדש

**Friday 9 March 2012 - 15 Adar 5772**  
**Sedra Ki Tisa**


**THE HALF BECOMES WHOLE**

**A**RE YOU A WHOLE INDIVIDUAL? OR DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU are only a half? Which is the healthier state? According to the Sages, looking at the beginning of this week's Sedra<sup>1</sup>, to realise that one is a half is a higher level than thinking one is whole.

The beginning of the Sedra presents the Divine instructions concerning the giving of the half shekel. The Jewish people should not be counted directly. G-d informs us that when a census is to be carried out each individual should contribute a half shekel. Then by counting the money collected one will know the number of people.

The term used for “counting” is unusual. The Hebrew words are usually translated “when you count the heads of the Jewish people” but could also mean “when you raise up the heads of the Jewish people”. The Sages tell us that this double meaning suggests that the fact of being counted in this way, causes also a spiritual elevation. Through the counting, our heads are “raised”. Why?

Here comes also a second question. Why should the Israelites be asked to give only *half* a shekel? Why not a whole shekel? Rarely do



**In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin**  
 (Yenta bas Devora) ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772  
 Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb ש'

we find the Torah doing things by halves.

Further, the Torah states the value of the shekel. One whole shekel is the equivalent of twenty small coins current at that time. This means the half shekel is just ten small coins. The Torah might have said: “give ten small coins”. Instead, it says “give a half”. What is so good about a half?

If we appreciate the importance of a ‘half’ we can also understand the way in which the giving of the half shekel elevates us spiritually.

The first step is to recognise our own limitations, both in relation to G-d and also as concerns other people. Each of us is far from perfect, and is in fact no more than a half.

Each person wishes to achieve something meaningful in life. We feel imperfect, no more than a half, yet we try to put in effort to the best of our ability. We attempt to put our entire being into our efforts, all the ten aspects of our soul, corresponding to the ten small coins. We know this is not enough. Yet, the Sages tell us, G-d promises that He will then add His ten Divine Attributes<sup>2</sup>, corresponding to the other ten coins. Together with G-d we create a whole shekel. Something important is achieved.

The same idea applies to our relations with others, whether spouse, colleague, friend or neighbour. The half shekel in the Torah helps us realise that by ourselves each of us is only a half. We form an effective whole only by joining with another.

This explains the Hebrew wording of the Sedra. Through the giving of the half shekel not only are the Jewish people counted, but also their heads, their spiritual stature, is raised.

The idea that by ourselves we are not whole is vital for our spiritual lives. Our sense of inadequacy helps us experience genuine spiritual elevation. When we discover that we need to join, with G-d and also with other people, we are closer to expressing our true self: a half which becomes a whole.

1. Exodus 30:11-34:35. 2. The ten attributes of the soul and, on an infinitely exalted plane, of the Divine, are: Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Love, Severity, Mercy, Victory, Submission, Dedication, Fulfilment.

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## *SEDRA KI TISSA*

### **FOR GOOD OR BAD**

Rachel was in big trouble. That day, during a science lesson, she had started idly to sketch a portrait of her teacher, Mrs Pickwick. Rachel had managed to exaggerate Mrs Pickwick's less harmonious features, and her portrait was not at all flattering. You might guess that Rachel and Mrs Pickwick were not on good terms.

Unfortunately, Mrs Pickwick saw Rachel showing this masterpiece to her friend, and had promptly confiscated it. The scene which followed was not pleasant, and Rachel felt very unhappy. She was now sitting in her room, struggling to compose an apology letter.

"What's up?" her father asked her, seeing her downcast face. Somewhat shamefaced, Rachel told him.

Mr Kirsh looked serious. He said, after some thought: "You know Rachel, you have a wonderful artistic talent. In the Sedra we read this week, we are told about a person who was also very talented, Betzalel. He was chosen to be in charge of building the Sanctuary. And then, later on, we also read about a terrible event - Moses goes up to Mount Sinai, but when he doesn't return on the day they expected him back, the Jews make themselves a golden calf, an idol, and start dancing around it in a horrible way".

Rachel nodded. In fact, she had drawn a scene depicting that event.

“When Moses came down with the Tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written to give to the Jews and saw what they were doing, he dropped the Tablets and they broke. It was terrible. G-d was very angry with the Jewish people”.

Again, Rachel nodded.

“Now, both of these events involved the creation of artistic objects, the first was the Sanctuary - I’m sure you’ve learnt about all the beautiful hangings and vessels it contained. The second was a calf made out of pure gold. But can you see the difference between them?”

Rachel realized what her father was getting at and turned red. She said in a small voice. “Well, the first one was what G-d wanted, but the second one made Him angry, I suppose. I - I think I see what you mean. Using my artistic skill to draw nasty caricatures of my teachers is not really what I should do with it. I should only use it for good things, like Betzalel, and not for bad, like the people who made the golden calf.”

“So what can you do to apologize to Mrs Pickwick?” her father said, pleased she had got the point.

Rachel thought hard. “I know!” she said “I can make a portrait of her - a nice one – and put it in a frame. Then I can send it to her with an apology note... That will be using my talent in a worthwhile way, and hopefully she won’t be so upset with me.”

“Good idea!” said her father. “That way you can change bad into good...”

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