

# The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

פרשת כי תשא תשי"ז ד"ה כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל בלתי מוגה

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## GIVING ONE'S BEST

**WHEN YOU COUNT [LITERALLY: LIFT] THE HEADS OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL BY THEIR NUMBERS.. THEY SHOULD GIVE A HALF SHEKEL.** The Rashab<sup>2</sup> in a discourse of 1919 explains that first we have to understand what Moses was trying to do. He was 'the faithful shepherd', meaning that he was the shepherd of faith, strengthening the faith of the Jewish people, helping them internalise their faith.

This means, says the Rashab, not only faith in the immanent Divine radiance, and not only faith in the transcendent Divine radiance, but also in the Essence of the Infinite - all should be felt as internalised faith, acting within the individual.

This process of internalisation of faith is what is meant by giving the half shekel to Moses. Through this the head of each member of the Jewish people is lifted, and their behaviour in terms of thought, speech and action is transformed. Then negative tendencies of their character traits are dissolved away, hinted to by the Hebrew word *lifkudeihem* which means 'by their numbers' but which can also relate to a term meaning 'lacking'<sup>3</sup>.

This inner purification also takes place during prayer, which can be conceived as a spiritual crucible, refining the inner being of the person. Thus in the Amidah one asks G-d for forgiveness, because after all the various stages of prayer - the preparation for the Psalms of Praise, then the Psalms of Praise (beginning with

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<sup>1</sup> Maamar Ki Tisa Et Rosh B'nei Yisroel 5717 (1957). It was printed in Dvar Malchut Ki Tisa 5776. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn (1860-1920), fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe.

<sup>3</sup> As in I Sam.20:18.

Baruch she-Amar), then the Blessings before the Shema, then the Shema, and then the opening blessings of the Amidah - one feels conscious of even a slight inner flaw as something uncomfortable, and one asks G-d to help one remove it.

Now we can understand the giving of the half shekel, which is described as consisting of ten *gerah* (a small coin), and that rich and poor have to give the same amount.

Every Jewish soul has ten spiritual qualities, relating to the Ten Sefirot. Whether it is an exalted soul, spiritually 'rich' or a relatively lowly soul, spiritually 'poor', every soul has the same ten qualities (although they radiate differing levels of intensity of the Divine). The service of the Divine consists in devoting to G-d *one's own* ten qualities, with all one's effort. This is one's giving of the half-shekel. But what about the other half? That is given in response from above, from G-d.

To understand this, consider the general idea that one should serve G-d with joy. On the one hand, this is a general demand from everyone, as it says 'serve G-d with joy' (Ps.100:2). On the other, it is a rare accomplishment, achieved only by the few, as expressed in another verse: 'rejoice, Tzaddikim, in G-d' (Ps.97:12).

This anomaly is explained by the fact that there are two levels of joy. For joy is an expression of love, and in love of the Divine there is a love within the bounds of Reason, and a higher love beyond Reason.

Love of the Divine within the bounds of Reason is demanded from everyone. One has to feel the precious quality of Torah and Mitzvot, and through this one feels joy. But this is within the bounds of Reason. Beyond Reason is the love described in Tanya ch.10 which is a love not for one's own benefit at all, whether physical or spiritual, but simply the quest to unify the Divine and the Shechinah in the lower world. This love and joy goes beyond one's personal spiritual thirst. It is a revelation from above.

The Rebbe adds that this higher level is what is meant by *hishtavut*, equanimity, as explained by the Baal Shem Tov: that one has no personal desire or need, one's only longing is to fulfil the Divine Will.

This is the second half of the shekel. By giving one's best with the ten aspects of one's being, one's own half a shekel, G-d gives in return the other half, representing the higher level of love and joy, beyond the bounds of Reason. This is the effect of Moses' helping each Jew internalise faith, so that he or she can devote their ten aspects to G-d, and also reach the higher level of Divine service represented by the second half shekel, coming from G-d.

In 1919 the Rashab taught this discourse for the generations ahead, so that we should be aware of the process of internalisation of faith that Moses and his successors till our own time are activating on our behalf, especially as Chasidim: that we should not have to think of ourselves at all, but can just be dedicated to the Divine.

This relates to Purim Katan, which relates to the verse ‘the happy heart is always joyful’ (Prov.15:15). This means a ‘broad mind’, which expresses spiritual wealth beyond Reason, without any personal desire, even in spiritual terms, which means true equanimity.

With this spiritual level of self-surrender, *mesirat nefesh*, we can all manifest the broadness of mind of the ‘happy heart’, and hope that we will never have to undergo practical self-sacrifice and that all impediments to our service will be removed, and all will be revealed in terms of visible and practical goodness.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care