



TWO HALVES EQUAL ONE

Farbrengen – 14 Adar, 5740-1980

This week is Parshat Shekalim, commemorating the commandment to contribute a Half-Shekel to the Holy Temple.

Torah tells us that every person must say: "The world was created for me." In fact, Torah asks, "Why was man created alone?" – Implying that it should have been otherwise. The answer is, he was created alone so that a Jew at the end of time should know that he is "a complete world," just as Adam was alone in the world!

In fact, it is so important to know this, that Adam was created alone just to teach us this lesson! This does not mean that when two Jews meet each being important, they remain separate, G-d forbid!

Rather, they should follow the lesson of today's Torah portion: The Mitzvah is that "when you count the Jewish People" they should each give half a shekel.

In all matters of holiness we strive for perfection; the fattest, nicest, and best must be given for holy purposes. Yet, here we are told, "the rich man shall not increase, nor the poor man decrease"; each must give specifically a half Shekel?

The idea, as explained in Mussar, Kabbalah, Chassidism, and elsewhere: This stresses that when is a Jew complete? Only when he joins with another Jew. When they remain separate, they are no more than two distinct halves. Only when they stand together does the half become whole. In fact, the verse calls it "a holy shekel" – they unite to become a holy entity.

True, even after they meet and talk "their minds are not alike," as we see in actual fact. But that is not important.

We are instructed to "Love truth and peace." The Talmud explains that although the School of Shammai held a certain case forbidden, while the School of Hillel held it permissible, nevertheless, they were each truthful, for each was true to their opinion, as they understood it which is their truth, for "a judge may consider only that which he sees." Nevertheless, together with this "truth" they also had "peace," –both coming from "love:" Not forced, nor for some ulterior motive.

This was possible because they had a true love, and love can unite opposites. In fact, when do we see true love?

When two people share the same ideology, the same behavior, and the same education and don't fight each other; that is no proof that they are truly peaceful and loving.



But when one person is a scholar and the other is a layman, one is a leader and the other a “water-carrier,” and nevertheless they are in harmony, that is evidence of true love one rooted in the Torah of Truth.

And truth never changes, so it will be a lasting love. This is hinted at in the word ‘*emet*,’ truth. The Jerusalem Talmud notes that the three letters of *emet* are the first, middle, and last letters of the alphabet. When they all unite to become one word, that is certainly truth—something which cannot change, since it brought together the beginning, the middle, and the end.

We learn the same lesson regarding the Megillah. The Ba’al Shem Tov explains the law “one may not read the Megillah backwards” to mean, “We may not read the Megillah as ancient history.” Rather, we must read it now, in our times, and relive the events now, and derive a message for today.

And surely if every part of the Megillah is current, the Megillah’s central theme is certainly relevant nowadays. What caused the great miracle? Esther said “Gather all the Jews and fast for me.” This prayer to G-d caused the decree to be annulled and the Jews enjoyed a great victory, “it was turned upside down.” How were they able to “go and gather all the Jews;” that all Jews should join in the same gathering, on the same level? After all, some Jews had enjoyed Achasverosh’s feast, while others were on the highest level of perfection: Mordechai himself, who also fasted for Esther, and Queen Esther herself, “my maids and I will also fast.”

This was possible because “they told him the Nation of Mordechai”: It was said—and recognized by non-Jews in the street— that “Mordechai’s People will not bend nor bow.”

With some issues, there may be many different opinions, just as some Jews ate at the banquet. But when it comes to a fundamental of faith, anyone who belongs to “Mordechai’s nation” will “neither bend nor bow!”

