



## MISHPATIM

THE WHOLE HALF

*A Half-Shekel Teaches Total Commitment*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Mishpatim*

Following the revelation at Mount Sinai, G-d legislates a series of laws for the people of Israel. These include the laws of the indentured servant; the penalties for murder, kidnapping, assault, and theft; civil laws pertaining to redress of damages, the granting of loans, and the responsibilities of the "Four Guardians"; and the rules governing the conduct of courts of law in administering justice.

Also included are laws

warning against mistreatment of foreigners; the observance of the seasonal festivals; the agricultural gifts that are to be brought to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; the prohibition against cooking meat with milk; and the *mitzvah* of prayer. All together, the *parshah* of *Mishpatim* contains fifty-three *mitzvot*: twenty-three imperative commandments and thirty prohibitions.

G-d promises to bring the people of Israel to the Holy

Land and warns them against assuming the pagan ways of its current inhabitants.

The people of Israel proclaim, "We will do and we will hear all that G-d commands us." Leaving Aaron and Hur in charge in the Israelite camp, Moses ascends Mount Sinai and remains there for forty days and forty nights to receive the Torah from G-d.

## QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Have you ever held back from fully committing to something—not because it wasn't worthwhile but because you weren't sure it would last?

What did you gain from that caution, and what might you have lost?



## THE *MITZVAH* OF THE HALF COIN

**The original collection:**  
a fundraiser for the sockets  
that held the beams of the  
Tabernacle's walls.

**The annual collection:**  
a fundraiser for the  
communal offerings.



# TEXT 1

Exodus 30:13-16

יג. זֶה יִתְּנוּ כָּל הַעֹבְרִים עַל הַפְּקֻדִים  
מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ  
עֲשָׂרִים גֵּרָה הַשֶּׁקֶל מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל  
תְּרוּמָה לַה'.

יד. כָּל הַעֹבְרִים עַל הַפְּקֻדִים מִבֶּן  
עֲשָׂרִים שָׁנָה וְיָמָעָלָה יִתְּנוּ תְּרוּמַת ה'.

טו. הָעֲשִׂיר לֹא יִרְבֶּה וְהַדֵּל לֹא  
יִמְעִיט מִמִּחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל לְתַת אֶת  
תְּרוּמַת ה' לְכַפֵּר עַל נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם.

טז. וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת כֶּסֶף הַכֹּפְרִים מֵאֵת  
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנָתַתָּ אֹתוֹ עַל עֲבֹדַת  
אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְהָיָה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
לְזָכְרוֹן לְפָנַי ה' לְכַפֵּר עַל  
נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם.

13. All who are counted must give a half-shekel of the sacred shekels. Twenty *gerah* is a shekel; half a shekel should be an offering to G-d.

14. Everyone who goes through the counting, from the age of twenty and upward, shall give an offering to G-d.

15. A wealthy person should not give more, and a poor person should not give less, than half a shekel with which to give the offering to G-d, to atone for your souls.

16. You shall take the silver of the atonements from the Children of Israel and use it for the work of the Tent of Meeting; it shall be a remembrance for the Children of Israel before G-d, to atone for your souls.



Regardless of the  
currency, they would  
always give **half a coin.**

## TEXT 2A

Maimonides,  
Mishneh Torah, *Laws  
of Shekels* 1:5-6

מחצית השקל, זו מצותה - שיתן מחצית מטבע של אותו הזמן.

. . . בזמן שהיה המטבע של אותו זמן דרכונות, היה כל אחד ואחד נותן במחצית השקל שלו סלע. ובזמן שהיה המטבע סלעים, היה כל איש נותן במחצית השקל שלו חצי הסלע, שהוא שני דינרין. ובזמן שהיה המטבע חצי הסלע, היה כל אחד ואחד נותן במחצית השקל אותו חצי הסלע.

The *mitzvah* of giving a half-shekel entails donating half of the coin that is the common currency at any time.

. . . When the common currency was a *darcon*, everyone gave a *sela* [half a *darcon*]. When the common currency was a *sela*, everyone gave half a *sela*, the equivalent of two *dinarim*. When the common currency was half a *sela*, everyone gave that coin, half of a *sela*.

## TEXT 2B

*Maimonides, ibid., 1:1*

ממְצוֹת עֲשֵׂה מִן הַתּוֹרָה לְתַן כָּל אִישׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל  
בְּכָל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה . . . וְאִינוֹ נוֹתְנוֹ בְּפַעֲמִים רַבּוֹת, הַיּוֹם מְעַט  
וּלְמָחָר מְעַט, אֲלָא נוֹתְנוֹ כְּלוֹ כְּאַחַת פְּעַם אַחַת.

It is a positive commandment from the Torah that every Jewish male donates a half silver coin every year. . . . This could not be paid in installments, a little today and a little tomorrow. Rather, it had to be given all at once in one payment.

## A CONTRADICTION

One must pay in full, but  
only with a half coin.



## TEXT 3

*Talmud, Zevachim 88a*

אָמַר שְׁמוּאֵל: כְּלֵי שְׁרֵת אֵין מְקַדְּשִׁין אֶלָּא  
שְׁלֵמִין, אֵין מְקַדְּשִׁין אֶלָּא מְלֵאִין.

Shmuel said, "Vessels used in worship at the Temple may only be consecrated when they are whole and full."



Everything done in the Temple was done entirely, never in part. So why were the Jews required to give half a coin?

The half-shekel reminds us that without G-d we are incomplete, only half of a whole.



תְּצוֹצְרוֹת — “trumpets”

*chatzotzrot*

תְּצִי צוּרָה — “half image”

*chatzi tzurah*

## TEXT 4

Rabbi Dovber of  
Mezeritch, Or Torah,  
p. 45b

וְזֶהוּ "שְׁתֵּי חֲצוֹצְרוֹת כְּסָף". שְׁהָאָדָם הוּא חֲצִי צוּרָה, שְׁהוּא  
רַק דָּ"ם, וְאַל"ף לְבַד כְּבִיכּוֹל גַּם כֵּן אֵינוֹ צוּרָה שְׁלִימָה.  
אֲמַנָּם כְּשִׁיתְדַבְּקוּ יַחַד נַעֲשֶׂה צוּרָה שְׁלִימָה.

The inner meaning of two silver *chatzotzrot* [trumpets] is that a human [without G-d] is merely a "half image" (*chatzi tzurah*). The human is merely *dam*—blood. The *alef* [a reference to the One G-d] alone is also incomplete, as it were.

However, when they merge, a whole image is formed.

# אָדָם — “Human Being”

*Adam*

אָדָם → #1 → One G-d

דָּם — “blood”

*dam*

A human is body and ~~see~~ soul, blood and a spark of G-d. When fused together, we complete both ourselves and G-d.

# Human Being

# TEXT 5

*Rabbi Shabtai Halevi  
Horowitz, Shefa Tal,  
Introduction, p. 1*

ידוע שהנשמות של האומה הישראלית הם חלק אלוהי ממעל, אשר על זה רמז הפסוק: "כי חלק ה' עמו" (דברים לב, ט).

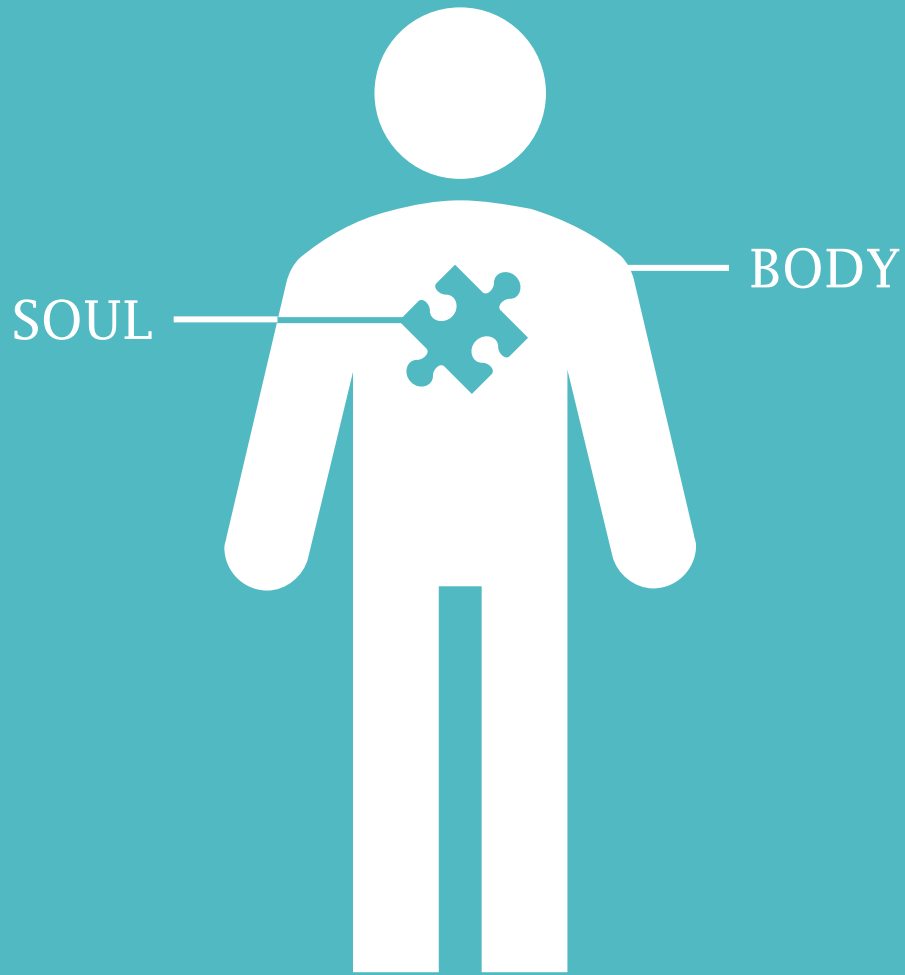
רצונו לומר, חלק מממש. כחלק שנתחלק מאיזה דבר, שהוא שנה ודומה בעינינו לאותו דבר שנתחלק ממנו, ואין הבדל והפרש בינו ובין אותו דבר. רק נשאותו דבר הוא הכל והכלל, שהוא יותר גדול מהחלק שנתחלק ממנו, אבל בעצמותם הם דומים ושונים.

כמו כן, אין הבדל והפרש בין הנשמה ובינו יתעלה ויתברך שמו. רק שהוא יתעלה ויתברך הוא הכל, הוא האור הפולל, האור הגדול הבלתי סוף, הבלתי תכלית, והנשמה היא חלק אור וניצוץ, שנתחלק מהאור הגדול ברוך הוא וברוך שמו.

It is widely known that the souls of the Jewish people are a part of G-d above. This is implied by the passage, "For His people are a part of G-d" (Deuteronomy 32:9).

This means it is literally a part. It is like a piece that was separated from a larger utensil, which is identical to and part of the utensil from which it was separated. There is no distinction between the smaller part and the larger utensil except that the utensil is the whole and larger, and the separated piece is a part and smaller. Otherwise, they are of the same material.

Similarly, there is no separation and difference between the soul and G-d except that G-d is the whole, the encompassing, endless light, and the soul is a part of this light, a spark separated from the great, blessed light.



A Jew's soul is a piece  
of G-d.

Without that piece of  
G-d, we are incomplete.

## TEXT 6

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 31, p. 133*

וְזֶהוּ עֵינֵינוּ "מִחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל", דְּהֵיִינוּ גִילּוּי הַנֶּפֶשׁ הָאֱלֹקִית,  
הַמְּעוֹרָר בְּאָדָם אֶת הַהִרְגָּשָׁה שְׂאֵינוּ אֶלָּא "מִחְצִית" בְּלִבָּד,  
וְשׂוֹאֵף וְרוֹצֵה לְהִתְאַחַד עִם "חֲצֵי צוּרָה" הַב', עִם הַקְּדוּשָׁה  
בְּרוּךְ הוּא.

This is the idea of the half-shekel. It arouses the G-dly soul within us and inculcates the feeling that we are merely half. And we long and desire to unite with our other half, G-d.

The half-shekel inspires  
us to connect to our  
higher, better half, G-d.





We are a *part* of  
G-d, which makes  
us **fully committed.**

# TEXT 7

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, ibid.*

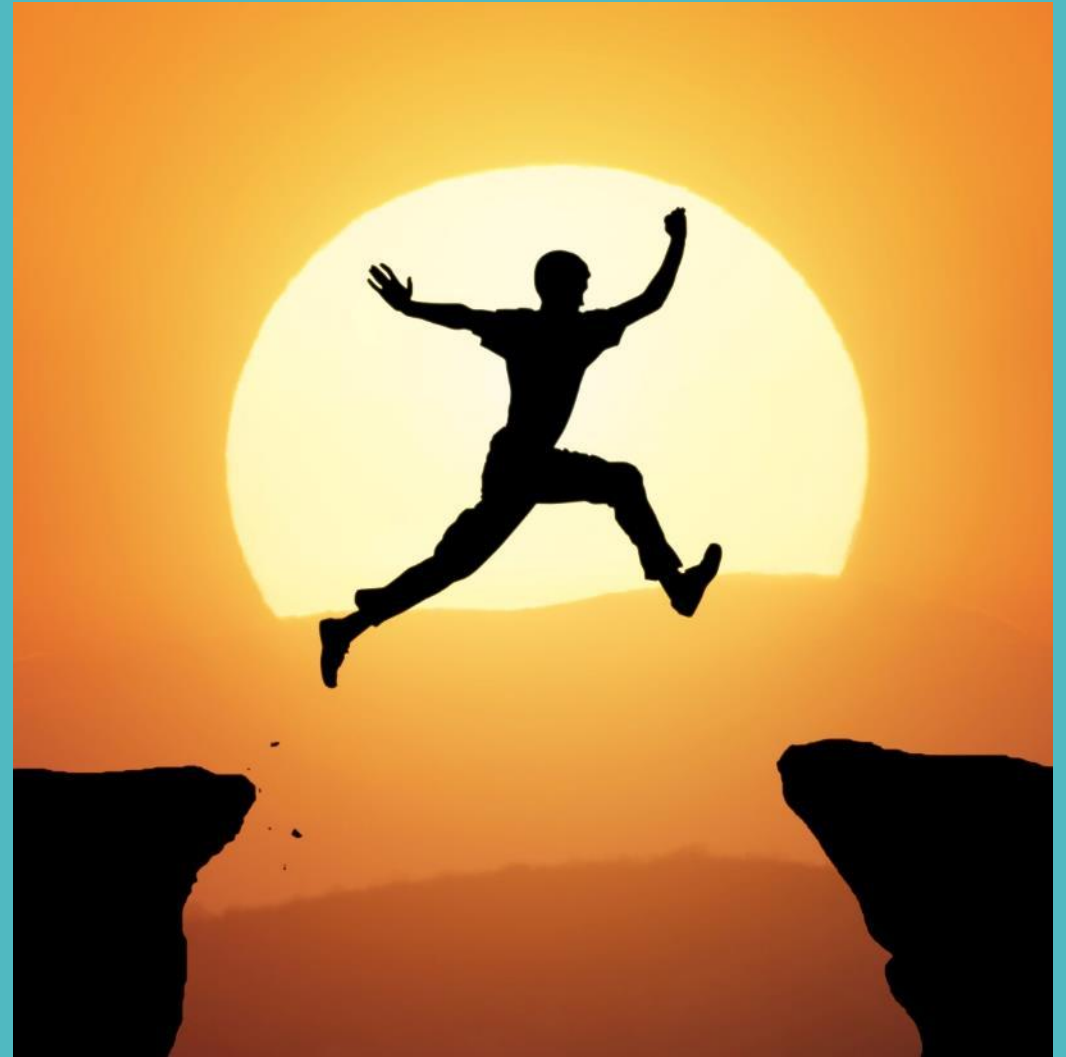
זֶה שְׁכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹכְנִים לְמִסּוֹר נִפְשָׁם לֵה' הוּא בְּאוֹפֶן "שְׂאֵי אֶפְשָׁר כָּלֵל לְכַפּוֹר בֵּה' אֶחָד". הֵיִינוּ,  
שְׂמַרְגִּישִׁים שְׂאִינָם יְכוּלִים לֵהִיּוֹת נִפְרָדִים מִמֶּנּוּ יִתְבַּרֵּךְ. וְהַרְגִּישׁ זֶה בָּא עַל יְדֵי שְׂמַעוֹרָרִים בְּעֵצָמָם  
אֶת הַתְּקַשְׁרוּתָם לֵה', שְׂיִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא הֵם כְּמוֹ שְׂתֵי חֲצָאֵי צוּרוֹת.

וּכְאֲשֶׁר מְרַגִּישׁ שׁ"ה' אֶחָד" הוּא הוּא חַיּוּתוֹ וְנֶאֱמִיתִית מְצִיאוֹתוֹ ("מִשּׁוּם שֶׁה' אֶחָד מְאִיר וּמְחַיֶּה כָּל  
הַנְּפֹשׁ"), אִם כֵּן אֵין שְׂיִיךְ שְׂיִהְיֶה פִּירוּד בֵּין הַנְּשָׂמָה וְהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שְׂאִינָם אֵלָּא כְּמוֹ "שְׂתֵי  
חֲצָאֵי צוּרוֹת".

All Jews are prepared to give their lives for G-d because a Jew is incapable of denying the One G-d. We sense intuitively that we cannot separate from G-d. This feeling is stimulated by reflecting on our innate bond with G-d, like two halves of one image.

When we sense that G-d is our life and our authentic selves because He animates our souls, any separation between G-d and us, two halves of one whole, becomes impossible.

We'd do anything for ourselves. Once we recognize that we are literally a part of G-d, we go all in. We would even give up our lives for Him.





Paying the donation in installments would suggest a relationship that grows over time.

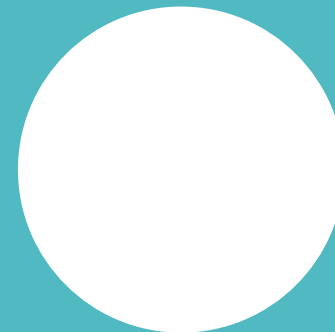
Our relationship with G-d is already complete from the very beginning.

## TEXT 8

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, ibid.*

דלא שײַך לומר שײַש לְאָדָם "קִצָּת" מְסִירַת נְפֶשׁ או  
"הַרְבֵּה" מְסִירַת נְפֶשׁ, כִּי הַפִּירוּשׁ שֶׁל מְסִירַת נְפֶשׁ  
הוא - שְׂמוּסָר אֶת נַפְשׁוֹ, דְּהֵיִנוּ נְקוּדַת הַחַיּוּת שְׁלוֹ,  
לֵה', וְלֹא תַפְכִּין בְּזֶה הַתַּחֲלָקוֹת.

It is not possible to die a little for G-d or die a lot for G-d. Self-sacrifice means that we give up our lives, the quintessential, indivisible point of life.



In this instance, giving a half-shekel *is* going all the way.

The half-shekel represents a whole commitment.



We can access this deep connection to G-d even at the very beginning of our spiritual journey—or before it even starts.

# TEXT 9

*Maimonides,  
Mishneh Torah,  
Laws of Shekels 4:1*

מתרומת הלשכה מה יעשה בה?

לוקחין ממנה תמידין של כל יום, והמוספין, וכל קרבנות הצבור ונספיהם, והמלח שמולחין בו כל הקרבנות, וכן העצים - אם לא הביאו עצים ולא מצאו אלא בדמים.

והקטרת ושכר עושיה, ולחם הפנים ושכר עושי לחם הפנים, והעמר, ושתי הלחם, ופרה אדמה, ושעיר המשתלח, ולשון של זהורית שקושרין בין קרניו.

What are the funds used for?

From these funds, they purchase the daily offerings, the additional offerings [for days of note], all other communal offerings, and the wine libations that accompany them. Additionally, these funds pay for the salt used on all the offerings and wood for the altar. The wood only needs to be purchased if no one donates timber.

They are also used to purchase the following items: spices for incense offerings, wages of those who prepare the incense, the showbread and the wages of those who prepare it, the annual offering of barley [during Passover], the two loaves [during Shavuot], the red heifer, the goat sent to Azazel [on Yom Kippur], and the scarlet thread tied between its horns.

The funds from the half-shekel donations were used to purchase the offerings.

קָרְבָּן — “offering” or “draw close”

*korban*

קִרְוּב — “closeness”

*kiruv*

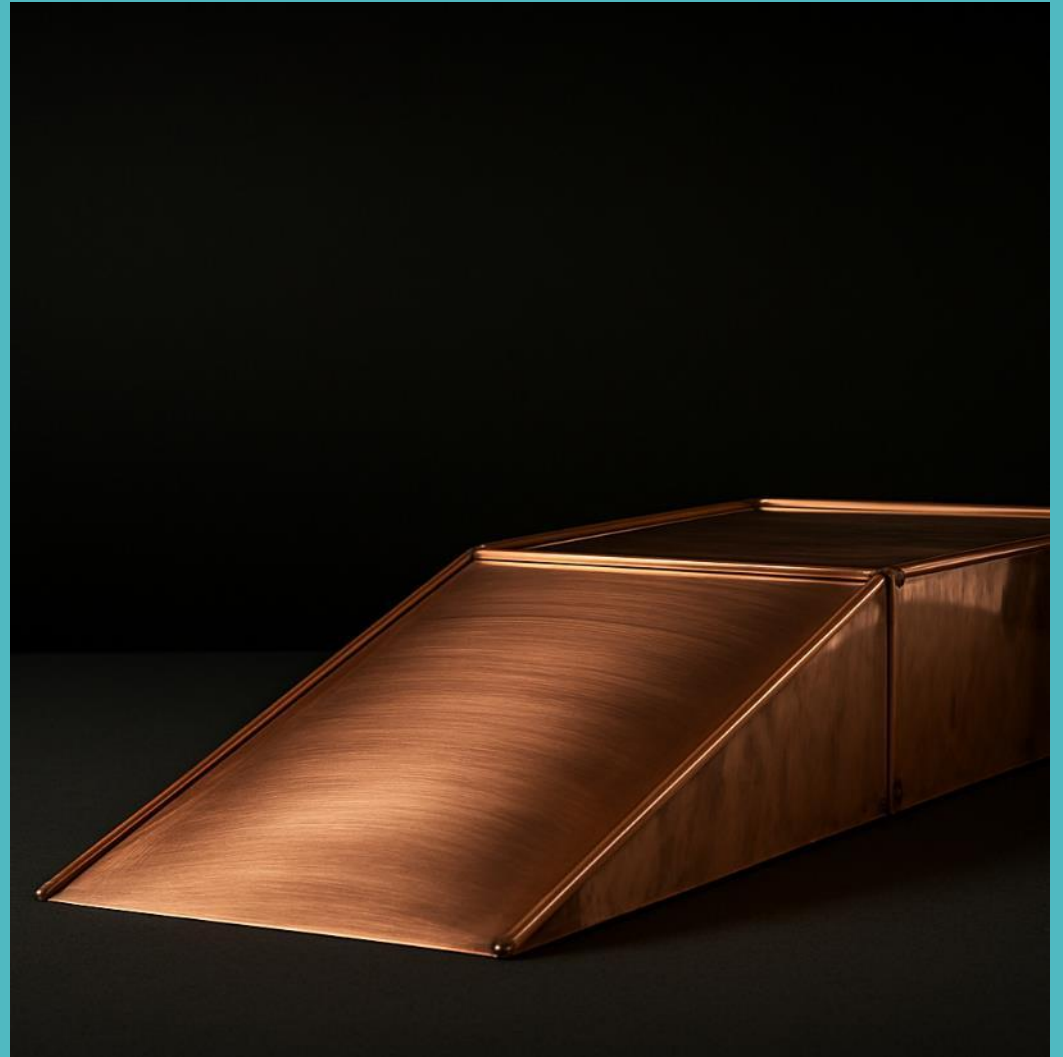
## TEXT 10

Rabbi Bachya ben  
Asher ibn Halawa,  
Leviticus 9:1

וּלְכֹדֵן נִקְרָא קֶרְבָּן, שֶׁהוּא קָרוֹב  
הַפְּחוֹת וְהַמְדוֹת.

It is called *korban* because it draws our skills and natural dispositions closer to G-d.

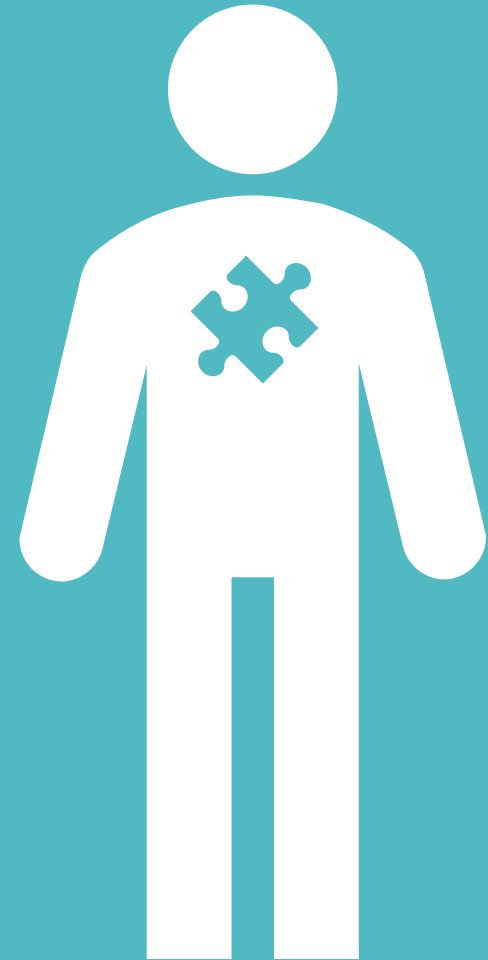
The purpose of a sacrifice is to bring one closer to G-d.





The half-shekel donations were given before the sacrifices were brought, highlighting that the Jews 'went all in' even before reaching the pinnacle of their relationship with G-d.

No matter where we are on our spiritual journey, we always remain a part of G-d and can tap into that connection at any point.



# TEXT 11

Rabbi Shneur Zalman  
of Liadi, Tanya,  
Likutei Amarim, ch. 25

נִשְׁלָא לִיפְרֵד בְּשׁוּם אוֹפֵן מִיחֻדּוֹ וְאַחַדוּתוֹ  
יִתְבַּרֵךְ, אֲפִילוֹ בְּמַסִּירַת נַפְשׁ מִמֶּשׁ, בְּלִי שׁוּם  
טַעַם וְשִׁכְל מוֹשֵׁג, אֶלָּא בְּטַבַּע אֱלֹקֵי.

וְכָל שִׁכְן בְּשִׁבְיַת הַתְּאֻוֹת, הַקְּלָה מִיִּסּוּרֵי  
מִיתָה, נְשַׁקְרוֹב אֵלָיו הַדְּבָר יוֹתֵר לְכַבּוֹשׁ  
הַיֵּצֵר . . . אֲפִילוֹ מֵעֲבִירָה קְלָה שֶׁל דְּבָרֵי  
סוֹפְרִים, נִשְׁלָא לַעֲבוֹר עַל רְצוֹנוֹ יִתְבַּרֵךְ,  
מֵאַחַר שֶׁנִּפְרָד בָּהּ מִיחֻדּוֹ וְאַחַדוּתוֹ, כְּמוֹ  
בְּעִבּוּדָה זָרָה מִמֶּשׁ, בְּשַׁעַת מַעֲשֵׂה . . .

נְשַׁלְעֵמוֹד נִגְדוֹ וְלְכַבְּשׁוֹ, קָרוֹב מְאֹד אֶל  
הָאָדָם, כְּשִׁישִׂים אֶל לְבוֹ, שֶׁלְנִצַּח . . . קַל  
מְאֹד מִיִּסּוּרֵי מִיתָה, ה' יִשְׁמְרֵנוּ; וְיִסּוּרֵי  
מִיתָה, ה' יִשְׁמְרֵנוּ, הִיָּה מְקַבֵּל בְּאַהֲבָה  
וּבְרִצּוֹן נִשְׁלָא לִיפְרֵד מִיחֻדּוֹ וְאַחַדוּתוֹ יִתְבַּרֵךְ  
אֲפִילוֹ לְפִי שַׁעָה, לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לַעֲבוּדָה זָרָה  
חַס וְשָׁלוֹם.

We would never part from G-d's unity and oneness even on pain of death. This is without rhyme or reason, but purely out of our Divine nature.

[If we are ready to do that] how much more so are we prepared to subdue our appetites, which entails much less suffering than death. [Once we realize that] even the lightest rabbinical sin transgresses G-d's will and separates us from G-d during the forbidden act as much as idolatry, it is very easy to overcome the temptation.

It's very easy to resist and subjugate our nature when we consider deeply that to conquer our nature . . . is much easier than death, G-d forbid. Yet we would lovingly and willingly accept the pain of death, G-d forbid, to not be separated from G-d's unity and oneness by an act of idolatry, even for a moment, G-d forbid.



If we are willing to die for G-d, we are certainly willing to give up whatever stands between us and Him.

כָּל הַעֹבֵר עַל הַפְּקֻדִים

*Kol ha'over al hapikudim*

“all who pass by for the count”  
or “all who transgress the laws”

Deep down, even the sinners' souls  
were “passing by to be counted,”  
ready to go all in with G-d.

# TEXT 12

*Rabbi Menachem  
Mendel of Lubavitch,  
Or HaTorah, Exodus,  
p. 1848*

וְזֶהוּ "זֶה יִתְּנוּ כָּל הָעוֹבֵר עַל  
הַפְּקוּדִים" (שְׁמוֹת ל, יג), הַיֵּינוּ  
הַמְּצוֹת. שְׂרַמ"ח מְצוֹת נִקְרְאִים  
רַמ"ח פְּקוּדִין, רַמ"ח אֵיבָרִים  
דְּמִלְכָּא. וְלָכֵן גַּם הָעוֹבֵר עַל  
הַפְּקוּדִים, אֵף עַל פִּי כֹן, חוֹבֵה  
הִיא לִיתֵּן מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל . . .

שְׂכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל, גַּם מִי שֶׁעוֹבֵר עַל  
הַפְּקוּדִים חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם, מְכַל מְקוֹם,  
זֶה יִתְּנוּ מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל. כִּי כִּיּוֹן  
שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת מִחֲצִית, מִמִּילָא  
יְהִי נִמְשָׁךְ מִלְּמַעְלָה גַם כֵּן  
הַמִּחֲצִית שֶׁמִּלְּמַעְלָה.

This is the deeper meaning of "This should be given by all who pass by for the count" (Exodus 30:13). It refers to the 248 laws that correspond to 248 Divine attributes. This means that even those who are prepared to transgress G-d's laws [and turn their back on one of His attributes] are required to give a half-shekel.

. . . Every Jew, even those prepared to transgress G-d's laws, G-d forbid, must give this half-shekel. Once the donors feel like a mere half, the higher half [G-d] reaches down from above to connect with them.



The half-shekel sparks a two-way bond: we connect to G-d, and G-d connects to us.

Every moment in life can be like a wedding when we choose to do G-d's will and join our half with His.

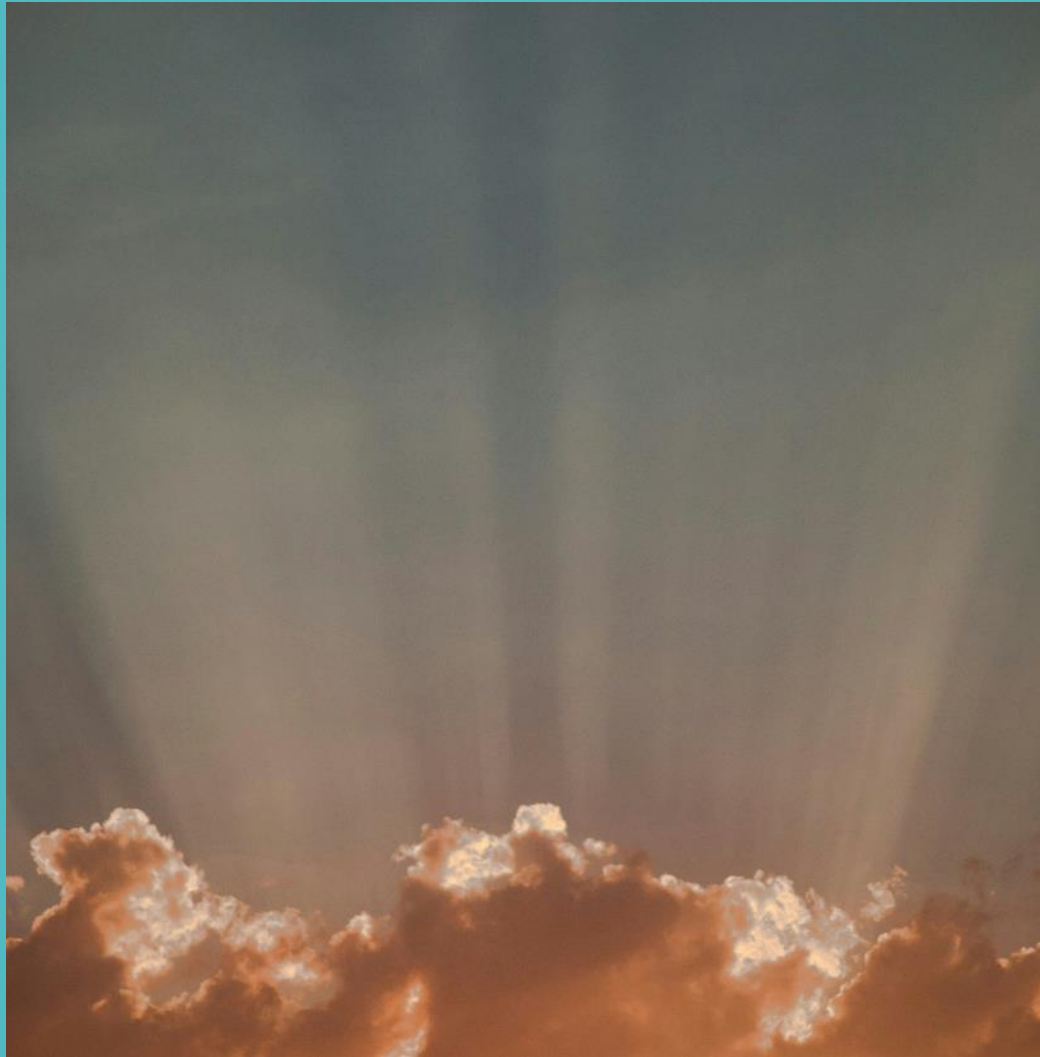


## TEXT 13

*Talmud, Eruvin 54a*

אָמַר לוֹ שְׁמוּאֵל לְרַב יְהוּדָה: "שִׂינָא, חֲטוּף  
וְאָכּוּל חֲטוּף וְאִישְׁתִּי, דְּעָלְמָא דְאַזְלִינָן מִיְנֵיהּ  
כְּהִילוּלָא דְמִי".

Shmuel said to Rabbi Yehudah, "Smart one, seize the moment and eat, seize the moment and drink [referring to good deeds], for this world from which we will one day depart is like a wedding."



Making every moment a union with G-d brings us closer to the ultimate wedding—the coming of Mashiach.

## KEY POINTS

1. Every year, Jews are required to donate a half-shekel. It reminds us that we and G-d are two halves of one whole.
2. We are required to pay our half-shekel in full. Once we feel incomplete without G-d, we can't hold back; we give without reservation, providing everything to G-d and going all in.
3. Ironically, giving a half-shekel makes a complete donation. If it were a whole shekel, we would hold some of ourselves back.
4. The donors came to this realization before they drew close to G-d. This suggests that we don't need to be over-pious to achieve this mindset. We can attain it even on the threshold of sin.
5. If we focus on our oneness with G-d and our willingness to die for G-d before we commence our transgression, we will be unable to follow through with the sin. For if we are willing to die for G-d, we are certainly willing to live for G-d.

