



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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Parshat Ki Tisa begins with the mitzvah of the *machatzit hashekel*, the half-shekel coin. This mitzvah is so beautiful. On the one hand, it was used to count the people without really counting them one-by-one (something we continue to avoid doing to this day). However, there is a tremendous amount of depth and beauty in the *machatzit hashekel*. Why a half-shekel? Why not have everyone bring a whole shekel? The idea that has always touched me the most is how this teaches us, “לא עליך” “It is not upon you to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it” (Avot 2:16). The idea being, that each and every one of us has a *tafkid*, a role, in this world, and though we can’t accomplish everything, we can accomplish what is within our *tafkid* to accomplish. Never should any of us be in a position where a person could say, “If not for me, we’d be in a terrible place.” Rather, everyone has their *chelek*, and if everyone does their part, then we can move forward and progress. That is the idea of the half-shekel; we all need each other to be whole.

Last week, I returned from a trip to America, my first trip since the beginning of the war. I was scared because since October 7th, I had only been in Israel. I know how focused everyone in Israel is on the war and helping our brothers and sisters, and I didn’t know what it would be like outside of Israel. While I left Israel knowing that our brothers and sisters overseas care, I didn’t know what percentage of their lives it was taking up,

whether an almost total percentage like here in Israel or whether it would just be a small part of their lives. I was very impressed to see it’s taken up so much of their lives.

After visiting New York, New Jersey, Atlanta, and South Florida (spending Shabbat at the Young Israel of Hollywood, Florida with my dear friend Rabbi Yosef Weinstock), I can rest assured. I can honestly say that I am finding a *Klal Yisrael* that understands the idea of “neither are you free to desist from it.” A *Klal Yisrael* who sees each other as partners, everywhere in the world. I’m finding a *Klal Yisrael* that has reached out to help Israel endless times since Simchat Torah, that has donated their time and money, that has davened with incredible intensity, and has come to be here for their brethren in Eretz Yisrael.

There were two things that really stood out to me from this past trip. I davened in sixteen different spaces during this trip, including the Young Israel of Woodmere, small shul minyanim in Boro Park, Florida shuls, and airport waiting areas. I was in every space, from old *kollel Batei Midrash* to modern shuls with stylish architecture, but there was one common denominator. Every minyan I visited, no matter where, concluded with a recitation of *Tehillim* for their brothers and sisters, for the State of Israel, for the soldiers, for their families, for those injured, and for the hostages. The question was never whether *Tehillim* would be said, but how many chapters. This includes, by the way, Satmar minyanim down in Florida. It was truly heartwarming to know

that so many Jews, of all types, are thinking about *acheinu kol Beit Yisrael* and their the Jewish brothers and sisters in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The second thing that really stood out to me is that no matter where I was asked to speak, whether it was a shul, a school, parlor meetings in people's homes, or with NCSY teens, I could see that there was a tremendous interest in what is going on in Israel. They wanted to better determine for themselves what they can do to help. Everyone wanted to know what their *machatzit hashekel* was.

Walking around New York, New Jersey, Atlanta and Florida, I saw houses with gigantic Israeli flags draped over them. I saw stores and billboards publicizing support for Israel and the hostages. It was really very heartwarming. I came back to Israel after seeing a *Klal Yisrael* so united, so together. Let me take the opportunity to thank my brothers and sisters overseas for their support. I met people who put up flags, and I also met people who tearfully but with a sense of mission sent their sons to fight for *Am Yisrael* in Gaza. I met those who took the time to learn all day that in the merit of their learning the IDF should be successful and the hostages returned. Every act of courage and support goes such a long way. Everyone is taking a *chelek* in such a beautiful way.

We at OU Israel will, *b'ezrat Hashem*, be running a campaign *zecher le'machatzit hashekel*. While we cannot give a physical

half-shekel for the *Beit HaMikdash* today, what we can do is show *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* how much we want the *Beit HaMikdash*,

by giving our half-shekel *chelek* to *Klal Yisrael*. That means not only doing our part, but also helping the organizations who work toward this goal in a big way. As Purim nears, you will see this mitzvah opportunity in Torah Tidbits and our other platforms with information on how to donate so that we can continue to do our work, both with the English-Speaking public across Israel, or with Israeli teens all over the

country through our programs.

Our latest initiative based on the request of leaders and Rabbanim is an upcoming conference "Caring for *Klal Yisrael* in Times of War." I encourage everyone who views themselves, or others view them, as community leaders to register because we all have friends and neighbors who need care and help during these challenging times. This is another way in which you can do your *machatzit* in helping those who are struggling. Please see the ad on the back page for more information.

May we continue to find our *chelek* and work together, and continue to display our beautiful unity throughout *Klal Yisrael*.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



Rabbi Avi Berman

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