

The Half-Shekel and Atonement

This weeks reading is from Parashat Ki Tisa (*Shemot / Exodus 30:11-34:35*), the Lord instructs Moshe to take a census of the people (30:12) and each person is to give a ransom (half-shekel) to the Lord when numbered. Moshe instructs to make the bronze laver and place it between the altar and the tent of meeting (30:17-18), and the perfume for incense within the tabernacle (30:23-33). Moshe spent a long time on the Mountain of Sinai (32:1) and the people asked Aaron to make gods for them to worship. Aaron took gold and made a golden calf and they worshiped the calf (32:2-6). The Lord desires to destroy the people and Moshe reminds the Lord of the covenant promises He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (32:7-13). Moshe descends from the mountain, sees the people sinning, and destroys the two tablets containing the Aseret Hadibrot (32:14-19). Moshe grinds the golden calf into fine powder, mixes it with water, and causes the children of Israel to drink it. Moshe instructs the Levites to kill those who were responsible (32:23-28). Moshe tells the people to dedicate themselves to the Lord as he returns in an attempt to make atonement for their sins (32:29-30). Moshe asks to be blotted out of God's book of life if He will not forgive the people (32:31-34). Moshe asks that the Lord's presence come with the Children of Israel (33:12-17). Moshe asks to see God's Glory (33:18). The Lord shows Moshe His glory and declares who He is, merciful, gracious, slow to anger, loving, and having grace forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin for thousands (34:6-7).

ספר שמות פרק ל

יא וידבר יהוה אל משה לאמר:
יב כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל
לפקדיהם ונתנו איש כפר נפשו
ליהוה בפקד אתם ולא יהיה בהם
גנף בפקד אתם: יג זה יתנו כל
העבר על הפקדים מחצית השקל
בשקל הקדש עשרים גרה השקל
מחצית השקל תרומה ליהוה: יד
כל העבר על הפקדים מבן עשרים
שנה ומעלה יתן תרומת יהוה: טו
העשיר לא ירבה והדל לא ימעט
ממחצית השקל לתת את תרומת
יהוה לכפר על נפשתיכם

Shemot / Exodus 30:11-15

30:11 *The Lord also spoke to Moses, saying, 30:12 'When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord, when you number them, so that there will be no plague among them when you number them. 30:13 'This is what everyone who is numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a contribution to the Lord. 30:14 'Everyone who is numbered, from twenty years old and over; shall give the contribution to the Lord. 30:15 'The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than the half shekel, when you give the contribution to the Lord to make atonement for yourselves. (NASB)*

The Parashah this week opens with the half-shekel. The Mishnah, Seder Moed Tractate Shekalim, describes in detail everything relating to the Half-Shekel: (i) how the public was to be informed, (ii) how it was collected in Israel and abroad, (iii) how to move the money in Jerusalem, (iv) its appropriations and permitted uses for the needs

