

Parshas Ki Sisa

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The Perfect Imperfection

The society in which we live is overwhelmed with constant advertisements. We are bombarded with signs, articles, emails and commercials with one underlying theme:

We are inadequate and the product in this ad will correct that problem. This theme of constant need is a major hindrance for joy and happiness. With an eye always focused on the outside we can never have a full sense of being complete.

The classic example of this in the Torah is at the epic battle of Yaakov and Eisav. As Eisav approaches his brother to slaughter him and his family, Yaakov offers a gift which Eisav at first doesn't accept. He says to Yaakov "Yesh li rav," (I have much) and his brother returns with simplicity that he does not need the animals which he is offering as a gift for "yesh li kol" (I have all).

The distinction between the words "much" and "all" speaks volumes. Eisav's approach to the world is that there is so much to gain. Each purchase of land, cattle, clothing and more is a further opportunity to amass wealth. It is echoing the advertisement theme that there is always something on the outside which can further my being. Yaakov Avinu, on the other hand, is portraying a diametrically opposing perspective. Instead of looking out, our challenge is to look in. Celebrate the perfection and completion of our world. G-d has bestowed upon us the precise amount of money, property, family etc. that is right for us. The

loving hand of our Father in Heaven is gently pressed upon our frail shoulders and nurturing us in the way that is needed for us. We are our own world. This lesson, in and of itself, is the message of a lifetime.

The problem, however, is how do we get there? Is it so simple to ignore the call of the outer world? Are we not supposed to pursue financial stability or even wealth? Some of the greatest Sages in history, such as R' Yehuda Hanasi were immensely wealthy. Even Yaakov himself amassed tremendous wealth. How do we reconcile this

sage is to be gleaned here. A half shekel is by definition incomplete. It has not reached fullness. You and I are the same. The human being has been created imperfect and fallible. Our sins are the expression of this imperfection. The task is to embrace and face that imperfection. We must realize that we are not whole and that we do sin. We are incomplete in a sense. This incompleteness, however, is not in the exterior. Life will not become whole by getting more 'things,' rather it will become whole when we burn with passion for growth. When we take the

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seeming contradiction? The answer to this question can be found at the beginning of this week's parsha.

Hashem commands Moshe to count the Jewish people using the half shekel. Every member of the census would bring this half coin as the "kofar nafsho" (atonement of his soul). The Midrash here states that Moshe Rabbeinu was perplexed and G-d had to show him a fiery image of the half shekel to understand. At first glance, this is shocking. What is so confusing about a half shekel? The Baalei Tosfos (Chulin 42a) explain that Moshe simply couldn't understand how a half shekel can bring atonement for anyone. The answer provided to Moshe was the fiery coin.

It would seem that a powerful mes-

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physical gifts that G-d has given us, whether it be like the rich R' Yehuda Hanasi or perhaps like Hillel who lived in dire poverty, and burn with a passion to connect, grow and fulfill our lives with deeds of kindness, then we become whole.

Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato zt"l, so eloquently explains in the first chapter of his ground breaking work, Mesilas Yesarim, that true completeness comes only from closeness to G-d. We ourselves will always be half shekels, but when we move inward and live passionate lives of Torah, the half shekel is completed as our Maker meets us and completes us.

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Good Shabbos!