

Happy Purim, everybody! This week's פרשה is פרשת כי תשא, which begins with the מצוה of מחצית השקל [which we already leined before, but it's in תשא כי תשא]. Regarding the מצוה of שקלים, R' Simcha Sheps, the מגיד שיעור and גיוואלדיקע ראש ישיבה, wrote a splendid ספר called שמחת התורה. I highly recommend it to anyone who can get a hold of a copy. He brings a tremendously interesting הערה on this מצוה. It says in the פרשה of (שמות ל:טו) מחצית השקל: מחצית השקל (שמות ל:טו) - everybody had to give half a shekel; ה'עשיר לא ירבה והדל לא ימעט ממחצית השקל: מחצית השקל (שמות ל:טו) - everybody has to give exactly the same. R' Simcha points out something fascinating: from this פסוק, we see that there is an איסור for an עשיר to give more than מחצית השקל. This must be understood. Why should there be an איסור to give more? Firstly, how could a person give anything different than what Hashem commanded? Secondly, why should there be an איסור if he does? After all, when it comes to צדקה, the more a person gives, the better. Why is מחצית השקל different?

R' Simcha explains that the תורה is revealing a tremendous insight into many מידות that lurk beneath the surface of a person's actions, hidden deep within the heart. Naturally, people don't like parting with their money - especially a rich person. The מנחות פ"ו ע"א in גמרא even says: וסימניך עשירים מקמצין - rich people are often frugal and very careful with their money. However, in this case, something different is at play. The פסוק says ה'עשיר לא ירבה והדל לא ימעט - everyone must give exactly the same amount. This is difficult for the עשיר to accept. Why? Because he cannot stand the fact that he is suddenly equal to the עני in his giving. It is a direct blow to his כבוד! Therefore, he wants to give more, not necessarily because of generosity, but because he cannot tolerate being on the same level as a poor person. "How can you tell me that I, a wealthy man, am the same as a poor person?" The answer is that the תורה is teaching us a profound lesson: in the eyes of Hashem, we are all equal. In the counting of כלל ישראל, each נשמה is equal. A person should not feel superior to another based on wealth. The מחצית השקל reminds us of this truth.

Now, רבי עקיבא איגר asks a question on this ענין: Who was the one giving over this מצוה? It was none other than משה רבינו. And משה רבינו was known as (במדבר י"ב:ג) - ענו מכל האדם - the humblest of all men. If משה רבינו, the leader of כלל ישראל, embodied such ענווה, how could a wealthy person think himself superior to others? Why couldn't the עשיר simply learn ענווה from משה רבינו? The answer lies at the very end of this week's פרשה. The פסוק says (שמות ל"ד:ל"ג) - וַיִּתֵּן עַל פָּנָיו מָסָה: When משה רבינו spoke to the people, they became frightened. He wondered what was happening and realized that his face was radiating an intense, brilliant light, shining like the sun, if not brighter. Therefore, he placed a מסוה, a veil, over his face. This is highly unusual behavior - why would משה רבינו walk around with a veil all the time? The תורה then states (שמות ל"ד:ל"ד) - וַיִּבָּא מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי ה' לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ וַיִּסַּר אֶת הַמָּסָה עַד צֵאתוֹ: When משה went before Hashem, he removed the מסוה. But when he spoke to the people, he wore it. What is the השכל here?

The answer is that משה רבינו was indeed the ענו מכל האדם, yet he was also the מנהיג and, in a sense, the מלך of כלל ישראל. Although he was not a coronated king, he functioned as the מלך in practice. And a מלך must uphold his כבוד and maintain a certain stature, as we know the הלכה is הלכה אין כבודו מחול - a king cannot forgo his כבוד. As a leader, משה רבינו had to project an elevated status. How did he do this while remaining the humblest of all men? By wearing a מסוה. The מסוה was not meant to cover arrogance - it was meant to conceal his humility. To the people, he appeared as a figure of grandeur and leadership. But when he stood before Hashem, he had no need for external coverings - there, he could reveal his true self, the ענו מכל האדם. This teaches us a powerful lesson. The עשיר who struggles with מחצית השקל makes a mistake - he sees his wealth as a measure of status. But the true measure of greatness is ענווה, knowing how to project leadership while still maintaining humility because we recognize that we are all equal before Hashem.

May we take this lesson to heart, and may we always strive to do what is right. Though you may be hearing this after פורים, that's okay - שמחה is not limited to one day. We should always strive to עבדו את ה' - בשמחה, and may we be זוכה to hear great שמחות by all of ישראל. Good Shabbos!

