

# The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn



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## A ROCK, A COVENANT, AND HALF A COIN

One of the main subjects of Parshas Ki Sisa is the *chet ha'egel* and its atonement. The beginning of the *parshah*, too, deals with the *kaparah* for this sin. As many commentators explain, when the *posuk* states that the *machatzis hashekel* was to be given "*lechaper al nafshoseichem*—to atone for your souls," this mainly refers to the *kaparah* for the *chet ha'egel*.

[The Midrash further explains that this atonement is reflected in the requirement to give *half* a shekel, corresponding to the fact that the Jews sinned at *midday*.]

In addition to the *machatzis hashekel*, there are two more concepts mentioned in the *parshah* which, upon closer examination, also reflect the *kaparah* for the *chet ha'egel*. The first concept can be found when the Torah relates how Hashem revealed the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy to Moshe. Hashem commands Moshe to stand on the *tzur* (rock), and continues that when His Glory would pass by, He would hide Moshe within the crevice in the rock. As we will see, the idea of *tzur* sheds light on the *kaparah* for the *chet ha'egel*.

The second concept is that of a *bris*. When Moshe pleaded with Hashem to forgive the Jews, Hashem responded, "*Hinei Anochi kores bris*—I hereby enact a *bris*." The idea of *krisas bris* also helps explain how this *kaparah* was achieved.

### WHAT DOES KAPARAH MEAN?

To understand this, we must first explain what *kaparah* means. *Kaparah* doesn't merely mean that Hashem does not punish the person for the sin he committed. The word *kaparah* can also be translated as "cleanse"; in other words, Hashem wipes away the "dirt" that accumulated due to the sin.

The same is true in our case: Hashem cleansed the Jews from the spiritual filth that the *chet ha'egel* brought about. How so? Through *tzur*, *krisas bris*, and *machatzis hashekel*.

### HIDDEN FIRE

Let's begin with *tzur*. The word *tzur* can mean "source" (as in the

verse, "*Habitu el tzur chutzavtem*—look at the 'rock' from where you were hewn"). As it applies to a Jew, *tzur* refers (not to how he appears externally, but rather) to his true existence, the way he exists in his source.

*Tzur* can also refer to *tzur hachalamish*, a type of rock that has the capacity for fire hidden within it. Through rubbing or striking

the rock, it is possible to bring the fire out to the open.

Open fire requires two conditions to exist: it needs something to hold it—be it a candle, wood, or another type of fuel—and no water may be poured over it, lest it be extinguished. The same applies to spiritual fire, the "fire" of G-dliness: if one wants G-dly fire to reside within him, he must have the proper vessels to contain the fire—

namely, Torah and *mitzvos*—and he must stay away from *aveiros*, which can extinguish the flames.

However, none of these conditions apply to "fire" hidden within a stone. Such fire does not need anything to sustain it, and the stone can lie in water for years and still retain the ability to produce fire.

The same is true with a Jew. It is possible that he does not possess an open G-dly fire, either because he is lacking Torah and *mitzvos* to grasp it, or because he has committed *aveiros* that extinguished it. However, this is only true when looking at the Jew's external appearance. By contrast, the way he exists in his source (the first translation of *tzur*), he still possesses a hidden fire that is always complete. All that is needed is to find the right way to reveal it; once that is accomplished, all the "dirt" that accumulated through the person's misconduct is washed away.

### CLOSER THAN GLUE

Let's analyze the second concept—the idea of *krisas bris*.

In days of old, how was a *bris* made? The people making the *bris* would cut an entity (such as a calf) in half and walk between the two pieces.

When choosing an action to represent an idea, the action must

reflect that idea. Here, where two people desire to increase their connection, it would seem more appropriate to take a rope or glue and attach themselves together with it (or something along those lines). Why do what appears to be quite the opposite—to *split* something in half?

Let's take two people who are close friends. Despite their closeness, they are still two distinct individuals. Therefore, as long as they each act in a way their colleague approves, they will remain friends; but as soon as they change their conduct, the friendship will cease.

The purpose of a *krisas bris* is to change the dynamics of a friendship so that the two individuals are like *one person*. Just as a person continues to love himself despite his faults, the friends will remain close even if their conduct has altered.

How is this accomplished? Not through taking a rope and tying themselves together—that would still leave them as two separate people. Rather, they divide a single entity and walk between the parts, to symbolize that just as the parts are two halves of a *single* whole, they are similarly like *one* person in two bodies.

When Moshe asked Hashem to forgive the Jews, Hashem replied that He would make a *bris*, joining Him and the Jews as a single entity. When this is accomplished, Hashem loves us despite our sins and will never replace us with another nation, because we are His children and are one with Him.

Moreover: Since the essence of a Jew is that he is one with Hashem, it is clear that any sin is only external, due to the influence of the *yetzer hara*. Deep down, however, every Jew desires to connect to Hashem through Torah and *mitzvos*. When the essence of a Jew is revealed (through a *krisas bris*), his misdeeds disappear and atonement is achieved.

## TWO HALVES OF ONE WHOLE

Finally, we have the *machatzis hashekel* which brought about atonement for the *chet ha'egel*.

When describing how much each Jew was to give, the *possuk* states: "A shekel is comprised of twenty *geirah*, and a half of this shekel should be given to Hashem." Seemingly, the *possuk* should have said simply that each Jew was to give ten *geirah*, or a *beka* (the name of a half-shekel coin). Why the emphasis on

the fact that the coin being given was merely a half of a complete shekel?

The reason is because in order to achieve atonement, it is necessary to reveal that Hashem and Bnei Yisroel are two halves of a single whole. On the *possuk*, "Make for yourself two *chatzotzros* [trumpets]," the Maggid explains that Hashem and Bnei Yisroel are two *chatza'ei tzuros*—two half-forms that are only complete when they are joined together. Just as each half shekel consisted of ten *geirah*,

we possess ten faculties and Hashem possesses ten *sefiros*, but our ten and Hashem's ten are two parts of a single entity.

Giving a *machatzis hashekel* demonstrated that we and Hashem are essentially one, causing any *aveirah*—even one as severe as *avodah zarah*—to be wiped away.

For further study, see *maamar d"h Ki Sisa 5722. Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 3, pp. 926ff.

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