

THE MITZVA OF GIVING THE HALF SHEKEL

The simple meaning of the Mitzva of Giving the Half Shekel is as a remembrance to the Half Shekel that was brought in the Beit HaMikdash. This was announced on Rosh Chodesh Adar, and the Gemara explains that when Hashem commanded the Jews in the desert to bring the Half Shekel, He intended to save them from the 10,000 shekels silver that Haman would weigh out in the future to give to Achashverosh, for the right to destroy the Jews.

Haman also searched to find which in month he would be able to place an 'evil eye' on the Jews. He found that Adar was such a month, and therefore we also give the Half Shekel as a means of preventing the evil eye of Haman from falling upon the Jews. In the time of David HaMelech, when the nation was counted without using shekalim, a plague was cast upon the people that lasted three days.

Shekalim, is from the language, mishkal, to weigh, and since the month of Adar is a preparation for the month of Nisan, the month of redemption, therefore, a man in Adar must 'weigh' his deeds and activities to prepare himself for Purim, and the month of Nisan.

The numerical value, Gematria, of shekalim is 480, the same as the number for the 'wife' of the Samech Mem, specifically because during these days before Purim, we conclude the 'weeks of shovavim', which is a repair for the sin of the holy covenant, the brit milah. This repair, or tikkun, subdues the power of this negative force, whose name we do not pronounce, and the completion of the process is through the giving of the Half Shekel.



Mordechai & Ester's grave

The Chida brings down that Purim has a portion of every festival. Just as on Pesach, the Jews came out of slavery into freedom, so too on Purim the Jews were saved from death and given life. Just as on Shavu'ot the Jews received the Torah, so too on Purim they received keeping the Torah willingly and joyfully. Just as on Rosh HaShana the books of life and death are opened in heaven, so too on Purim the Jews were being judged if they should be saved. On Yom Kippur there is forgiveness for our sins, so too on Purim, the Jews were forgiveness for joining the feast of Achashverosh. And just as on Succot, the Jews were surrounded by the clouds of glory, so too on

Purim, there were many covert to Judaism, (who increase G-d's glory) as it says in the Megila, 'And many of the people of the land became Jews.' All of these are hinted in the festival of Purim.

It is therefore very important for each person to prepare himself for this day with holiness and purity. Certainly it is good to have in mind before the reading of the megila that in the merit of this mitzva, Hashem should exterminate all the evil powers of this world, which is related in an acrostic of the first letters of the verse, 'to remove the filth from the land.'

FORM THE CUSTOMS & LAWS OF THE FESTIVAL OF PURIM

Rabbi Chaim Vital immersed in a mikva erev Purim as was his custom before every Shabbat and festival. Shabbat clothing is worn on Purim, and if women have gold jewelry, Rabbi Yoseph Haim writes in 'Ateret Tiferet', they should adorn themselves with such Jewelry to honor the festival. The custom is to say, 'Cursed is Haman' three times, and intend to bring down the Samech Mem and his legions, and so to say three times, 'Blessed is Mordechai', as was the custom in the holy yeshiva, Beit El. During the morning reading of the megila, when the words, 'for the Jews was light and joy, happiness and riches,' the custom is to touch and kiss one's tefilin. Before making the festive meal, after reading the Megila and concluding the morning prayers, a person should immediately perform the 'mitzvot hayom', by gifting gifts to the poor (matnot l'evyonim') and afterward, 'sending food to one's friends', 'mishloach manot', and then begin his personal festive meal, so too was the custom of the Ari'zal, and the Ra'shah.