

# Kehillah

Chiddushim and Insights for Shabbos | 27 Shvat, 5783 | 9



## The Half-Shekel Antidote to Disunity

Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

This Shabbos opens the series of four *parshios* leading up to *Klal Yisrael* becoming Hashem's chosen people at *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. Each *parasha* has a fundamental principle moving us towards that goal.

We open with *Parshas Shekalim* where we read the *pesukim* commanding Moshe to count the Jewish people. It was done by each person contributing half a *shekel* to fund the *Mishkan* and, in the future, the *Beis Hamikdash*.

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*Everyone is both dependent on and responsible for others in the community. But there is an even deeper message.*  
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But there are two strange elements in the commandment.

First, the wealthy person was not allowed to give more than half a *shekel*, while the poor person could not give less. Not a very efficient way to run a fundraising campaign. And, contrary to almost all other mitzvos, the poor person was required to give his half *shekel* even if it meant selling the shirt off his back. Secondly, the counting would have been much simpler had each person given a full *shekel*.

The Gemara in *Megillah* (13b) explains the timing of announcing the upcoming half-*shekel* collection on Rosh Chodesh Adar. "It was known to the Almighty that Haman was going to offer [10,000] *shekalim* for the rights to annihilate the Jewish people, so Hashem commanded us to precede his *shekalim* with ours."

What is the connection?

Haman's critique of the Jews was that they were "dispersed and fragmented among the nations." Their vulnerability lay in their divisiveness and lack of unity. The antidote was *machatzit hashekel* – in a number of ways. Each person contributing a half *shekel* represents the fact that no one can accomplish what is needed as an individual. Every Jew needs other Jews for any project of value to succeed. Your contribution, your half *shekel*,

requires the contribution of another's half *shekel* to make it complete.

Many rich people like to bask in the accomplishment of their large gift, which can easily lead to a sense of power and arrogance. So they are limited to half a *shekel*. Poor people may use their poverty as an excuse to avoid participation and responsibility. Requiring their contribution, even under the most difficult financial circumstances, says "No excuses." Everyone is both dependent on and responsible for others in the community.

But there is an even deeper message. In the kabbalistic literature, "wealthy" denotes one who has resources to share with others. "Poor" represents one who needs to be a recipient of resources. Every Jew is wealthy, having resources and talents that can be shared with others. And every Jew, even with financial wealth, has needs that can only be supplied by others. Everyone is both wealthy and poor. Everyone can make a contribution – realizing that the other half *shekel* is still needed.

Haman's *shekalim* were given to annihilate us at a time of communal fragmentation. The antidote was unity and communal responsibility. By preceding his *shekalim* with our half *shekalim*, we overcame the source of our vulnerability.

We can glean an additional insight from the root of the word *shekel* – *to weigh*. There are two ways to assess value. One is relative and self-centered – what can I gain from this transaction? The other way is what I can accomplish with this transaction. One needs to assess the objective value of the money based on what it can accomplish. The choice of half a *shekel* communicates the responsibility of identifying priorities and using the money to make a contribution. This stands in stark contrast to selfish consumption.

As the first of the four *parshios*, the commandment of contributing half a *shekel* is the first step towards building the Jewish people: Identifying true priorities, making individual contributions, realizing the need to work together, and building and unifying the nation.

## How Should We Lend to the Poor? Rabbi Asher Meir

Our *parasha* commands us to be forthcoming in giving loans to the poor while also showing forbearance in collecting such loans.

“If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, do not act toward them as a creditor; exact no interest from them. If you take your neighbor’s garment in pledge, you must return it before the sun sets. It is the only available clothing—it is what covers the skin. In what else shall [your neighbor] sleep? Therefore, if that person cries out to Me, I will pay heed, for I am compassionate (*Shemos* 24-26).

Similar *mitzvos* appear elsewhere in the Torah. In terms of being forthcoming, the *Chinukh* counts “If you lend money” in our *parasha* as commandment 66. “To lend money to the poor...surely open your hand” (*Devarim* 15:8) as commandment 579. “To give charity to the poor,” which includes loans, and “Be careful not to have a disgraceful thought” (*Devarim* 15:9) as commandment 580 – referring to the prohibition of refraining from giving a loan due to the approaching *Shemita* year.

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*The Midrash suggests that the kind of generous forbearance we would like to receive from Hashem is the kind of forbearance we should show to indigent borrowers.*

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Regarding forbearance, we have the prohibition on dunning a borrower when he is unable to pay (*Chinukh* 67); not to impose interest on loans (*Chinukh* 68); not to collect interest (*Chinukh* 343); not to collect a loan after cancellation in the *Shemita* year (*Chinukh* 475) as well as to cancel such a loan (*Chinukh* 477); not to take as a pledge a utensil needed for preparing food (*Chinukh* 583); not to take a pledge forcefully (*Chinukh* 585); and to return a pledge that the borrower has need of (*Chinukh* 586 and 587); and not to take a pledge from a widow (*Chinukh* 591).

An inherent tension is revealed: The more forbearance we require of the lender, the less inclined people will be to lend money. This led to leniencies in the commandments of forbearance, with an eye toward encouraging people to be forthcoming.

The Mishna (*Sheviis* 10:4) tells us that a special innovation called a *prozbul* allows loan collection even after the *Shemita* year.

[A loan secured by] a *prozbul* is not cancelled. This was enacted by Hillel the Elder, for when he

observed people refraining from lending to one another and thus transgressing what is written in the Torah, “Beware, lest you harbor the base thought ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is approaching,’ so that you are mean to your needy kinsman and give him nothing.”

Another innovation was the *heter iska*, a carefully crafted partnership agreement that makes it almost certain that the silent partner will obtain agreed-upon profit payments almost identical to those of interest payments. This gained very rapid acceptance because the *poskim* recognized that it greatly increased the availability of credit for businessmen.

In the area of interpretation, we find that the *poskim* sought leniencies to allow debt collection even when there is a concern for dunning an indigent borrower. The Rambam (*Hilchos Malve Velove* 1:2) writes: “Whenever a person presses a poor person for payment when he knows that he does not have the means to repay the debt, he transgresses a negative commandment. As *Shemos* 22:24 states: ‘Do not act as a creditor toward him.’” Later authorities infer that only when the lender is certain that the borrower can’t pay – a rather unusual situation- is he forbidden from seeking collection.

A leniency based on custom is found in the *Responsa Rivash* (484). The Rivash found that his new community would require debtors to provide a guarantor, otherwise they would be detained. Rivash tried to reverse this custom but was persuaded that this measure was necessary to encourage giving loans.

Despite these leniencies, a person should always strive to conduct himself towards a poor borrower with the restraint implied by the Torah commandments. The Midrash (*Shemos Rabba* 31:1) states:

Every creature is indebted to God, but He is clement and merciful, and pardons prior [sins] . . . This can be likened to borrowing from a moneylender who then forgot [the loan]. After a while [the borrower] presented himself and said, “I know that I owe you [money]. [The moneylender] said, Why did you mention it? It was completely forgone and forgotten. So it is with God. His creatures sin before him, and He sees that they don’t repent, and even so He forgoes [punishment].

The Midrash suggests that the kind of generous forbearance we would like to receive from Hashem is the kind of forbearance we should show to indigent borrowers.

## Empathy Is Not Enough Rabbi Yitzchak Adlerstein

“Underneath His feet was the likeness of sapphire brickwork, and it was like the essence of the heaven in purity” (*Shemos* 24:10).

What was the function of this mysterious object? What can we learn from it? Rashi explains that during the years of Egyptian enslavement of the Jews, it served as a reminder to Hashem of the rigors of the servitude, which forced them into brick-making.

Reminder? Forgetting is a human characteristic, not a Divine one! Does Hashem need a constant reminder?

Know this, taught Rav Yeruchem Levovitz. When the Torah describes a *middah* of Hashem, the purpose is simply to instruct us how to imitate Him. In the case at hand, the point is that the Possessor of all the *chesed* that could be had still required, *kivayachol*, something more than intense, heartfelt empathy. The brick was a concrete reminder. Similarly, we fail to fulfill the mandate to bear another’s burden when all we do is *understand* the pain of the other. Even the greatest *baal chesed* needs to do more than conjure up images in his mind of what the other is experiencing. We do not fulfill our obligation until we *feel* what the other person feels.

We see Moshe doing this while still living in Pharaoh’s palace. “Moshe grew up. He went out to his brothers and witnessed their burdens” (*Shemos* 2:11). Rashi comments: “He set his eyes and heart to be pained for them.” Chazal elaborate: “He lent his shoulder and assisted each and everyone” (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:27). I don’t believe that he did this to help them. He did it for himself – to help him feel the pain of his brethren. People believe that they fulfill their obligation by fully understanding the tragedies they come upon. They are wrong; they are fooling themselves. You don’t fulfill your obligation of being *nos’ei b’ole chavero* until you bear some of the pain of that burden.

We are still puzzled. While the sapphire brick served a function during the years of suffering that the *Bnei*

*Yisrael* endured, what was it doing here at *Matan Torah* – at the polar opposite of that suffering, a time of incredible rejoicing? What this tells us is never to forget the past. It seems to be human nature that people hold on to the dark memories of the past only so long as they are still in pain. When that subsides, and they move on to days of fullness and euphoria, the memories fade. Here, the Torah depicts *HaKodesh Baruch Hu* holding on to a “reminder” of the horrors of the past, even at a moment of great joy. This instructs us to do the same – to hold on to mementos of the periods of darkness from which He led us out.

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*We are required to go beyond recognizing the simcha of another. We have to make their simcha ours.*  
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We find another gem at the end of our *pasuk*. “It was like the essence of the heaven in purity.” The “it,” says Rashi, is light and rejoicing, which He placed before Him once the *Bnei Yisrael* were redeemed. In other words, just as we are required to go beyond understanding in order to bear the yoke of our friend, we are similarly – and perhaps to an even greater degree – required to go beyond recognizing the *simcha* of another. We have to find a way to make their *simcha* ours.

We customarily respond to hearing good news about someone else by dispatching a quick *mazal tov* message. We then pat ourselves on our backs for our consideration in quickly displaying our friendship and sharing their *simcha*. This is self-delusional. Truly joining in another’s *simcha* – as we are required to do – means that we must work at it. We have to think deeply about the other’s situation and participate through actual deeds, not only good thoughts.

*This article is based on Daas Torah of R. Yeruchem Levovitz, Shemos, p.237-239.*

## Have You Ever Been Checkmated By Your Child? Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

Fun fact: If you pay attention, you’ll notice how similar the term *checkmate* is to the Hebrew word for chess, *shachmat*. And if you pay further attention, you’ll notice that *shachmat* sounds like *sheik met*, the king is dead – the objective of the game.

Have you ever been checkmated by one of your children? They ask you a question, and you are stuck. Nowhere to go. The little thing has outmaneuvered you this time.

I remember one such time in particular. “Mummy,” they innocently asked, if I was to [*insert whatever misdemeanor/aveirah/crime applicable to your child*],

would you want me to tell you?” Now what? If I say no, I’m encouraging them to lie and act out behind my back. If I say yes, I’m tacitly giving my permission.

Checkmate.

At that frozen moment in my parenting, I had an ingenious and inspired answer, like a moment of *ruach hakodesh*. And so I said, “Great question. Can I get back to you on that one?” You think I’m joking about the inspired answer. I’m not. Having the wherewithal not to get drawn into giving an answer you don’t mean in moments like this is crucial. Then I went to speak to someone older and wiser. I was fortunate enough to





be working on staff with the legendary Rabbi Brown. On his advice, this is what I said to my child.

“I’m ready to answer your question now. Thank you for your patience. (That was my part. Rabbi Brown’s is coming.) If you were to [insert aforementioned misdemeanor/aveirah/crime], I would expect you to tell me. I’m here to talk with you and advise you. But I also want you to know that doesn’t mean you would have my approval.”

Just like that. Checkmate gone. I have two contrary messages here. Instead of being forced into choosing one, I’m going to be true to both. We can hold paradoxes in one space, We can have complex dynamics going on simultaneously. We can be our children’s parents on many fronts, all at the same time.

I can be my child’s confidante and friend without having to compromise on my standards of right and wrong. I can be my child’s parent and instructor without always having to impose distance and fear.

Reverence and respect work together. Safety and standards work together. Openness and expectations work together. Love and leadership work together.

Sometimes different aspects of our role feel like they need to compete with each other, but it’s not always true. As long as we are honest, reasonable, and remain completely focused on providing what our children need from us, we can play multiple roles with united messages in the lives of our children.

## Making Our Jobs Feel Easier Tzvi Broker

In conversations with people about their work, I hear frustration from those who experience work as too heavy or too hard. The Torah is sensitive about the type of work we do. *Parasha Mishpatim* introduces the *Eved Ivri*, a Jew who became a slave because either he stole and was unable to pay a debt, or he sold himself into slavery in order to make ends meet.

*Requiring someone experienced to do something simple as a pointless exercise is a form of emotional abuse.*

There is a *machlokes Rishonim* whether the laws governing the type of work one is allowed to assign an *Eved Ivri* applies also to a free person. According to Rabbenu Yona, the prohibition of giving exceedingly hard work applies equally to the work given to every Jew. But what is considered this prohibited type of work?

Given the context of Hashem’s redeeming us from Egyptian slavery, we would expect to see back-breaking, sweat-inducing labor at the top of the list. But as Rashi points out in *Parshas Behar* quoting *Toras Cohanim*, it is forbidden to ask someone to heat up a cup of water that’s not needed or to wait around aimlessly without a purpose.

These circumstances are understandably annoying, but is this really “exceedingly hard work.” The explanation lies in the depth of the Torah’s understanding of the human experience. Carrying heavy items may be physically exhausting but when done for a purpose, it’s a reasonable expectation. In contrast, requiring someone experienced to do something simple as a pointless exercise is a form of emotional abuse.

If you were ever assigned a task you felt was pointless, you can relate to the frustration. One lesson of the *Eved*

*Ivri* is that the Torah envisioned work as an experience of fulfilling a purpose. Work without a sense of purpose was what we experienced as slaves in *Mitzrayim*, where Pharaoh intentionally orchestrated for the Jewish slaves to build cities doomed to collapse. Through pointless work, he sought to crush us psychologically and emotionally.

*Work that is in some way aligned with a passion, talent, or interest is energizing even if the work is physically draining.*

What creates purpose at work? From my experience working with many professionals, the knowledge of providing for one’s family is rewarding enough for some. The actual work is thus less important. Others have a real need to connect to their work. Work that is aligned with a passion, talent, or interest is energizing even when it’s physically draining. On the flip side, work that is not aligned with something deeper in yourself will be draining even if it involves sitting in a comfy office chair in an air-conditioned office.

Does experiencing *purpose* at work happen automatically? We all may know individuals who work in meaningful professions yet feel empty at times. While there are many contributing factors, often this emptiness can be the result of losing sight of why they’re working. Work becomes second nature; it becomes a habit.

We can inject more purpose into our work simply by taking a minute before starting our day to ask ourselves why we’re working today. Become aware of the reasons and choose to embrace the day with a higher intention. This practice is a worthwhile investment. As we discover and inject feelings of purpose throughout our day, we may surprise ourselves how much lighter and easier our work days become.

## Shekalim: Our Eternal Hand and Name Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer

*Yeshayahu* Chapter 56, which we read as the *Haftarah* on fast days, presents two characters who approach Hashem with a claim of belonging.

One is the convert, concerned about his past: having been born into a foreign nation, can he fully belong to the Jewish people? The second is one unable to have children, whose similar concern draws from his lack of continuity for the future: “Behold, I am a shriveled tree” (56:3).

How would we respond to such questions? I think many of us would be dismissive. “What’s the problem,” we might say. “Observe the Torah, and you’ll have a share in *Olam Haba* just like everybody else.” The Abie Rotenberg song applies universally: “There is no need to fear your destination / You’ve earned a place right by the throne.”

*Yeshayahu’s* response, however, is far more profound: “For thus said Hashem to the barren ones who observe My Sabbaths and choose what I desire, and grasp my covenant tightly. I will give them in My house and within My walls a hand and a name (*yad vashem*), which is better than sons and daughters. I shall give them an eternal name, which will never be terminated” (56:5).

Eternity in *Olam Haba*, says the Prophet, is contingent on eternity in this world. Nevertheless, Hashem arranges that even the barren, by means of clinging to the covenant, receive their part in eternity. Their deeds

live on after them. Their identity (“name”) and their actions (“hand”) are forever perpetuated among the Jewish people.

More often than not, we cannot know how this perpetuity is crafted; how do our deeds make an eternal impact? Yet, the *pasuk* tells us that it relates to Jerusalem and the *Mikdash*: “In My house and within My walls.” Here, at the very core of the Jewish nation and its connection to Hashem, all Jews who keep the covenant – even those who lack a shared past or a shared future – touch eternity. Here, we all live on.

As we begin the journey towards the annual rebirth and redemption of *Pesach*, we start from *Shekalim* – the contribution that each and every individual makes to the *Mikdash*. Both our eternity, expressed in the survival of *Purim*, and our ultimate destiny, represented by *Pesach*, inhere in the *Mikdash* – the core of our national being.

And though we cannot know the precise details, *Shekalim* reminds us of our duty to invest thought and energy on how we can make a lasting impact – for the good of the Jewish people generally and for Jerusalem specifically. Each one of us has a share.

***It is a tremendous zechus to dedicate the Kehillah publication for the iluy neshamah of Binyamin Yisrael ben Shlomo Halevi z”l, son of Ronald and Carol Gonsher. It should serve as an eternal Yad Vashem.***

### *Our Son Stopped Talking to Us ?!*

Rebbetzin Tamar Pfeffer

#### *Question*

Our 16-year-old son studies at an excellent yeshiva, *Baruch Hashem*. Several months ago, he stopped talking to us. Just stopped. We don’t know the reason, but he went through a period when he had a very hard time getting up in the mornings. We spoke to him quite bluntly about it. He was probably hurt. We also took away his blanket in the mornings when he didn’t get up, which made him very irritated.

Until then, he was just a really good boy – a gentle and highly sensitive child who would sometimes cry in pressured situations. Quiet but very stubborn. It should be noted that he is at home, sleeps at home, and studies well in yeshiva. On occasion, though, he stays in bed until noon.

What can we do?

#### *Response*

Very Dear Parents,

I greatly appreciate your question. Your desire for the good and the right is evident. I’ll start with some general background to my response.

Hashem created humanity as a wonderful creation that also has a dark side evident in harmful expressions and negative emotions such as jealousy, competitiveness,

laziness, and arrogance. This is true for every person. Parents have a dark side that they need to recognize and with which they need to work. So do children.

Did Hashem make a mistake in bestowing us with these darker aspects? Not at all. They are part of our lives, providing us opportunities for growth and development and allowing us the joy of making progress. A person



cannot simply erase his darker sides but needs to acknowledge that they are part of him and work with them in moving forward. The first step is this simple recognition.

How can a child be taught not to hate these negative parts within himself? The answer is that parents have a duty to transmit love – not hatred – even towards the challenging parts. Children internalize messages about themselves first and foremost from their parents. They will treat themselves the same way their parents treat them.

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*What should a parent do when he notices that his child has trouble getting up in the morning? First and foremost: love him just the way he is.*  
 .....

The feeling that came to me while reading the question is that everything was fine as long as your son was a “really good boy.” However, when darker sides began to appear – getting up late, behaving inappropriately towards parents – then your appreciation for your son, and perhaps even the love you showed him, were somehow damaged.

When a child feels he’s loved for his good behavior and actions, his encounter with his dark sides makes him hate himself. He feels that these elements of his personality prevent others from loving him. When he fails to be loved by others, he stops being loved even by himself. This leads to a loss of joy, vitality, and life; everything begins to go wrong.

What should a parent do when he notices that his child has trouble getting up in the morning, for example? First and foremost: love him just the way he is. When a child feels unconditionally loved, he feels positive about himself and has the strength to move forward.

I can understand the frustration when a child stays in bed in the morning. We want to fix him. But change will come from love. A parent can tell his child: “I understand your difficulty. When I was young, I experienced it, too. Don’t worry. It’s a passing phase.” This sends the child positive vibes of love and acceptance, giving him strength to move on.

Your question emphasizes that your son likes to stay home, which is a real positive. If he’s connected to the home, despite the baggage he’s carrying,

this demonstrates the strong, positive, and loving relationship you enjoy. But what else can be done?

There is no magic solution. Your son is already grown up and will make his own choices. You can’t force him to talk. But you, as parents, are responsible for your part, which is showing him unconditional love – even when he refuses to speak.

Daven for love. A prayer for something so deep and central as love will not return empty-handed. You can also work on small acts of giving. Feel for him, with an open and compassionate heart. He’s in a mess, and you need to be stable and strong and loving to help him get through it. Recall the times when he was younger, when love may have been more free-flowing. And talk about love, even if he doesn’t reciprocate. Do anything and everything that arouses unconditional love on your part.

This is the parent’s side of things, which is the only one you’re responsible for. How does it affect your child? This depends on him, and you’ll have to go at his pace. Surely, however, your unconditional love will have a positive effect.

.....  
*Recall the times when he was younger, when love may have been more free-flowing. And speak about love, even if he doesn’t reciprocate.*  
 .....

A no-less-important point in the labor of love is a parent’s work on him- or herself. You wrote that you spoke bluntly to your son. You took his blanket, and he was hurt. It may be that you think you were too firm, which is now a dark patch in your own psyche. Now is the time to make peace with it, to forgive yourselves. Yes, perhaps we were angry and too firm, but this will be a learning experience from which we will grow and develop.

Sending your question itself is an act of learning, part of a process, and part of self-forgiveness. Humans are imperfect creatures by design, not by accident. We all fall, and the call to greatness urges us to learn from the experience and move forward. Do not resist and cover over mistakes; use them as an engine for growth.

I wish you much love and peace between yourselves, with the children, and with Hashem. May the *Shechinah* shine in your home.

*Tamar Pfeffer*

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**Tamar Pfeffer is a parenting and relationship counselor with years of experience, certified under Mrs. Rachel Arbus. Questions should be submitted to [ask-en@akshiva.co.il](mailto:ask-en@akshiva.co.il)**

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## Two Train Tickets to Slabodka Rabbi Shmuel Kimche



After the tremendous high of *Matan Torah*, I always get this back-down-to-earth feeling as we open *Parshas Mishpatim*. Suddenly, it's about the details that make up our *Avodas Hashem*. Chazal in the *Zohar* refer to the 613 mitzvos as *ittin* – suggestions, opportunities that open up more opportunities to build closeness with Hashem. What's striking is the complexity – the infinite chain reactions and eternal ramifications – of even our smallest actions.

I want to share a story that hit me deeply and expresses these ripple effects in a very real way. Here goes.

...

Reb Moshe from Miami had an important meeting in Tel Aviv. The year was 1960 and travel to Israel was not just a quick hop. Every second was precious. As Reb Moshe walks down Rechov Allenby in central Tel Aviv, something strange catches his eye. He watches from a distance as he sees a seemingly simple *makolet* storeowner with a gentle smile serving a customer.

Then, as the customer leaves, the storeowner returns his focus to the *sefer* that he had been learning! As Reb Moshe watches this scene repeat itself a few times, he reflects that this is no regular person. A storeowner in central Tel Aviv does not simply learn between customers. There must be a story here.

Reb Moshe gingerly walks to the *makolet* and strikes up a conversation with Yankele. Who are you? Where do you live? Where are you from? What are you doing here? The regular questions that any of us would ask a frum storeowner in the 1960's in central Tel Aviv.

"I was born and lived in Minsk before the war. There is nothing left in Minsk. But where are you from?" asks Yankele, noticing Reb Moshe's American accent. "Are you by any chance from America?"

"Absolutely," Reb Moshe replies. "I am just visiting for a few days and am going back to America soon."

Yankele asks his new friend a quiet question. "Do you by any chance know Aharon Sassover?"

Rav Moshe stops short. "Of course I know him! Why do you ask?"

"Really? You know him? I don't believe you. Wow! What does he do? Is he a Rav?" asks Yankele with a shine in his eyes.

"He is certainly a Rav. But tell me, what is your connection with him?"

"Well, I will tell you. Before the war, I started working in Minsk and did not have much time to learn. We were quite poor. But I decided that I must be connected somehow to learning. So I decided that every time I

earned a *ruble*, half would go to me and half would go to a fund. I saved up for a few years. *Kopec* after *kopec* and *ruble* after *ruble* until I had saved enough to buy train tickets to Slabodka. I went to the local *Talmud Torah* in Minsk and asked the *Rosh HaYeshiva* for the names of the two most promising boys. I handed to the *Rosh HaYeshiva* two tickets for the boys to go and continue learning in Slabodka.

The Rav quickly made arrangements for the boys to travel and continue learning in Slabodka. I forgot the name of one of the boys, but I remember the name of Aharon Sassover. I heard that they both moved to America. So I asked you whether you know Aharon and whether he is a Rav. Is he?"

*I went to the local Talmud Torah in Minsk and asked the Rosh HaYeshiva for the names of the two most promising boys.*

Rav Moshe can hardly speak. "Do you have any idea who Aharon Sassover is?" he asks in a hoarse whisper. "There is not a religious Jew in the world who has not heard of Rav Aharon. Except they know him by a different name in America. They know him by the name of Rav Aharon Kotler! The famous *Rosh Yeshiva* of Lakewood, one of the founders of *yiddishkeit* in America! Do you have any idea what your train ticket did?"

Rav Yankele starts to cry with joy. "I don't believe it! I don't believe it!"

Inspired, Rav Moshe takes his flight back to America – back to his *kehillah* – and starts telling everyone this amazing story. One day he has an important visitor. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky came to stay at his home.

During Rav Yaakov's stay, Rav Moshe tells him, "Do I have an amazing story for you." And he starts to relay this amazing story to the *Gadol HaDor*. But during the entire story, Rav Yaakov is smiling and nodding as if he had already heard the story.

Rav Moshe, almost unable to contain himself from the awesome revelation in the story, turns to Rav Yaakov and asks him, "*Kvod HaRav*, it seems like you have already heard this story."

Rav Yaakov turns to Rav Moshe and says, "Yes, I know the story well but from a different angle. You see, the storeowner said there were two boys he sent to Slabodka. The first was Rav Aharon. The other one was me!"





My friends, listen to this. When Rav Yankele the storeowner goes to *Shamayim*, he has no idea what lies in store for him. His half-*ruble* changed the entire Torah world in America. Unbelievable.

*Mishpatim* are not only commandments — they are

*suggestions* for growing closer to Hashem. We come closer to Hakodesh Baruch Hu through actions. Detailed actions. Small actions. And even the smallest actions can have infinite ripple effects that can radically affect our own lives.

## Repaying a Loan for Pizza Lunch Josh and Tammy Kruger

### The Story

“I definitely want that chocolate bar!”

“Look at those jaw breakers!”

Chana and Naomi were standing by the candies at the local supermarket near their school. They had saved up money from their allowances, and they were quite excited when they got permission from their parents to stop by the store on their way home from school today.

They counted out their coins.

“Chana, don’t you still owe me four *shekels* from last month? Remember you needed it for pizza day at school? I really need it now so I can afford that chocolate bar.”

Chana looked up in surprise, “But I didn’t borrow the money from you in the end. I thought I needed to, but then I found coins in the bottom of my school bag.”

Naomi frowned, “I really don’t remember that.”

The girls tried to remember what exactly happened but couldn’t agree.

### The Discussion

**Q:** What should the girls do?

**A:** There is a famous halachic rule called *hamotzi mei’chaveiro alav ha’raaya*. If you think someone has something that is yours, then you must prove it. In our story, Naomi thinks that 4 *shekels* in Chana’s wallet belong to her. Naomi must first prove that it really is hers in order to take the money. Perhaps she can find a witness at her school who saw her give the money to Chana? If she can’t bring proof, then Chana keeps the four *shekels* (*Baba Kama* 118a; *Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat* 75:9).

**Q:** What if Chana said she did borrow the money from Naomi, but Chana thinks she paid her back?

**A:** Here the situation is different. Because Chana admits that she took the loan, she now takes the responsibility to ensure that the loan is returned. She must be sure that she returned the money. If she is unsure, she has to pay Naomi 4 *shekels* (*Baba Kama* 118a; *Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat* 75:9).

**Q:** How is this story related to the *parasha*?

**A:** *Parshas Mishpatim* deals with laws that are related to borrowing and loaning (*Shemos* 22:13).

### Back to the Story

The grocer heard part of the girls’ conversation. He gently said to Naomi, “Since your friend denies ever taking the loan, she is not required to give you any money unless you can prove that she did take the loan. I learned this *halacha* with my *chevrusa* a few weeks ago in night seder.”

At that moment, Naomi’s Aunty Racheli walked into the store to pick up some groceries.

“Naomi!” she exclaimed, “I’m so happy to see you. I have an envelope with your babysitting money. You forgot to take it from my house last week. You left in such a hurry. I’ve had it in my pocket for a few

days, and I’m so glad to run into you” She pulled out of her pocket a white envelope marked *Naomi* with some jingling coins inside. “Thank you again for babysitting the twins. They had a great time with you. Here is your 15 *shekel* payment.”

“Thank you,” said Naomi. “This is perfect timing.”

A few minutes later, the two girls left the store, each with their favorite candy in hand, and a few remaining coins in their pockets. They chewed their treats with big sticky smiles.

**Written in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeiffer. Le’iluy nishmas Frumit Bat Yosef, Edith Nusbaum a”h.**

