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5782 פֶּרֶשֶׁת כִּי תִּסָּא

Ki Thissa: Why Give Half a Sheqel?

What is the reason for the Maḥaṣiṯh HaSheqel (half Sheqel)? The Rishonim explain that it is to teach us unity. Every member of the Jewish nation has to love his neighbor as if we are one body. Therefore, each one gives half a Sheqel so that together with the other person's half Sheqel it makes a whole.

Rab Hida, 'a"h, adds that since the Sheqalim (coins) were used to cover the cost of the communal offerings which were for the atonement of Israel (the Jewish people), this is an indication to us that the sacrifices can only atone for the sins of the Jewish people when they are in complete unity. This means that even if one person is rich and the other is poor they still feel as one with the other person.

Wealth and honor are physical, but the Nefesh (soul), which is what really counts, is the same for everyone because all souls come from the same source and we are all children of our Father in Heaven.

(See Penei Dawid, Ki Thissa)

Birkath HaMazon: When Is it a Torah or Rabbinical Obligation?

There are two levels of obligation to recite Birkath HaMazon, one is a Torah obligation (DeOraitha) and the other is Rabbinical (DeRabbanan). The Torah states, וְאַכַּלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ "You shall eat, you shall be satisfied and you shall bless" (Debarim 8:10), which means that you must be satisfied in order to be obligated to bless. The Rabbis, however, require that if one ate the minimum required amount of bread but is not satisfied, one must still recite Birkath Hammazon after the meal.

There is an opinion, albeit not the majority one, quoted by the Rama, that if one is thirsty, one must also drink in order to be obligated to read Birkath HaMazon from the Torah. This is according to the opinion of Ribbi Meir in the Gemara of Berakhoth (49b) that "you shall eat" refers to food, but "you shall be satisfied", refers to drinking. Therefore, even if one ate till one was satisfied, but did not drink and was still thirsty, one should make every effort to drink some water before reciting Birkath HaMazon.

In this manner, one would recite it with the higher Torah obligation, according to all opinions. If one can not find any water to drink, one must still recite Birkath HaMazon because, at the very least, it remains a Rabbinical obligation.

(See Rama, 197:4. Kaf Haḥayyim 197, Oth 30. Mishna Berurah ibid, 25-26)



מדרש בן איש חי
Midrash BEN ISH HAI

For the 'Ilui Neshamah of
רחל בת שמחה גורגיי

Removing Food Stuck to Clothes on Shabbath

One who shears the wool or hair from an animal on Shabbath, be it alive or dead, is doing something forbidden by the Torah. This is true, even if one were to cut it from the hide, after it has been removed from the animal. Plucking the wool from an animal that is alive is not forbidden by the Torah, because it is not the normal manner in which it is done, but it is forbidden by the Rabbis.

Plucking hairs from the hide of an animal, whether it is still just hide or has been turned into a garment, is forbidden. While some are of the opinion that it is forbidden by the Rabbis, according to many opinions it is forbidden by the Torah.

In practical terms this means that one must be extremely careful when one wishes to remove pits or other food which got stuck to fur coats and the like, since hairs are likely to get plucked. As mentioned above, this would be, at the very least, a transgression of a Rabbinical decree, and quite possibly a Torah one.

(See Ben Ish Hai, 2nd year, Parashath Ki Thissa, Oth 13)

Differences in Custom in Yishtabbah

The Shulhan 'Arukh states that the Hazzan should stand for Yishtabbah. It should be noted that the custom in some communities is for the main Hazzan to start leading the prayer at that point. Sephardi communities who do so, start a paragraph earlier with "Ki Lashem Hammelukha".

The reason why the Hazzan should stand is so that he can say the Qaddish after Yishtabbah, without any interruption or delay.

The Ashkenazi custom is for the congregation to also stand for Yishtabbah. The Sephardi custom is that only the Hazzan stands, whereas the congregation (and one who is obligated to pray by himself) remain seated. Ashkenazim remain standing for the Qaddish (in accordance with the Ashkenazi custom of standing for all Qaddish prayers), and Sephardim remain seated for the Qaddish, in accordance with their custom.

Ashkenzim end the blessing of Yishtabbah with the words "Barukh Hei [יְיָ] Ha'olamim" whereas the Sephardi opinion is that one should say "Barukh Hai [יְיָ] Ha'olamim"

(See Shulhan 'Arukh, Orah Hayyim, 53:1. Kaf Hachayyim, ibid., Oth 1,3. Mishnah Berurah, ibid., 1)

Women's Corner - by Rabbanith Ruth Menashe 'a"h

Telling the Truth to Our Children

People from all cultures and nationalities view truth as a noble value. Whether or not they themselves are always honest, does not detract from the fact that, across the board, truth is a desired and expected virtue of any upright individual. Does the concept of being truthful to others apply when addressing children as well, or is it, perhaps, acceptable to lie to them?

A study in this field, reveals that parents do lie to their children and that the most common area of parents lying to their children, is for the purpose of modifying their children's behavior: "If you eat spinach - you will become strong"; " If you don't leave the park now we will leave you here, and the policeman will come..." These are just two of endless common examples. The bottom line is that we honestly have to ask ourselves, "Are these statements true?". Of course, no parent in their right mind will ever leave their child in the park, or call the policeman if the child does not follow their instructions to leave the park.

(To be continued)