

1. Shemos 30: 11-16

יא וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה  
לֵאמֹר.

11 And the LORD spoke unto  
Moses, saying:

יב כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת-רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי-  
יִשְׂרָאֵל, לִפְקֻדֵיהֶם, וְנָתַנּוּ אִישׁ  
כֹּפֶר נַפְשׁוֹ לַיהוָה, בַּפְּקֹד  
וְלֹא-יְהִי בָהֶם נֶגֶף, בַּפְּקֹד  
אֲתָם.

12 'When thou takest the sum of the  
children of Israel, according to their  
number, then shall they give every  
man a ransom for his soul unto the  
LORD, when thou numberest them;  
that there be no plague among  
them, when thou numberest them.

יג זֶה יִתְּנוּ, כָּל-הָעֹבֵר עַל-  
הַפְּקֻדִים--מִחֻצֵי הַשֶּׁקֶל,  
בַּשֶּׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ: עֶשְׂרִים גֵּרָה,  
הַשֶּׁקֶל--מִחֻצֵי הַשֶּׁקֶל,  
תְּרוּמָה לַיהוָה.

13 This they shall give, every one  
that passeth among them that are  
numbered, half a shekel after the  
shekel of the sanctuary--the shekel  
is twenty gerahs--half a shekel for  
an offering to the LORD.

יד כָּל, הָעֹבֵר עַל-הַפְּקֻדִים,  
מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה, וּמַעְלָה--  
יִתֵּן, תְּרוּמַת יְהוָה.

14 Every one that passeth among  
them that are numbered, from  
twenty years old and upward, shall  
give the offering of the LORD.

טו הָעֹשִׂיר לֹא-יִרְבֶּה, וְהַדָּל  
לֹא יִמְעִיט, מִמִּחֻצֵי הַשֶּׁקֶל--  
לִתֵּת אֶת-תְּרוּמַת יְהוָה, לְכַפֵּר  
עַל-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם.

15 The rich shall not give more, and  
the poor shall not give less, than the  
half shekel, when they give the  
offering of the LORD, to make  
atonement for your souls.

טז וְלָקַחְתָּ אֶת-כֶּסֶף הַכֹּפָרִים,  
מֵאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְנָתַתָּ אֹתוֹ,  
עַל-עֲבֹדַת אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד; וְהָיָה  
לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְזִכְרוֹן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה,  
לְכַפֵּר עַל-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם. {פ}

16 And thou shalt take the  
atonement money from the children  
of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the  
service of the tent of meeting, that it  
may be a memorial for the children  
of Israel before the LORD, to make  
atonement for your souls.'

## 2. Rashi Shemos 30:15

וְנָתְנוּ כָּל אֶחָד מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל, וְהֵן לִקְנוֹת מֵהֵן קִרְבָּנוֹת צְבוּר שֶׁל כָּל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה, וְהִשְׁווּ בָהֶם עֲנִיִּים וְעֹשִׁירִים, וְעַל אוֹתָהּ תִּרְוַמָּה נֹאמֵר לְכַפֵּר עַל נַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם, שֶׁהַקִּרְבָּנוֹת לְכַפֵּרָה הֵם בָּאִים;

each of them gave half a shekel. These were employed in purchasing the communal sacrifices for each year. Rich and poor were made alike in regard to these half shekels; and it is with reference to this heave offering that Scripture uses here the expression **לכפר על נפשותיכם**, "to make expiation for your souls", for sacrifices were brought in order to make atonement.

## 3. Or HaChaim Shemos 30:12

Our sages comment that a sinner causes his head to be bowed as a result of his sins. Evil is defined as something which causes man to look only at what is below him, at the ground, whereas **קדושה**, sanctity, results in raising up one's head and elevating a person spiritually. ...Inasmuch as the Torah commands this count after the sin of the golden calf as Rashi concluded based on the words **ונתת אותו על** "and you will appoint it for the service of the Tent of Meeting" in verse 16, we can understand why the expression **כי תשא**, "when you will raise," is appropriate. We encounter a similar use of the word **תשא** in Genesis 40,13 when the Torah refers to Pharaoh "raising" the head of the chief of the butlers who would be reinstated into his position. In our case, the Israelites will be enabled to hold their heads high again as a result of this count which served as atonement for the sin of the golden calf. Up until this time they had not felt able to raise their heads due to the shame of having had a part in that sin.

## 4. Mishna Torah Hilchos Shekalim 1:1

מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה מִן הַתּוֹרָה לָתֵן כָּל אִישׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל בְּכָל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה. אֶפְלוּ עֲנִי הַמִּתְפָּרְנִס מִן הַצְּדָקָה חַיִּב. וְשׂוֹאֵל מֵאַחֲרֵים אוּ מוֹכֵר כְּסוּת שֶׁעַל כְּתִפוֹ וְנוֹתֵן מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל

The Torah commands each member of Israel to contribute half a shekel each year. Even a poor man who lives on charity is required to give; he borrows or sells the garment off his back and contributes a silver half-shekel

5. Bava Basra 9a

אמר רב אסי לעולם אל ימנע אדם עצמו [מלתת] שלישית השקל בשנה שנאמר (נחמיה י', לג) והעמדנו עלינו מצות לתת עלינו שלישית השקל בשנה לעבודת בית אלהינו

Rav Asi says: A person should never prevent himself from giving at least one-third of a shekel a year in charity, as it is stated: "And we also established mitzvot upon ourselves, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the House of our God"

6. Bamidbar 35: 31, 32

**לא** וְלֹא-תִקְחוּ כֹפֶר לְנַפְשׁ רֹצֵחַ, אֲשֶׁר-הוּא רָשָׁע לְמוֹת: כִּי-מוֹת, יוּמָת.

**31** Moreover ye shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer, that is guilty of death; but he shall surely be put to death.

**לב** וְלֹא-תִקְחוּ כֹפֶר, לְנוֹס אֶל-עִיר מְקַלְטוֹ, לְשׁוּב לְשִׁבְתָּ בְּאָרֶץ, עַד-מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן.

**32** And ye shall take no ransom for him that is fled to his city of refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest

Shemot 21: 29-30

**כט** וְאִם שׁוֹר נִגַּח הוּא מִתְמַל שְׁלֵשִׁים, וְהוּעַד בְּבַעַלְיוֹ וְלֹא יִשְׁמְרֵנוּ, וְהֵמִית אִישׁ, אוֹ אִשָּׁה-- הַשׁוֹר, יִסָּקֵל, וְגַם-בְּעַלְיוֹ, יוּמָת.

**29** But if the ox was wont to gore in time past, and warning hath been given to its owner, and he hath not kept it in, but it hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death.

**ל** אִם-כֹּפֶר, יוּשַׁת עָלָיו-- וְנָתַן פְּדִיִן נַפְשׁוֹ, כָּלל

**30** If there be laid on him a ransom, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatsoever is laid upon him.

## אֲשֶׁר-יוֹשֵׁת עָלָיו.

Rashi: אִם כֹּפֵר יוֹשֵׁת עָלָיו. "אִם" זֶה אֵינוֹ תָלוּי, וְהָרִי הוּא כְמוֹ "אִם כָּסֶף תִּלְוָה" – לְשׁוֹן – לְשׁוֹן:  
אֲשֶׁר, זֶה מְשַׁפְּטוֹ שִׁישִׁיתוֹ עָלָיו בֵּית דִּין כְּפָר:

This אִם is not conditional but it has the same meaning as in (Exodus 22:24) “When (אִם) thou lendest money” where it has the meaning of אֲשֶׁר, “when” (for it is a duty to lend money to the poor and it is not optional). It is the law regarding him that the court should set on him a ransom.

### 7. Rabbeinu Bachya Shemos 30:12

The most important revelation of our verse is that all the people that were counted each enjoy individual supervision of their fates by the Lord G'd. All the deeds performed by any individual are recorded. This is why these people become potential victims of a plague. As long as they had only been part of a whole, and not individuals in their own right, the evil eye had not been able to focus on them, seeing they were not a number in themselves. The whole idea of enjoying individual supervision of one's fate by G'd carries with it also the awesome responsibility of ensuring one does not become a candidate for punishment by G'd.

When the woman of Shunem for whom the prophet Elisha had offered to intercede with the king (Kings II 4,3) declined his offer by saying: “I live amongst my people,” (I do not need to be singled out), she had exactly this thought in mind. Once she would have become a known quantity at the king's court, she was also liable to draw unwelcome attention to herself if she committed a mistake. As long as she was more or less anonymous, no trespass would be accounted as her personal fault specifically.

The day on which all our actions are reviewed by G'd is Rosh Hashanah, New year's Day. On that day each one of us is treated as an individual and this is why it is such an awesome day. On that day our deeds are isolated from the fact that all of us are also members of the community at large (compare Jeremiah 32,19). We also find this thought in Ruth 1,1 where the prophet Samuel begins the Book by stressing the individuality of Elimelech and how by trying to be different from the

community and suffering their collective fate he set himself up for punitive action by G'd involving both him and his sons.

8. Seforno Shemos 30:12

ונתנו איש כופר נפשו כי הכרח המנין באישי האדם הוא מצד ההשתנות הקורה באישיו מהויה והפסד, וזה בסבת חטאם, כאמרם (שבת פרק במה אשה יוצאה) אין מיתה בלא חטא, ובכן כל מנין הוא מזכיר עון

the need to count human beings stems from the fact that human beings are not the same each time, i.e. ever since death was decreed upon mankind this reflects sin. Prior to sin man, who was meant to live indefinitely, would be the same at each count. The sages have said that no one dies unless he had committed a sin (Shabbat 55). It follows that mention of a head count of people is an oblique reminder of man's sin, his guilt.

9. Rashi Shemos 30:12

ולא יהיה בהם נגף. שְׁהַמְנִין שׁוֹלֵט בּוֹ עֵין הָרַע, וְהַדָּבָר בָּא עֲלֵיהֶם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁמְצִינוּ בִּימֵי דָוִד ((שמואל ב כ"ד

for numbers (i. e. things that have been numbered) are subject to the influence of the "evil eye", and therefore if you count them by their polls pestilence may befall them, as we find happened, in the days of David

10. Shmuel Bet 24

**א** וַיִּסַּף, אֶף-יְהוָה, לַחֲרוֹת, בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל; וַיִּסֹּת אֶת-דָּוִד בְּהֶם לֵאמֹר, לֶךְ מִנָּה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-יְהוּדָה.

1 And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them, saying: 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'

**ב** וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל-יוֹאָב שֶׁר-הַחַיִּל אֲשֶׁר-אִתּוֹ, שׁוּט-נָא בְּכָל-שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִדָּן וְעַד-בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע, וּפְקְדוּ, אֶת-הָעָם;

2 And the king said to Joab the captain of the host that was with him: 'Go now to and fro through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, and number ye the

וַיִּדְעֵתִי, אֵת מִסְפַּר הָעָם. {ס} people, that I may know the sum of the people.' {S}

ג וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹאָב אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ, וַיֹּסֶף יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֶל-הָעָם כָּהֵם וְכָהֵם מֵאָה פְּעָמִים, וְעֵינַי אֲדַנֶּי-הַמֶּלֶךְ, רְאוֹת; וְאֲדַנֶּי הַמֶּלֶךְ, לָמָּה חִפֵּץ בַּדְּבַר הַזֶּה. 3 And Joab said unto the king: 'Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they may be, a hundredfold, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it; but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?'

ד וַיִּחַזַּק דְּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל-יוֹאָב, וְעַל שָׂרֵי הַחֵיָל; וַיֵּצֵא יוֹאָב וְשָׂרֵי הַחֵיָל, לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, לִפְקֹד אֶת-הָעָם, אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל. 4 Notwithstanding the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host. And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel.

י וַיִּיָּדָד אֶת-הָעָם; {פ} 10 And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. {P}

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל-יְהוָה, חָטָאתִי מְאֹד אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי, וְעַתָּה יְהוָה הֶעֱבַר-נָא אֶת-עֹוֹן עַבְדְּךָ, כִּי נִסְכַּלְתִּי מְאֹד. And David said unto the LORD: 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, O LORD, put away, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of Thy servant; for I have done very foolishly

11.Brachos 62b

”אם ה' הסיתך בי ירח מנחה”, אמר רבי אלעזר: אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא לדוד: ”מיסית” קרית לי? הרי אני מקשילך בדבר שאפילו תינוקות של בית רבן יודעים אותו. דכתיב: ”כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקדיהם ונתנו איש כפר נפשו וגו'”. מיד, ”ויעמד שטן על ישראל”, וכתב: ”ויסת את דוד בהם לאמר לה מנה את ישראל”. וכיון דמנינהו לא שיקל מינייהו כופר. דכתיב: ”ויתן ה' דבר בישראל מהבקר ועד עת מועד”

As for David's statement to Saul: "If it be the Lord that has incited you against me, let Him accept an offering" (I Samuel 26:19), Rabbi Elazar said that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to David: Do you call Me an inciter? In retribution, I will cause

you to fail in a matter that even schoolchildren know, as it is written: “When you take the sum of the children of Israel, according to their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when you number them; that there be no plague among them, when you number them” (Exodus 30:12). Immediately after God said this to David, “Satan stood up against Israel and incited David to number Israel” (I Chronicles 21:1). Moreover, it is written: “And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He incited David against them, saying: Go, number Israel and Judea” (II Samuel 24:1). The proportional response to David’s calling God an inciter was that He incited David. And when he counted them, he did not take a ransom from them, and he was punished, as it is written: “So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the appointed time” (II Samuel 24:15)

## 12. Rav Hirsch Shemos 30:14

However, the contribution required of each individual is symbolized by מחצית השקל, one half-shekel. Viewed objectively, not even the most complete and perfect contribution of any one individual can accomplish the whole of the work that must be done. The work of any individual is always but a fragment; an equally devoted effort on the part of his brother is required in order to produce the whole. No individual is asked to accomplish the entire task: לא עליך המלאכה לגמור (*Avos 2:16*); he is asked to make his personal contribution to the whole, weighed by the standard of the Sanctuary.

One shekel is equivalent to twenty *gerah*, of which the individual is expected to contribute ten. In and of itself, his contribution should be — as far as he is concerned — one rounded whole [ten, a complete unit]. His contribution should be as complete as *he is able* to make it, and he must weigh it in the scales of his conscience. No matter how small a fraction his own contribution represents in relation to the whole of the task to be accomplished, he must spare no effort, no ability, no resource, in promoting the accomplishment of the whole and furthering the welfare of the community. Although לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, nevertheless ולא אתה בן חורין להבטל ממנה (*ibid.*). His half-shekel must weigh ten *gerah* by the standard of the Sanctuary.