

"When you will take the sum of the Bnei Yisrael, according to their number, and every man shall give a ransom for his soul." (30:12)

The primary purpose of the half-*shekel* contribution was to serve as a method for counting *Bnei Yisrael*. In addition to this, the proceeds of the first *shekel* collection served a sacred cause; the silver collected was used in the building of the *Mishkan*, the symbol of the Divine Presence in the midst of *Klal Yisrael*. Subsequently, this became an annual collection during the month of *Adar*. The money was specifically earmarked for the provision of the sacrifices, thereby including all of *Klal Yisrael* in this act of daily worship. In this manner, the *shekel* became a significant symbol of an individual's membership in *Am Yisrael*. It conveyed a meaningful message relevant to all time. In order for a Jew to be numbered among the community of *Klal Yisrael*, he must make a contribution to the community. What benefit is gained by the community from those who choose to close their hearts and pockets, never doing their share for the perpetuation of the Jewish people?

We may suggest an even more profound idea which may be derived from the giving of the *shekel*. Human beings are not counted by their heads like cattle. "*When you will count Bnei Yisrael,*" then "*let each one give a ransom for his soul.*" The fulfillment of Hashem's purpose is realized not merely quantitatively, but qualitatively as well. It is a man's soul which counts. His spiritual contribution leads to the fulfillment of Hashem's purpose. Regarding that good, it is not only the individual himself that counts; rather, the total development of his spiritual dimension must be noted.