

Everyone passing by to be counted must give this half-shekel based on the shekel of the Holy. (30:13)

Why were the people commanded to give only a half-*shekel*? It clearly was not due to financial difficulty. It is not as if another half-*shekel* would have placed anyone on the poverty list. It is almost as if the Torah wants to send a message with the “half” *shekel* amount. Indeed, the commentators, each in his own inimitable approach, underscore the value of a “half” and how it applies to each Jew – knowing that on his own he is fractioned, he is not whole. He needs his fellow in order for him to become whole. *Horav YOSHIAHU PINTO, Shlita*, offers a powerful insight which should engender some non-ambiguous deliberation on our part. A Jew should believe, and this conviction should remain the principle upon which he is able to confront issues – both adverse and propitious – that all we see, all with which we are confronted, is only “half,” part of reality. There is always another perspective, the rest of the story, a second look, two sides to every coin. In other words, what we see and what we experience constitute partial reality. It may appear dismal and bleak now, but be patient, it will change for the better. Likewise, one should not think that his good fortune is here to stay. He could be experiencing the “other side, second half” of the coin – or the beginning.

One who suffers a traumatic experience should not assume that this is “it.” Now, life is challenging, but be patient, it is only half. More will soon emerge, and it will make sense out of the present. It is very much like the parable rendered by the *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists, about the prince who grew up amid extraordinary opulence, to the point that he believed that everything grew on trees. The bread that he ate, the cake that he enjoyed, grew on trees. His belief was shattered when, one day, he left the palace on an extended journey where he saw farmers “destroying” (plowing) the earth. If this was not sufficiently strange to him, he was stupefied when, a few days later, he saw the same farmer burying (planting) good, edible seeds in the ground. A few weeks later, when he saw tall, strong stalks of wheat growing in the field, he was quite impressed, until he saw the farmer cut (harvest) them down. He followed the process and became angered when he saw the farmer pound (grind) the kernels into white powder. When he saw the flour mixed with water produce delicious bread, however, he understood that he had always been looking at part of the story.

Machatzis ha’shekel, half a *shekel*. It is always a half. We are not privy (in one sitting) to the whole story. We all have issues; we all have complaints. Some articulate their problems more than others, while others have the sagacity to remain quiet, patiently awaiting a turn of events. We all play a minor role in the play of life. Hashem places us in specific places and gives us a part to play, a role to perform. We can only do what we are supposed to do, since we do not see beyond the time allotted to us in this life.

The following frightening story is true and demonstrates how little we know and how shortsighted we can be, because we see only one frame of life, not the whole/bigger picture. In a small Austrian

town on the German/Austrian border, there lived a couple with a sick baby. It was the end of the nineteenth century and urgent care centers with their expertise were unknown. The baby was spiking a high fever. The father went out in search of a competent doctor who could save his baby's life. Finally, he convinced a doctor from a neighboring town to make a house call. It took hours of patience, expertise and drugs to bring down the child's fever before they were convinced that the child's crisis had passed. The doctor was considered a hero, accolades and gratitude being lavished on him. He left a proud, happy man, having saved a child's life. To any of us hearing the story, we would feel good all over and agree that the doctor was truly a hero. That is, until we learned the identity of the child: Adolph Hitler, *yemach shemo v'zichro*. As I said, we only see part of the picture, half the story.