

## בענין פרשת שקלים

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I. Introduction. Each year, the first sign of the joyous יום טוב season comes with the reading of פרשת השקלים. The (ראש השנה דף כט.) states that if ראש חדש אדר falls on שבת (as it does this year) we read פרשת שקלים on ראש חדש. If ראש חדש falls during the week, we are obligated to read פרשת שקלים on the preceding שבת. This special reading is the first of a series of four special readings that will be read over the next few weeks. In this essay, we will analyze the reasons for the obligation to read פרשת שקלים, discuss its origins, and explain why it is specifically read on שבת.

#### פרשת שקלים The reason to read

##### A. When the בית המקדש stood.

1. When we had the בית המקדש, each Jew was obligated to donate a half שקל to the communal funds in order to pay for the communal sacrifices (קרבנות הציבור). Starting from ראש חדש ניסן the communal offerings were only permitted to be purchased with the newly collected funds (see גמרא ר"ה דף ז. וריש מס' שקלים). As such, it was crucial that people be reminded one month in advance to contribute their portion in order that there be sufficient funds to purchase the communal offerings.

2. An additional reason to read פרשת שקלים is offered by מסכת סופרים. שיטת המסכת סופרים. An additional reason to read פרשת שקלים is offered by מסכת סופרים (פרק כ"א הלכה ב'). The explicitly states: "Why do they publicize the bringing of the שקלים on ראש חדש אדר? Because God knew that המן הרשע would come to weigh his coins on the Jewish people, so we pre-empt his שקלים with our own שקלים. As further evidence to this connection תוספות points out that the ten thousand talents of silver used by המן correspond exactly to a half שקל for each of 600,000 Jews.

B. In our times. Nowadays we no longer have a בית המקדש, nor do we have any obligation to pay for the communal sacrifices. In light of this fact, it is important to try to understand why we still read פרשת שקלים. The ספר החינוך (מצוה ק"ה) writes that although we no longer have a בית המקדש we still have the custom to commemorate the שקלים through reading פרשת שקלים in shul each year. It remains unclear, however, if we read פרשת שקלים to commemorate the מצוה of giving the שקלים or to commemorate the announcement to remind people to bring the שקלים to the בית המקדש.

1. Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (מקראי קדש סימן ג') (מגילה דף כט:) explains that the פרשת שקלים was even read in the times of the בית המקדש as a reminder to people to bring in their שקלים. It would seem that nowadays when no such reminder is necessary, we read פרשת שקלים as a method of commemorating the original פרשת שקלים, not as a way of commemorating the מצוה to actually give the שקלים.
2. לבוש. The (סימן תרפ"ה ס"א) writes that in general we commemorate מצוות that were performed in the בית המקדש by reading the pertinent section in the תורה. The most obvious example of this is the reading of the daily קרבנות we do each morning to substitute for the actual sacrifices that we are no longer able to offer. The reading of פרשת שקלים is another example of this idea. Since we are no longer

able to give an actual מחצית השקל to the בית המקדש, we read the section in the תורה that deals with the מחצית השקל as a substitute. Thus, reading פרשת שקלים is our method of fulfilling the מצוה of מחצית השקל.

a. נפקא מינה בין השיטות. A possible practical ramification of this מחלוקת about the nature of פרשת שקלים is suggested by Rabbi Tuviah Freund (מועדים לשמחה חלק ג' קריאת פרשת שקלים). If we are merely commemorating the public announcement to bring the מחצית השקל, it is possible that a child may read this פרשה for us. After all, the original public announcement was not intended to be מוציא the listeners in any sort of חיוב קריאה. Our reading today that commemorates this announcement should therefore also be valid when done by a child. If however, the לבוש is correct that we read פרשת שקלים as a fulfillment of the actual מצוה of מחצית השקל, those who are exempt from the מצוה should not be permitted to read the פרשה for others.

b. Other possibilities about a child reading פרשת שקלים. Responsa בנין שלמה (סימן נ"ד) argues that even according to the לבוש a child may read פרשת שקלים if he will become ר"ח ניסן before בר מצוה. He reasons that since the child will be obligated in contributing to this year's שקלים he is equally obligated to read the פרשה dealing with the שקלים. Using a similar line of reasoning to arrive at a different conclusion, Rav Moshe Shternbuch (מועדים וזמנים חלק ו' סימן צ"ה) suggests that anybody under the age of twenty should not be eligible to read פרשת שקלים. He argues that since only those from the age of twenty were obligated to contribute a מחצית השקל, only those over the age of twenty should read the פרשה.

II. Is reading פרשת שקלים considered to be a מצוה דאורייתא or a מצוה דרבנן? Initially, there doesn't seem to be much question that the מצוה of reading פרשת שקלים is only rabbinic in nature. This, in fact, seems to be the general assumption of all פוסקים. There is a minority opinion, however, that suggests reading פרשת שקלים may also be מן התורה. מן התורה lists (ברכות יג. ד: בלשון) מן התורה as a מצוה דאורייתא. The (ברכות שם) adds that פרשת זכור, פרשת זכור, and "others like them" are all required to be read מן התורה. The (סימן תרפ"ה) comments that when the רשב"א speaks of "others like them" the reference is to פרשת שקלים. The (פתח עינים) claims to have seen a manuscript of מסכת ברכות where the same assertion is made.

A. Explaining the opinion that it is דאורייתא. It is very difficult to understand how anybody can assume that פרשת שקלים is דאורייתא. After all, there is certainly no commandment in the תורה to actually read פרשת שקלים. Perhaps we may suggest that this approach assumes like the לבוש that we cited earlier (that we read פרשת שקלים as a substitute for the actual מחצית השקל). The (בדפי הרי"ף למסכת ברכות) suggest that when we recite the סדר הקרבנות in the morning, we are in fulfillment of our biblical obligation to offer these קרבנות. Perhaps, if פרשת שקלים is a method of fulfilling the מצוה דאורייתא as the לבוש suggested, the reading of the פרשה is an actual fulfillment of the מצוה דאורייתא to give the מחצית השקל. On a similar note, Rav Shlomo of Vilna cites his brother Rav Betzalel of Vilna that we find an allusion to פרשת שקלים in our times in the actual פרשה itself. The phrase "לכפר על נפשותיכם" is repeated twice within the few פסוקים that make up פרשת שקלים. At first the תורה states that the giving of the מחצית השקל is "והיו לבני ישראל לזכרון לפני ה'", and in the very next פסוק the תורה says: "לכפר על נפשותיכם".

לכפר על נפשותיכם". The first phrase refers to the actual מהצית השקל, while the second alludes to the "זכרון" of the מהצית השקל - the reading of the פרשה - to serve as a כפרה for those points in history when we do not have a בית המקדש.

III. Conclusion. We have discussed the possible reasons for and origin of the מצוה to read פרשת שקלים. As with any מצוה that can no longer be performed in its fullest sense without the בית המקדש, the reading of פרשת שקלים carries with it a bittersweet message. On the one hand we are thrilled to have the opportunity to perform מצוות even in the absence of our בית המקדש. On the other hand, the מצוה serves as a sobering reminder of just how limited our fulfillment of מצוות is while we remain in גלות. May we soon be זוכה to see the public sacrifices that our בית המקדש בבנינו have purchased with the