

Blessings Beyond Number

“When you take a census of the Bnei Yisrael...they shall give...half a shekel.” (Shemos 30:12-13). Counting the Bnei Yisrael is a fascinating subject. Hashem counts us several times in the Torah. Why? To show His great love for us, as Rashi states in the beginning of Sefer Shemos (1:1).

Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch adds another facet to the counting of the half-shekels. It was (and still is) a tremendous *zechus* (merit) to be a part of Klal Yisrael. Perhaps we can also add that being counted among them was one's ticket to receiving the great blessings that were bestowed upon the Jewish people. There was one condition. One had to give his *trumah* (donation) of a half-shekel. Without this self-sacrifice, one's dues were not paid. Only after sacrificing for the sake of the community, would the individual merit to be a full member and thereby receive its blessings.

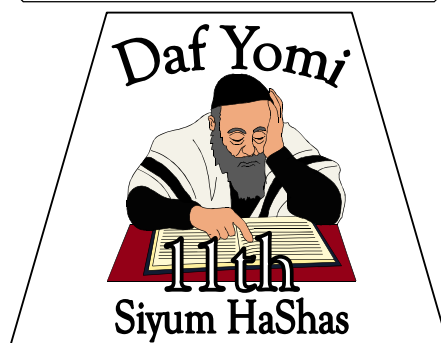
This week we celebrate a momentous event in the history of Klal Yisrael, the eleventh *siyum* (completion) of the entire Talmud by the *Daf Yomi* cycle. *Daf Yomi* began as a dream of Rav Meir Shapira, zt"l, the Lubliner Rav. He formulated a learning schedule that would unite Jews worldwide; a veritable “Yeshiva without walls”. Jewish people from all walks of life in all communities would learn the same “*daf*” (page) of Gemora each day. Each day, a different *daf*, the cycle moves on and on. Everyone has a common interest, a common goal, on their steady journey to a glorious Olam Habbo.

The program began on Rosh Hashanah 5684 (September 11, 1923). The 2711 pages of *shas* were completed in 7½ years. There are photos of the second *siyum* (5698-1938) celebrated at Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin. What happened over the next years is unbelievable. In 5728 (1968) the sixth cycle was completed in the USA in the Beth Jacob Auditorium in Brooklyn, attracting 1,000 people. The seventh cycle finished in 5735 (1975) in the Manhattan Center in the presence of 5,000 people. The *siyum* of the eighth cycle in 5473 (1982) was held in the Felt Forum and attracted still more participants. The ninth cycle was finished in 5750 (1990) by 20,000 people in Madison Square Garden. The tenth cycle completed in 5757 (1997) attracted 40,000 people in Madison Square Garden and Nassau Coliseum along with untold thousands in Bottei Kinesiot and auditoriums throughout the world. This week, 20 Adar 1, *siyums* of the

eleventh cycle are scheduled for tens of thousands, perhaps even 100,000 Jews in Bottei Midrashim and auditoriums worldwide. *Daf Yomi* is studied in virtually every Beit Hakinset. Tapes of every *daf* are available in many languages. There is even dial-a-daf by telephone. Did Rav Meir Shapira zt"l ever imagine such an awesome Kiddush Hashem? What a tremendous *bracha* has been bestowed on Klal Yisrael, its numbers increasing beyond belief!

Kinderlach . . .

Why has Daf Yomi merited such success? Perhaps our Devar Torah gives us the answer: mesirus nefesh (self-sacrifice). Each participant makes the time to learn his daily daf. Some get up early in the morning; others learn while commuting to work or late at night. There are even kollels devoted to daf yomi. All are moser nefesh for the program, sacrificing their “half shekel” of time to be counted as a member of this holy institution. In the merit of this, they share in daf yomi's huge success. What an example of Klal Yisrael's love for Torah. Hashem has surely blessed this holy institution with “bracha ad bli dai” (blessing without end) (Malachi 3:10).



A Golden Opportunity

“Ravina says, ‘The owner of an ox has to pay full damages if it gores another ox in its owner's courtyard.’ Zalman, did you hear me?”

“What? Of course I heard you, Tzvi. What did you say?”

“If you don't know what I said, then you didn't hear me. Come, let's try it again.”

“I'm sorry, Tzvi. My mind was wandering. Can you blame me? Look around us. There are so many empty seats in the Beis HaMedrash.”

Tzvi looked around and saw that it was true.

“Zalman, this is a golden opportunity.”

“Really? In what way?”

“This is a time of *rifion* (weakness) in our

Beis HaMedrash. What shall we do in such a situation? Let us look in this week's parasha - ‘Whoever is for Hashem, join me!’ (Shemos 32:26).”

“That verse is speaking about the Chet Ha'egel (Sin of the Golden Calf). What is the connection to our Beis HaMedrash?”

“The Chet Ha'egel was a time of terrible *rifion* in Klal Yisrael. Rav Aharon Kotler learns a lesson from this to all times of *rifion*.”

“Please share it with me.”

“Firstly, we must feel badly for those who are here and not here, for having to suffer this *rifion*. Even more so must we feel Hashem's *tsar* (anguish) over the failings and weakness of His children.”

“I understand.”

“Now, we can use as a motivation to *mechazek* (strengthen) ourselves and those around us. You should know, Zalman, that there is a very big reward for this.”

“Please tell me about it.”

“Let us return to the Chet Ha'egel. Moshe called out, ‘Whoever is for Hashem, join me!’ Who responded? The tribe of Levi. They strengthened themselves at this time of *rifion*, rallied around Moshe, and carried out Hashem's Will. For this, they were rewarded with the *zechus* to perform the *avodah* (service) in the Beis HaMikdash, greatness in Torah, and preference for positions in the Sanhedrin.”

“That is awesome.”

“I could not have said it better. Times of *rifion* are golden opportunities to strengthen ourselves, others, and reap tremendous rewards. Rav Kotler adds that only we can direct ourselves to put all of our *koach* (strength) into fulfilling our obligation.

Kinderlach . . .

It is important to be in a good, strong environment. We draw inspiration from our surroundings. Sometimes we find ourselves in weak atmosphere. What shall we do? Redouble our efforts! Hashem is giving us a golden opportunity for extra reward. Shevet Levi taught us a lesson for all time. They strengthened themselves, Klal Yisrael, gave Hashem nachas, and earned eternal reward. Follow their example. Seize the opportunity! “Whoever is for Hashem, join me!”

Parasha Questions

- From what age must one give his half-shekel? (30:14)
- What was the procedure for washing the hands and feet of the Kohanim? (Rashi 30:19)
- What was the shemen mishchas kodesh used for? (30:26-28, 30)
- For what use was the shemen mishchas kodesh forbidden, and what was the punishment? (30:32,33)