



**5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Terumah / פְּרֻשַׁת תְּרוּמָה /
Rosh Chodesh Adar / ראש חודש אדר | Shabbat Shekalim / שַׁבַּת שְׁקָלִים**

***DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF THE HOLY BIBAS CHILDREN AND THEIR MOTHER SHIRI HY"D
AS WELL AS THOSE HOSTAGES HY"D WHOSE BODIES RETURNED TO ISRAEL THIS PAST WEEK***

Where Partnership Becomes Nationhood

The opening *mishna* of *Masechet Shekalim* recounts that the announcements for the annual collection of the *machatzit hashekel* would begin on *Rosh Chodesh Adar*. Every Jewish male was obligated to send a *machatzit hashekel* (a silver *sela* coin in Mishnaic times) to Jerusalem to provide funds for communal *korbanot*. However, it seems that there was a dispute as to whether *kohanim* were also included in this obligation (see *mishna* 4 *ibid*). In fact, some *kohanim* argued that it was prohibited for them to contribute to the collection.

Their reasoning was as follows: several communal *korbanot* purchased with the funds of the *machatzit hashekel* were flour offerings, such as the *korban ha'omer* and the *shte'i halechem* brought on *Pesach* and *Shavuot*. The proper procedure for bringing these *menachot* is for *kohanim* to consume the non-burned portion of the *korban*. However, unlike a normal flour offering of a non-*kohen* in which only a small portion of *kemitza* is burned and the rest is eaten by *kohanim*, the verse in *Vayikra* (6:16) is explicit that a *kohen's* flour offering must be entirely consumed on the fires of the *mizbeach*. Many therefore argued that a *kohen's* contribution to the communal funds would ruin every flour offering brought by the *tzibbur*. Given that the priests now had partial financial ownership over the offering, the entire *korban ha'omer* would have to be burned, against the proper procedure that the Torah commands!

Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakkai was exceedingly dismissive of this argument, accusing the *kohanim* of offering these arguments to exempt themselves from the communal financial burden. The rule of law follows the great sage; even *kohanim* must contribute the *machatzit hashekel* to the *Beit HaMikdash* (*Rambam, Shekalim* 1:7).

However, the question still remains. How can we force the *kohanim* to contribute to the *korbanot hatzibbur*, thereby providing them with part-ownership in our flour offerings? Doesn't this necessitate burning every communal *mincha* entirely on the *mizbeach*?

In a seminal essay appropriately penned in the holy city of Jerusalem, Rav Kook (*Mishpat Kohen* 124) points to a significant contrast between the Jewish people and the other nations of the world. He explains that for all the other peoples of the world, a nation exists to benefit the individual. Essentially, nationhood is a glorified partnership that brings higher levels of prosperity to society. However, for the Jewish people, there is a fundamental difference between the ownership of שותפין (partners) and ציבור (the total community of *Klal Yisrael*). "באמת לגבי ישראל ציבור ושותפין הם שני מושגים". The totality of *Knesset Yisrael* is not simply a conglomerate of individuals but rather an organic whole that transcends the sum of its parts. Every individual is an indispensable part of the broader nation and seamlessly integrates into the glory of *Klal Yisrael*.



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This is why a communal *korban* is not jointly owned by every individual who contributes to it. The *korban* is owned by *Klal Yisrael*, the larger organic whole that transcends the separate identities of the individuals who contributed to it. The *kohanim* were not partial owners of the communal flour offerings; they were simply a part of *Knesset Yisrael*.

This powerful idea sheds light on the deeper spiritual significance of the *machatzit hashekel* and the role of Jerusalem in uniting the entire nation. In *Chodesh Adar*, as hundreds of thousands of separate coins began to arrive in Jerusalem from every corner of *Eretz Yisrael*, the holy city “collected” and “bound” them together. The communal sacrifices brought in Jerusalem’s center were the most powerful expression of our unity. A single sacrifice was purchased with the funds of the entire nation. The *korban* was not jointly owned by many; it was owned by *Knesset Yisrael*.

In Jerusalem, *Bnei Yisrael* are not just a conglomerate of individuals, but rather a single nation. This reality was concretely expressed through the *machatzit hashekel* and *korbanot*. **May we be zoche to reclaim the opportunity of tangibly feeling our unity with the donation of the machatzit hashekel in the fully rebuilt city of Yerushalayim, speedily in our days.**

