

**MORASHAH**  
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Rabbi Shlomo Marks

*Parashat HaShavuah Series*

Parashat Ki Tissa

Moshe Rabbeinu is told by Hashem to make a head count of *Am Yisrael*. This count is to be achieved not by lining everybody up and literally counting them; but rather, everybody – rich and poor alike – is to donate half a shekel. Rashi tells us that even Moshe was puzzled by the fact that the amount of the donation was set, for both rich and poor, at the same amount.

The *Parasha* opens as follows:

...כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת-רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְקֻדֵיהֶם...

“When you make a head count of the people of Israel...” (Sh’mot 30:12). This could literally mean “When you raise up the heads of the people for an accounting”. What type of accounting might this be? This is an absolutely fascinating piece! In this *parasha*, Moshe Rabbeinu spends most of his time up on Mount Sinai, writing down the Torah as dictated by Hashem and blissfully unaware of what is taking place below. When he descends, he finds *Am Yisrael* worshipping the *egel hazahav* (golden calf). This “up the mountain, down the mountain” idea is also a metaphor for being close to the Divine Presence and then far away from it.

The opening *pasuk* is already hinting at the fact that this is not a simple count, but a calling to account for the sin to come. The sadness of it all is that Hashem told the people to take the gold and silver from the Egyptians as a *mitzvah* to build the *Mishkan* (tabernacle). They then, through their lack of Torah knowledge, their spiritual frailty and the fear of abandonment, turn a *mitzvah* into a vehicle for an enormous sin. They no longer have the certainty or regularity of their daily lives in the *Galut* of Egypt. Furthermore, without Hashem’s daily guidance, spoken through Moshe Rabbeinu, this young nation cannot cope with daily life.

The reality is that we are now witness to the first recorded case of mass separation anxiety. *Am Yisrael* is but a small child, anguishing over the absence of its parent, Moshe Rabbeinu, Hashem’s messenger. Without Moshe, the heavenly spark is absent and a Jew without the heavenly spark is less than half a person.

My own experiences in Israel taught me that there are at least two types of *Galut*: there is physical *Galut*, that is, living outside of the *Eretz Hakodesh*, and there is spiritual *Galut*

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which is living without the divine presence. I personally experienced this type of *Galut* whilst living in the *Eretz Hakodesh* during my daily struggle to feed and clothe my family. This idea is mirrored in *Am Yisrael*, for even though no longer living in Egypt they were still in spiritual *Galut* and the Golden Calf was its physical manifestation.

We see from this week's *parasha* that living without the Divine Presence or His messenger can be the most devastating of all the forms of *Galut*. For without Hashem or His messenger we are nothing more than a fearful child who can be influenced by the false gods of the modern world. Hashem's presence is available to us all by daily prayer and Torah study. May we all go from strength to strength in these areas, and by these endeavors, we the Jewish people will never be truly alone.

*Shabbat Shalom!*

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