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UNDER THE AUSPICES OF HARAV CHAIM KOHN, SHLITA



STORY LINE

By Rabbi Meir Orlian

MACHATZIS HASHEKEL

"On the first of Adar we announce about the shekels... On the fifteenth, moneychangers would sit throughout the country" (Mishnah Shekalim 1:1-3).

Moshe was dreaming. He drifted into the future, hopefully near, to the era of the rebuilt Temple. As he wandered through the streets of Eretz Yisrael, he saw a person set up a booth and unfurl a sign: "Donate your machatzis hashekel (half-shekel) now!" People began lining up, forming a long line.

"Half a shekel!" exclaimed Moshe. "What can you do with half a shekel? And why are so many people running to donate?"

As Moshe stood there, Rabbi Dayan passed by; he saw the sign and joined the line. Moshe went over. "Excuse me, Rabbi Dayan," he said. "What is a machatzis hashekel?"

"The shekel was the primary silver currency in the Torah," answered Rabbi Dayan. "It was equivalent to 20 gerah, a small, commonplace coin that was later called a maah in Rabbinic literature. At some point the coins were made 20-percent larger, so that the shekel contained 24 maah, rather than 20. Machatzis hashekel is a half-shekel coin" (Rambam, Hil. Shekalim 1:1-3).

"I learned about shekels in the Gemara," said Moshe. "Is that the same shekel coin as in the Torah?"

"In Rabbinic times, the shekel of the Torah was called a sela; it contained 4 dinar, or zuz," replied Rabbi Dayan. "The term shekel was used for a 2-dinar, i.e., half-sela coin, so that a shekel in Rabbinic literature is actually the half-shekel of the Torah."

"Furthermore, the shekel of the Torah was made of pure silver," continued Rabbi Dayan. "This is known in Rabbinic literature as tzori (from Tyre) currency. In the times of Chazal there was also a common currency made of an alloy containing only one-eighth silver. Accordingly, it was worth only one-eighth the value and known as medinah (local) currency" (see Kiddushin 11a-b).

"How large was the shekel coin?" asked Moshe.

"Based on Rabbinic tradition, historical sources and archaeological finds, it seems most likely that the shekel weighed 14-15 grams, slightly more than half an ounce," replied Rabbi Dayan. "Some authorities estimate it at about 19 grams, two-thirds of an ounce. This amount is relevant also for pidyon haben

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BHI HOTLINE

HAT EXCHANGE. PART II

I took the Monsey bus from Boro Park to

Monsey. When we arrived I realized that someone had taken my hat and left his behind. I called the bus company, but no one contacted them about a lost hat. I also placed ads in the local papers and did not receive a response.

Q: Am I permitted to use the hat?

A: Last week we cited Shulchan Aruch's ruling regarding items that become exchanged at a wedding. The halachah in those cases is that one may not use the exchanged item. Furthermore, it must be returned to the owner, even if one cannot find his missing item (C.M. 136:2). Even when the other person took your object — e.g., there is only one raincoat left in shul that is not yours — it is an act of theft to use the remaining item unless beis din authorizes you to use it (Shulchan Aruch Harav, Geneivah 30). One may not even "borrow" it since borrowing items without permission (sho'el shelo midaas) is an act of theft. We mentioned, however, that where there is a custom that permits using exchanged items, for example, rubbers/galoshes left in public places, one is permitted to use the item that was left behind. However, it is difficult to apply that leniency when there is no widespread custom to that effect. Another potential leniency was when it can be assumed that the owner would not mind lending his item until the items could be returned. According to many poskim, this leniency is limited to short-term use of the exchanged item. It does not apply for extended use of the item since that will involve significant wear and tear. Additionally, for hygienic reasons people are



STORY LINE

(redeeming the firstborn), which is five shekels of the Torah. The common practice is to follow the stringent opinion of 96 grams of silver" (Y.D. 305:1; E.H. 66:6).

"How much is the half-shekel worth nowadays?" asked Moshe.

"The value of silver, in comparison to other metals, has dropped precipitously during the past few centuries," replied Rabbi Dayan. "In the times of the Tanach, and even into the Middle Ages, silver was worth about a twelfth of the value of gold. A half-shekel represented about half of an average month's salary! At current prices (March, '16), silver is worth only an eightieth of gold, whose current value is about \$15 an ounce, so that a half-shekel of silver is only about \$7.50."

"What was the machatzis hashekel used for?" asked Moshe.

"The machatzis hashekel was collected yearly from every Jew to fund the expenses of the Beis Hamikdash, including the public offerings, such as the daily offerings (korban tamid), Mussaf and ketores," replied Rabbi Dayan. "The half-shekel was a minimum but could be added to, in accordance with the family's expected budget. The Gemara teaches that in the early times of the Second Temple, when there were fewer people, they collected an amount more than the half-shekel. The same will likely be now, with the relatively low value of silver" (Rambam and Raavad, Hil. Shekalim 1:6).

Moshe woke up. "What a dream!" he exclaimed. He added a prayer that his dream should come true soon.



BHI HOTLINE

uncomfortable having someone else wear their hat for an extended period of time, making it difficult to rely on that rationale in your circumstance. However, in this circumstance there may be a different rationale.

The halachah is that if the owner does not retrieve the lost object, the finder must retain possession of it until the arrival of Eliyahu Hanavi (yehei munach ad sheyavo Eliyahu). Even though the owner has undoubtedly despaired (yei'ush) of recovering the item, one remains a custodian for it since he initially took possession of it before the owner despaired. However, the halachah regarding tefillin (Chazal's example of an easily exchanged item) is that one may appraise its value, accept responsibility to repay the owner that value, and then use or sell the item (C.M. 267:21).

Accordingly, there are many contemporary authorities who adopt a lenient position regarding items that are readily available for purchase and permit the finder to use the lost object once the value of the object was appraised. This is especially true regarding items that lose value after an extended period of time. Therefore, one should record, in a safe place, details related to the lost items that one has found and after doing so, he may use those items (Chasam Sofer, C.M. 122; Igros Moshe, C.M. 2:45; Ohr David 24; Minchas Yitzchak 8:146; and Cheishev Ha'ephod 2:11).

Your situation fits into this category, and furthermore it is logical that even after you get in touch with one another, he will not claim anything from you since he will realize that the exchange occurred due to his negligence.

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MONEY MATTERS

PARTNERSHIP # 22

Fair Division of Expenses

Q: I share an apartment with a roommate and we generally split rent, utilities and telephone. If I was away for most of the month, do I need to share in the expenses equally?

A: This depends on the initial agreement and the common practice. It is typical that one roommate might use the apartment more than the other. For example, one may go away for Shabbos frequently; one roommate might take vacation this time of year and the other at a different time.

Thus, if the initial agreement was to split the expenses without any exclusion, you would be liable to pay your half even while you are away. This applies not only to fixed expenses such as rent, but also to expenses dependent on use such as utilities, unless there is a clear common practice to the contrary, or the roommate willingly agrees to pay a larger share this month.

Furthermore, you are not allowed to have someone replace you while you are away without your roommate's consent to that person, unless your initial agreement states otherwise (C.M. 316:2).

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