

Machatzis Hashekel: The Half Shekel

During the days of the Temple, every Jewish male was obligated to contribute half a shekel to the communal fund to pay for the communal sacrifices and other public needs. Since the yearly drive started in the month of Adar we commemorate this mitzvah on Taanis Esther, or before the megillah reading. The “Machatzis Hashekel” is donated at the Mincha preceding Purim (the 13th of Adar). (When Purim is on Sunday, the Machatzis Hashekel is donated at the Mincha of Ta’anis Esther on Thursday.)

- Since the original obligation was to give half of a shekel, it is customary to give a coin that has the word half in its name. In the US, many people give a half dollar.
- It is customary to give three of these coins.
- This money is distributed to the poor.
- It must be given by, or on behalf of, all males over bar mitzvah. Many have a custom to give three half dollars on behalf of their sons who are also under bar mitzvah. If someone has started to give for his minor sons, he must continue with this custom every year until they begin to give for themselves. Machatzis Hashekel should not be given from monies previously designated for charity.

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