

MACHATZIT HASHEKEL – THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

Over a hundred years ago, at a festive gathering of prestigious rabbis, the Rabbi of Pressburg, Rabbi [Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer](#), known as the Ktav Sofer, got up to speak. It was Parshat Ki Tissa, and he announced that he had brought along a rare treasure that he wanted to display. To the amazement of all those gathered, the Ktav Sofer took out an authentic "*machatzit hashekel*," the half-shekel coin used in Temple times as the annual poll-tax payment to take care of Temple expenses.

The coin was passed around for each person to see and feel; until finally the Ktav Sofer asked for its return. But it was gone. "Who had it last? Have you seen it?" Everyone looked around his place, but it was nowhere to be found. "Perhaps," it was suggested, "someone put it in his pocket by mistake; let's all empty our pockets just to make sure."

At this suggestion, the elderly Rabbi Yehuda Asad of Hungary got up and said, "I ask that we wait twenty minutes before emptying our pockets." All were puzzled by his request, but they agreed out of respect for the elderly sage. After 20 minutes, Rabbi Asad rose and said, "I have one more request which may seem odd, but please, let us wait just 10 more minutes." Now the guests were more puzzled than before, but agreed to wait just 10 more minutes.

Suddenly, a waiter emerged from the kitchen shouting, "I found it! I found the *machtzit hasheke!*" Apparently, it had been placed on the table and then accidentally cleared away with the dishes. The mystery was solved.

Now all eyes turned toward Rabbi Asad: What was the explanation of his strange request? Rabbi Asad explained: "I wanted to keep it secret, but now I feel I must explain. You see, I too have a *machatzit hashekel*," he said, and he reached into his pocket and pulled out an ancient coin. "And I, too, brought it along to display. But when I saw the Ktav Sofer's delight in displaying his coin, I decided to keep mine a secret so as not to diminish his joy in any way."

This story shows the great sensitivity of the elderly rabbi. But also, it shows how far we must go to judge favorably, for imagine if the Ktav Sofer's coin had not been found. Would anyone have believed that another person in attendance not only owned a duplicate, but had brought it along as well?

This story can be found here: <https://ohr.edu/judaism/othrside/side067.htm>