

Coin of the Realm

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Q I plan to be in Eretz Yisrael for Purim while my family remains in America. When fulfilling the minhag of *zeicher lemachatzis* hashekel, I follow the Mishnah Brurah and give on behalf of my children. Which currency should I use for them, the Israeli half-shekel or the US half-dollar?

A The Rama (O.C. 694:1) says to follow the universal minhag of giving tzedakah before Purim to commemorate the *machatzis* hashekel donation in Adar in the time of the *bais hamikdash*. (Many have the custom to give three half-coins, as mentioned by the Rama.) Local currency must be used.



Yet the Biur Halacha (ibid.) disapproved of using his local half-groschen coin because of its low value; only a coin that is *chashuv* resembles the original silver *machatzis* hashekel. Some *poskim* didn't use the Israeli half-shekel coin for this reason, including R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited in Halichos Shlomo 18:9) and the Steipler Gaon, both of whom used half-dollar coins. Others maintain that a coin that is not in circulation locally is not considered a coin, so US currency is invalid in Eretz Yisrael, and they do not consider the half-shekel's low value an issue (Derech Emunah *Hilchos Ma'aser Sheini* 4:14). Some argue that given its universal acceptance, the US dollar is considered currency even abroad. The prevailing custom in Eretz Yisrael seems to accept use of the half-shekel coin.

One who follows the practice to use Israeli currency in Eretz Yisrael, should use it even for his child back home, for two reasons. First (Kaf Hachaim O.C. ibid. note 27), the reason of those early *poskim* that hold the view that one should give *machatzis* hashekel for his young child is that the head of a household must ensure that every member of his family receives *kaparah*, per the *pasuk* (Shmos 30:15) "*lechapeir al nafshoseichem* (to atone for your souls)." It stands to reason that the location of the head of household is determinative.

Second, the value and qualities of an item are determined based on its

location (Arachin 24a). *Ma'aser sheini*, for example, which can only be redeemed onto currency, may be redeemed with a foreign coin so long as the coin is located in its issuing country, regardless of where the owner and his fruits are (Ra'avad *Hilchos Ma'aser Sheini* ibid.). In your case, the coin is located in Eretz Yisrael.