

Parashat Ki Tetze 5779, 2019:

The Forgotten Sheaf

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Shichaha, the commandment to leave behind a forgotten sheaf of grain for the needs of the poor, is a key agriculturally-based *mitzvah* that appears in our *parasha*:

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to take it; it shall be [left] for the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, so that the L-rd, your G-d, will bless you in all that you do. (*Sefer Devarim* 24:19, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) formulates our *mitzvah* in the following manner:

The 122nd *mitzvah* that we are commanded is to leave over the sheaves which were forgotten (*shichaha*) during the harvest process. The source of this commandment is G-d's statement, "[When you reap your harvest] and forget a sheaf in the field, you may not go back for it. It must be left for the stranger, the orphan, and the widow." This phrase, "It must be left for the stranger, the orphan, and widow," constitutes the positive commandment to leave over [these forgotten sheaves] ...The Biblical requirement applies only in Eretz Yisrael. (*Sefer HaMitzvot*, Positive Commandment 122, translation, Rabbi Berel Bell, with my emendations)

The anonymous author of the *Sefer HaChinuch* (13th century) sheds light upon the underlying rationale of this commandment, and enables us to gain a deeper appreciation of its singular import:

Regarding the fundamental basis of the commandment: When the poor and destitute... in their [grinding] poverty look at the produce [of the field] in a [desperate and] dependent manner — while gazing upon the field's owner sheaving their sheaves...they [consequently] think in their [heart of] hearts: "Who will give [in order] that it will be like

this for me, [so that, I, too, can] gather sheaves into my house, for if I could bring [in even] one [sheaf], I would rejoice in it.” As such, [this commandment stems] from His kindnesses towards His creatures, may He be blessed, in order to fulfill their desire when it so happens that the owner of the field forgets it [the sheaves].

(Commandment 592, translations, <https://www.sefaria.org/>, with my emendations)

Thus far, the *Sefer HaChinuch* has focused upon Hashem’s great kindness in providing for the overwhelming needs of His creations, in this case, through the agency of the owner of the field. This is congruent with the celebrated *pasuk* (verse) that we recite three times a day in *Ashrei*: “You open Your hand and satisfy every living thing [with] its desire.” (*Sefer Tehillim* 145:16) At the same time, our anonymous author emphasizes the benefits that accrue to the owner of the field:

There is also a benefit for the owner of the field, in that he acquires through this a goodly soul; for truly through the trait of generosity and a blessed soul that does not place its heart upon the forgotten sheaf and leaves it to the destitute - on those with such a soul - does the blessing of G-d descend forever.

I believe the *Sefer HaChinuch* is teaching us a profound two-fold lesson: The *mitzvah* of *shichaha* simultaneously provides for the vital needs of the most vulnerable in society, and positively shapes the moral and spiritual persona of the one who fulfills this commandment. This is particularly the case since the arena of action regarding this commandment, unlike most *mitzvot*, is one of pure accident. The owner of the field must choose to respond in a precisely prescribed manner wherein he disregards the financial loss pursuant to the forgotten sheaf and leaves it, instead, for the needy. This notion is given powerful voice in the following story:

The following incident occurred to a righteous individual (*chasid echad*) who forgot a sheaf of grain in the midst of his field. He said to his son: “Go and offer a steer as a completely burnt offering and another steer as a free-will celebratory offering in my name.” His son then said to him: “Father, what have you seen in this *mitzvah* that causes you to rejoice more so on its behalf than any other *mitzvah* that is stated in the Torah?” He responded to

him: “The Omnipresent One (*HaMakom*) gave us the majority of the Torah’s *mitzvot* to be performed in a planful manner (*l’da’atainu*); this commandment, [however,] was given to us to be performed solely in an unplanned scenario. This is the case, since if we purposefully [and consciously leave sheaves in the field] in order to attempt to fulfill this *mitzvah* before the Omnipresent, it will not account to us as a fulfillment of the commandment...

At this juncture, the *chasid echad* explains to his son the ultimate reason for his overwhelming joy in fulfilling this *mitzvah*:

The Torah states concerning this commandment: “so that the L-rd, your G-d, will bless you in all that you do” — that is, the text establishes a [special] *bracha* (blessing) for one who fulfills this commandment. Can we not, therefore, establish a *kal v’chomer* (that is, “if this is the case, certainly that is the case”) statement regarding these matters? Namely: Since it is true that an individual who does not intend to acquire merit [as in *shichaha*] nonetheless achieves reward to the point that the Torah considers it as if this was his intention all along, all the more so would this be so regarding one who is well-aware that his actions will bring him reward [and will ultimately receive that which is promised]. (*Tosefta Masechet Pe’ah*, Professor Saul Lieberman edition, III:8, translation and brackets my own)

In sum, the *chasid echad* ecstatically performed the *mitzvah* of *shichaha*, and demonstrated his joy by having his son bring offerings on his behalf, since for this holy person, the *mitzvah* of *shichaha* provided proof that Hashem is He Who promises and surely fulfills.

May each of us merit the reward that the Holy One blessed be He has promised us, both in this world and in the world to come. As we encounter in one of the concluding verses of *Yigdal*: “*Gomel l’ish chesed k’mif’alo*” — “He bestows kindness [reward] upon an individual according to his actions.” *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*’s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdb718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.