

Parashat Ki Tetze 5784, 2024:

## *Forgotten Sheaves and Bitachon*

Rabbi David Etengoff

ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו כל בני ישראל, בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

*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 Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all that you do. (*Sefer Devarim* 24:19, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The anonymous author of the *Sefer HaChinuch* (13th century) sheds light upon the underlying rationale of this *mitzvah*, enabling 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 Hashem's 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]. (*Mitzvah* 592, translations, <https://www.sefaria.org/>, with my emendations)

The *Sefer HaChinuch* focuses upon the Almighty's great kindness in providing for the needs of His creations, in this case, through the agency of the owner of the field. This is congruent with the celebrated *pasuk* in *Ashrei*: "You open Your hand and satisfy every living thing [with] its desire."

(*Sefer Tehillim* 145:16) In addition, 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.

The *Sefer HaChinuch* teaches us a profound two-fold lesson: The *mitzvah* of *shichaha* simultaneously provides for the vital needs of the most vulnerable in society and shapes the moral and spiritual persona of the one who performs this act. This is the case, since this commandment, unlike most *mitzvot*, takes place as a result of pure accident; that is, the owner of the field must decide to abandon the forgotten sheaf and leave it for the needy. This notion is given powerful voice in the following story found in *Tosefta Peah*:

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 *HaMakom* (the Omnipresent One) gave us the majority of the Torah’s *mitzvot* to be performed *l’da’atainu* (in a planful manner); 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 Hashem your G-d, will bless you in all that you do,” that is, the text establishes a [special] *bracha* for one who fulfills this commandment. Can we not, therefore, establish a *kal v’chomer* 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]. (Professor Saul Lieberman edition, III:8, translation and brackets my own)

In sum, the *chasid echad* ecstatically performs the *mitzvah* of *shichaha* and expresses his joy through sacrificial offerings, since the commandment of *shichaha* provides proof that Hashem is He Who promises and surely fulfills.

With Hashem’s help, may we be *zocheh* to emulate such *bitachon*—trust in Hashem in our daily lives. May the *Mashiach* come soon and in our time, and may we fulfill the *mitzvah* of *shichaha*

once again in our land.

Shabbat Shalom

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

\*\*\* 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.