

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Emor

The Mitzvah of *Peah* and the Yamim Tovim

וּבְקַצְרְכֶם אֶת קְצִיר אֲרֻצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאת שְׂדֵךְ בְּקַצְרְךָ וְלִקְט קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעֵנִי וְלִגְר תֵּעֹזֵב אֹתָם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not completely remove the corners of your field as you reap and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the convert you shall leave them, I am Hashem, your God. (23:22)

A BREAK IN TOPIC?

Chapter 23 of Vayikra is devoted to the festivals of the Jewish year. In light of this, our pasuk, which discusses the mitzvos that apply to the harvesting of one's field, seems somewhat out of place. Specifically, this pasuk appears in between the Torah's presentation of Shavuos and Rosh Hashanah. The Meshech Chochmah discusses the lessons learned from the Torah's discussion of these mitzvos, both with respect to Shavuos which precedes it, as well as Rosh Hashanah that follows it.

PEAH AND SHAVUOS

The mitzvos of the Torah may be divided into two categories: the rational and the super-rational.

- ▶ On the one hand, there are mitzvos whose reason is not known to us, and which we would not have rationally intuited had Hashem not commanded us concerning them. These super-rational mitzvos are known as *chukim*. Examples of this type of mitzvah are the laws of kashrus and not wearing *shaatnez*.
- ▶ However, there are also many mitzvos which could be rationally intuited, such as honoring one's parents and giving tzedakah.

Shavuos marks the time of the giving of the Torah. As such, it is the appropriate juncture to address the impact of Matan Torah for both these types of mitzvos, and perhaps to redress a potential misconception concerning them. We may be inclined to think that it is only the category of *chukim* that was truly "given" at Sinai, since the rational mitzvos are ones we could work out on our own.

However, this is not the case. Left to their own understanding, it is very easy for human beings to develop an attitude which totally rejects these mitzvos as moral imperatives.

Parents can come to be seen as objects of scorn and derision, and the poor and the destitute can come to be regarded as a nuisance who do not deserve to partake of any of our hard-earned assets. Ultimately, the enduring affirmation of the value embodied in these mitzvos, too, is based on faith in Hashem Who commands and directs us concerning them in His Torah.

Therefore, having concluded its presentation of the festival which commemorates the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the Torah “adds in” a pasuk dealing with moral mitzvos – leaving food for the poor at the time of one’s harvest. This is in order to emphasize that these mitzvos, too, essentially derive from Sinai and that the ultimate basis for their fulfilment is as expressed in the concluding words of the pasuk: “For I am Hashem, your God.”

PEAH AND ROSH HASHANAH

The Midrash¹ makes a most unusual comment regarding the juxtaposition in our parsha of the mitzvah of *Peah* and the Festival which follows it – Rosh Hashanah. Referring to a pasuk in *sefer Yirmiyahu*,² the Midrash states:

” בִּי אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּלָה בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם: כָּל הַגּוֹיִם שֶׁמְכַלִּין שְׂדוֹתֵיהֶן – אֶעֱשֶׂה כָלָה. ” אֲךָ אֲתָדָּךְ לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּלָה: וְאַתָּה שְׂדוֹתֶיךָ מְכַלֵּה שְׂדוֹתֶיךָ – לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה כָלָה. הֲרָא הוּא דְכָתִיב ” לֹא תְכַלֶּה פְּאַת שְׂדֶךָ... בְּהַדָּשׁ הַשְּׂבִיעִי וְגו'.”

*“For I will bring destruction upon all the nations”: All the nations who completely remove the corners of their fields – I will completely remove them. “But upon you I will not bring destruction”: You who do not completely remove the corners of your fields – I will not completely remove you. Thus, the pasuk says, “Do not completely remove the corners of your field... In the seventh month etc.”*³

THE TIMING OF ROSH HASHANAH

In explaining this comment of Midrash, the Meshech Chochmah prefaces by noting that Rosh Hashanah features at the point in the year which follows the harvest season. There is room to ponder this timing. Chazal inform us⁴ that Hashem judges a person “as he is then and there.”⁵ If so, then presumably the best time for the Jewish People to be judged is when they are at their “most Jewish,” i.e., distinguished in their conduct from the rest of the nations. However, during the harvest months, people of *all nations* spend much of their time working in the field, so that this does not seem to be the best time for us to be judged in terms of how Jewish we have been.

It could be argued that a better time would be specifically following the winter months, when people do not work in the field and have more time to follow other pursuits. During these months, the difference the Jewish People and the other nations is more

1 *Vayikra Rabbah* 29:2.

2 30:11.

3 The next pasuk (24), which introduces Rosh Hashanah.

4 See *Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah* 1:3 and *Bavli ibid.* 16b.

5 “באשר הוא שם”

pronounced, for instead of engaging in idleness and self-indulgence, as others may do, the Jewish People use this time for more spiritual endeavors – Torah and Mitzvos. At that time, with the difference between the Jewish People and other nations much more highlighted – surely their judgement will be much more favorable! Why, then, is the period immediately following the harvest the “best time” for Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgement, to occur?

The answer, says the Meshech Chochmah, lies in the mitzvah of *Peah*.

BETWEEN “GIVING” AND “LEAVING”

The system of Divine Judgment operates with the principle of “*Middah Keneged Middah*” – measure for measure. The implications of this idea for Rosh Hashanah are that when our very existence is being judged and we wish to receive life, one of the most propitious ways to bring about that outcome is for us ourselves to bestow life on others through acts of kindness. However, even acts of kindness fall into different categories in this respect.

- ▶ There are gifts such as *Terumah* to the Kohen and *Maaser* to the Levi. With these gifts, the owner of the produce is allowed to decide which Kohen or Levi he will give them to, and will presumably only give them to a recipient he considers as worthy.
- ▶ In contrast, the items mentioned in our pasuk, such as *Peah*, are not formally *given* at all, they are simply *left* in the field for others to collect. This means that they may be collected by people who are not necessarily deserving of receiving them. A person who refuses to leave the corners of his field may do so because he wants to be the one to decide whether the recipient of his assets is worthy of receiving them.

It is this distinctive element which imbues these gifts with a special quality. By leaving these items in the field, thereby bestowing life to others even if they are not necessarily deserving, then *middah keneged middah*, the Jewish People are likewise able to receive life in their judgement even if, strictly speaking, they are not deserving.

This is the explanation of the connection drawn by the Midrash between leaving the corners of the field and having a successful judgment on Rosh Hashanah. Moreover, in light of this idea, the most auspicious day for us to be judged is in fact the time that follows the harvest, when we have fulfilled these mitzvos!

Thus, it emerges that not only is the mitzvah of *Peah* significant in terms of influencing the *outcome* of the day of Rosh Hashanah, it also affects the *timing* of that day.

These are the fundamental lessons which the Meshech Chochmah draws out from our pasuk by being mindful not only of its *contents*, but also of its *context*, in terms of both the festival that is mentioned beforehand as well the one which follows.