

Dear Chavraya,

There is a beautiful telling that the rabbis wove around a verse that stands somewhat by itself in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Emor*. In chapter 23 of the third book of the Torah, *Sefer Vayikra*, the major festivals of the Jewish year are enumerated. Tucked among the three "pilgrimage festivals," Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, each of which is a harvest festival, there is one verse not pertaining specifically to the holidays, but to agrarian tzedakah. The farmer is commanded: *When you reap the harvest of your land you shall not completely remove the corner of your field when you reap, and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger; I, God, your God.* There are two mitzvot in this verse, *peah/corner* and *leket/gleaning*. The farmer needed to designate one corner of the field in advance to be left unharvested, a source of sustenance for the poor. Similarly, not to celebrate earth's bounty only for oneself at the time of the harvest and its festival, the farmer could not go back and pick up any forgotten sheaves that had fallen during the harvesting, leaving these as gleanings for the poor.

Forgotten sheaves represent a beautiful but strange mitzvah. Unlike any other mitzvah, *sh'chichah/forgetting* involves no intent or *kavannah* on the part of the individual. So the rabbis tell of a particularly pious person, in the most beautiful sense of piety, who forgot an *omer*, a sheaf, in the field during harvesting. Upon realizing what he took to be his good fortune, the farmer told his son to go and prepare offerings and a feast. His son said, "*abba, what do you see to so rejoice in this mitzvah more than all the mitzvot that are in the Torah?*" The father explained to his son, "*HaMakom/The Place (God as all place, the Omnipresent) gave all of the mitzvot in the Torah to us through our awareness, but this one was not given to us through our awareness.... Thus the holy One says, 'When you reap and you forget a sheaf in the field....'*"

I find this *aggadah/telling* to be poignantly beautiful in its celebration of doing good. If the farmer so delights in the serendipitous opportunity to help others, we can assume that he is also one who actively creates opportunities to do good. The use of the word *omer/sheaf* in this *aggadah* makes an immediate association with the time of year that we are in, these seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuot, the *s'firat ha'omer/the counting of the omer*. The mitzvah of counting the omer appears in our parasha, *Emor*, immediately before the commandments of *peah and leket*. Counting each day we learn to make each day count. The Slonimer Rebbe speaks of the task of these days of counting to be *l'hafoch et ha'm'tziut... l'm'tziut chadasha.../to turn reality inside out to be a new reality....* We make each day count when we see its uniqueness, training ourselves to see something good and thereby to do something good in that day. In a world in which sparks of goodness are so often covered over and hidden, simple acts of goodness contribute to changing that reality. Not waiting to celebrate forgotten sheaves, may our counting of days through acts of kindness and the pursuit of justice and peace, *chesed, tzedakah, shalom*, bring us to the harvest of a world transformed.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor