

## Nature in the Parasha

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### Parashat Acharei Mot/Kedoshim

#### Ingrained Giving

During the week when the Land of Israel was returned back into Jewish hands after nearly 2000 years of exile we read Parashat Acharei Mot/Kedoshim. I just noted that the meaning of these Parshiot is, After death/Holiness. May I venture to interpret this as, "After the deathening exile there is holiness through the Jewish people once again returning to their Holy Land." Parashat Kedoshim opens with the directive to be holy: "You shall be holy; for I Hashem your G-d am holy" (Vayikra 19:2). So what is kedusha – holiness? A word that sounds weird in other languages. Our Torah verse gives us the clue, holiness is about emulating Hashem. An important part of being holy and living a holy life is to be giving in all our endeavors, for Hashem is all about giving. Holiness is not only in the synagogue and in the House of Study; holiness is in the work-field and in the corners of our orchard. We naturally want to give and enjoy the feeling of being a beneficiary. While, we all have various areas where we enjoy giving, the Torah teaches us a different attitude towards the very concept of ownership and giving. While it is gratifying to select personal gifts for loved ones, at times it can be challenging to give, especially when we have worked very hard for it. Having really earned something by the hard work of our hands, may give rise to a feeling of exclusive ownership. At harvest time, when we look forward to bringing the fruit of our own labor home. Precisely at the moment when we are about to proudly pronounce, "This is my own," that is the time to bear in mind and signify in deed how we are obligated to care for others as well (Rav S.R Hirsch, Vayikra 19:10).

ספר ויקרא פרק יט

(ט) וּבְקַצְרְכֶם אֶת קִצִּיר אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֶךְ לְקַצֹּר וְלִקֵּט קִצִּירָךְ לֹא תִלְקֹט:

(י) וְכִרְמְךָ לֹא תַעֲלֹל וּפֶרֶט כִּרְמְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעֹנִי וְלִגֵּר תַּעֲזֹב אֹתָם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

"When you harvest the harvest of your land, you shall not completely harvest the corner of your field; neither shall you collect all the gleanings of your harvest. Do not collect single or underdeveloped grapes from your vineyard; neither shall you glean all the fallen grapes. Leave them for the poor person and the convert. I am Hashem your G-d" (Vayikra 19:9-10).

The Torah designed these special agricultural mitzvot not only to assure that the poor and less fortunate are cared for at the time of harvest. These mitzvot are also to help the landowner harness his ego and open his heart to the less fortunate. The manner in which we may harvest our field of grain or vineyard is restricted to assure that we leave behind some portion of the crop for the poor. Verse 9 delineates specific mitzvot that apply to a field of grain, while verse 10 describes the commandments that apply to a vineyard. These mitzvot instill within us a general attitude of giving not just to loved ones but even within the furthest corners of our lives.



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## Forget it for the Poor

The first mitzvah of the field mentioned in Parashat Kedoshim is known as peah, referring to the corner of the field that must be left uncut for the poor to reap. This mitzvah applies equally to all fields, orchards and vineyards (see Devarim 24:20). In addition, we have the mitzvah of leket, often translated as gleanings. It refers to the mitzvah of leaving for the poor the fallings of the hands of the harvester while harvesting the field. This only applies if less than three stalks fall in one place during the harvest. If, however, three stalks fall at once, the owner is permitted to collect them. Ruth was aware of this law and was careful to glean only one or two fallen stalks (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 113b). There is a similar mitzvah regarding the vineyard, known as peret. The vineyard also has an additional mitzvah, not to “pick clean” the vines by collecting the ollelot, the underdeveloped clusters of grapes. Parashat Ki Tetzei introduces another mitzvah known as shichecha. If a sheaf is forgotten during the harvest, it is to be left for the poor. The owner of the field may not return to collect it. This mitzvah applies to trees as well; when one forgets to pick one or two trees, they must be left for the poor. In the summary, the agricultural gifts are as follows:

**The Four Gifts of the Vineyard:** 1. פֶּרֶט/peret – the fallen grapes 2. עוֹלָלִים/ollelim – the undeveloped clusters 3. שִׁכְחָה/shichecha – the forgotten clusters 4. פֶּאֶה/peah – the corner of the vineyard.

**The Three Gifts of the Field:** 1. לֶקֶט/leket – the gleanings 2. שִׁכְחָה/shichecha – the forgotten sheaf bundle 3. פֶּאֶה/peah – the corner of the field.

**The Two Gifts in the Orchard:** 1. שִׁכְחָה/shichecha – the forgotten fruits 2. פֶּאֶה/peah – the corner of the orchard (Babylonian Talmud Chullin 131a). Together all the mitzvot transform our field into a center for agricultural tzedakah (charity), allowing us to provide for the poor in a dignified manner.

## The Mitzvot of the Field and the Nature of Property Ownership

These agricultural mitzvot ingrain within us that our field and vineyard do not yield their produce for us alone, (this is the message of peah and ollelot). With the labor of our own hands we do not work only for ourselves (this is the message of leket and peret) (Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, *ibid*). We shouldn't think that we are giving to the poor from our own property, or that Hashem has despised him by not giving him the abundance that He has given us. The mitzvot of the field teach us that the poor is also Hashem's child, just as we are, but his portion is in our produce. It is for our merit that Hashem intended to give his/her portion from our hand. This is the reason why the beginning of the verse “When you reap” is plural, but the end “you shall not reap all the way” is singular. At the beginning, it uses the plural “the harvest of your [plural] land,” belonging to the owner, the poor, and the stranger, for in truth, their portion is included in the owner's field (Rav Moshe Alschich, *Torat Moshe*, Vayikra 19:9-10). The change in terminology in our Torah verse from plural to singular can also imply that the verse is focusing on the individual responsibility of providing for the poor, even when society as a whole is involved in the harvesting (Rabbeinu Bachaya). Moreover, the Torah may have wanted to dispel the faulty notion that when the amount of gleanings does not add up to anywhere near enough to provide something meaningful for the poor, the law does not apply. The Torah, therefore, addresses each farmer individually,

telling us that even if our individual contribution is minimal, we must still keep the laws of the land (Ohr Hachayim). The fact that the agricultural gifts apply even when we don't have enough produce to satisfy the needs of the poor teaches us that the purpose of the agricultural gifts is also to limit the landowners sense of ownership and strengthen his character trait of generosity.

### Applying the Gardening Gifts Today

How does these mitzvot apply to us today? With a small plot of a few dozen fruit trees in the land of Israel, I'm eager to practice character development through the mitzvah of the gifts of my garden. Do these mitzvot even apply today? If so, how do I go about it? Luckily, my husband showed me our book מצוות הארץ כהלכתן/The Mitzvot of the Land According to their Laws by Rav Yitzchak Goldberg. This book includes a section about the agricultural gifts in our time. Originally, these gifts are mitzvot from the Torah as we learn from this week's parasha. However, these mitzvot of the field, which have the same status as terumot and ma'aserot (tithes), only apply from the Torah when the majority of the Israelites have returned to their land. Until then they apply according to rabbinical status (Rambam, Hilchot Terumot 1:26). The Rabbis ruled that we must keep these mitzvot also today to ingrain within the corners of our being the limitation of ownership and ego through the mitzvot of allowing the poor to take what is rightfully theirs. This explains also why there is an opinion that the mitzvot of the agricultural gifts apply even outside of Israel according to the Rabbis (Rambam, Hilchot Matanot Ani'im 1:14). These mitzvot mandate that we can't even get the feeling of control through the apparent benefit of deciding which needy individuals will receive our gifts. The mitzvot teach us to let go of ownership and allow the poor their entitlement. For this reason, the Torah does not use a terminology of giving but rather: "You shall leave them" in Vayikra, "It shall be" in Devarim. However, the obligation to leave the agricultural gifts for the poor only apply even according to Rabbinical ruling as long as there are poor people who come and pick up these gifts. If no-one picks the fruits left for the poor, then anyone can pick them including the landowner, since we are not obligated to leave the produce for animals and birds (Babylonian Talmud, Chulin 134b). There is an opinion that even if no poor people come to pick we still must leave the peah in order not to transgress the commandment "You shall not completely harvest the corner of your field" (Vayikra 19:9). According to the Torah, peah has no set amount; however, the Rabbis ruled that it must be at least on sixtieth (Mishnah Peah 1:2). So, if for example my pear-tree has sixty fruits I need to leave one unpicked and declare it peah. After a few days, if no poor people come to pick, I can pick the last pear myself before the birds gets it. The best way of fulfilling these mitzvot today, would be to tell some poor students and all the beggars that come to our door weekly, that they can help themselves for peah and ollelot in our garden. For most, the few fruits they could gather may not be worth their effort, but that will be their decision. At least I can do my part the best I can.

### Reapers of the Holy Apple Field

The field exists also in the spiritual realm. It corresponds to the sefirah of malchut, which is called a field. There exists different kinds of spiritual fields. The field of Esav is filled with arrows and murderers. In contrast, the field that is called "the field of holy apples" corresponds to the lower

Garden of Eden. The mitzvot that we perform becomes seedlings in that field. From all our actions and speech that we perform in the lower world, we produce fruits in the Garden of Eden. The inner meaning of, "When you harvest the harvest of your earth" is to cut down the yetzer hara (negative impulse) which destroys us through our earthliness. How can we destroy our yetzer hara? Through Torah and tefilah and good deeds by which we can become holy. It is possible to reach the upper Garden of Eden through planting a spiritual vineyard by means of Torah learning for the sake of Hashem. In our learning we must take precautions to stay away from fallen wisdoms, which correspond to the peret and ollelot. Our goal when serving Hashem should not be in order to receive a reward, even not in order to receive spiritual reward in the world to come. Rather, our worship needs to be for the sake of giving pleasure to Hashem, and influence blessing, life and healing to the world. "Do not glean the gleanings of your harvest," which is dew of holiness, for yourself, in order that the Creator shall bring down blessings upon you. Only do it for the sake of the "poor" the lower worlds that look forward to our mitzvot that cause the Creator to bring down influences to them. There are inner hidden meanings in the mitzvot of the field. Leaving agricultural gifts for the poor connect us with the living G-d. We learn this from the fact that the numerical value of the word פֶּאֶה/peah is 86 the same gematria as אֱלֹהִים/elokim – G-d. (Based on Pardes Yosef and Toldot Aharon, Vayikra 19:10).