



Ki Teitzei: The Sublime Subconscious

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

“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 Lord, your God, will bless you in all that you do.” (Devorim 25:19)

The harvest season was a joyous one for the farmer. Months of hard labor, weeks of uncertainty had finally yielded a beautiful bounty. It is in this very moment of harvest that God commands the farmer that if he inadvertently leaves behind some harvested grain, he must leave it for the poor. If the farmer complies, he is promised beautiful blessing from God. This became known as the mitzvah of *shichicha* (forgetfulness).

Rashi comments:

God will bless you - Although [the forgotten sheaf came into his hand without intention [of the owner]]. How much more so [will one be blessed] if he did it deliberately! Hence, you must say that if someone dropped a sela, and a poor man found it and was sustained by it, then he [who lost the coin] will be blessed on its account. — [Sifrei 24:149]

Rashi was bothered by the idea that blessing would come on account of an unintentional act. After all, the farmer did not intend to give anything to the pauper. He would have preferred to prevent the sheaf from falling and being left behind. Yet, despite this “inadvertent mitzvah”, he receives blessing and reward from God. Why should the farmer be rewarded for this inadvertent act? A mitzvah is meaningful when it stems from a desire to serve God, infuse light into the world, and create purposeful change. The farmer forgot a sheaf of wheat. Why should this be counted as a mitzvah for which one receives reward?

The Ibn Ezra (Avraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra, 1089-1167) explains that nothing happens by accident. When the farmer leaves behind a sheaf of wheat, it stems from a subconscious desire to be charitable and provide for the poor. On a conscious level, the farmer wants to take in every last stalk, while on a subconscious level, he wants to share with his impoverished brothers and sisters. The mitzvah of *shichicha* shows us that on a subconscious level we want to do good. There are times in life when we are not conscious of what we want to do or who we want to become. Holiness is part of our core and the very fabric of our persona. This personalistic holiness presents itself in so many ways, including the things we forget in the field.

This idea is profound as it highlights a fundamental belief – at our core, we are holy and good. We do not believe that man is inherently evil and must overcome his innate darkness in order to become holy. We believe that man is inherently good, kind, charitable, and holy. God rewards for our inadvertent mitzvos as they highlight the holy subconscious we each possess.

As we progress through the month Elul and take stock of what we have and have not done, we sometimes feel depressed over our mistakes and missteps. We think that our mistakes have compromised our inner purity and have rendered us broken and at times, irreparable. The mitzvah of *shichicha* reminds me that no matter what I have done or how many mistakes I have made, holiness is part of my core. At times, my personal holiness may not be apparent on the conscious, visible level, but it is always present beneath the surface, just waiting to come out and illuminate the world.