

PARASHAT EMOR



הפאה והביכורים Pe'ah and First-Fruits

■ “I am First, I am Last”

One of the more well-known gifts that farmers are required to give to the poor is Pe'ah. When harvest time comes, the landowner must make sure not to bring home all the crops. He must rather leave over a small corner – a *pe'ah* – at the end of his field, from which the poor people can come and take.

וּבִקְצֹרְכֶם אֶת קִצִּיר אֲרֻצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֵךְ בְּקִצְרֹךְ...
לְעֹנִי וְלִגֵּר תַּעֲזֹב אֹתָם...

When you harvest the fruits of your land, do not consume the corner of your field in your harvest... but rather leave it for the poor person and the stranger. (Vayikra 23,22)

The Torah emphasizes that we may not consume every last grain that grows in our fields. It does not tell us, however, how large a corner we must leave over. This means that if we leave over even just a tiny portion, we thereby fulfill the commandment. In fact, the Mishna (Pe'ah 1,1) states that Pe'ah is among the commandments that have no minimum requirement; leaving over even one grain is sufficient.

Why is this? What benefit can accrue to a poor person if only a minuscule amount is left for him? Is it not likely that land-owners might take advantage and leave only a grain or two for the poor? This is precisely why the Sages intervened and ruled that Pe'ah must be no smaller than a certain minimum:

Though it was said that Pe'ah has no minimum requirement, one must not give less than 1/60th. (Pe'ah 1,2)

That is, from a field of 60 acres, one entire acre must be left as Pe'ah. Still, however, we wish to understand: Why did the Torah not set a minimum amount for Pe'ah?

Pe'ah is not the only mitzvah with no Torah-mandated minimum; Bikurim and Terumah to the Cohen are the same. Regarding Bikurim, the Torah says: “*You shall take of the first of all the fruits of the earth... and place it in the basket*” (D'varim 26,2). And the Terumah tithe to be given to the Cohen is described as “*the first of your grain, wine and oil, and the first of your sheep's fleece*” (18,4). In both cases, no amount is specified, and it is left to the land-owner to decide how much to give. (Regarding Terumah, the Sages determined that one should normally give 1/50th of the produce, or 1/40th if he is very generous, but certainly no less than 1/60th.)

By not specifying specific amounts, the Torah wishes to emphasize a message other than how much we must give. From Bikurim and Terumah, which the farmer separates from his produce before he takes for himself, we learn that he must not be the first one to benefit from his field. And from Pe'ah, where he leaves over a corner at the end, we learn that the land-owner must not be the last one to benefit from his field; others are to benefit from it after him.

The common denominator here is the most fundamental concept of all: “Hashem is first and Hashem is last.” As the Prophet teaches:

כֹּה אָמַר ה' מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגֹאֲלוֹ ה' צְבָאוֹת
אֲנִי רִאשׁוֹן וְאֲנִי אַחֲרוֹן וּמִבְּלִעְדֵי אֵין אֱ-לֹהִים.

*Thus said Hashem, King of Israel and its Redeemer,
G-d of Hosts: I am first and I am last,
and there is no G-d but Me.* (Yeshayahu 44,6)

Man comes into the world and finds that the Creator of the World has preceded him; He was first, and prepared the world for man most perfectly. Decades later, when man leaves the world, he leaves it again in the hands of He Who remains last, Who prepares it in the meanwhile for future generations of man. We mortals are just a spark merging into the “dynamic stream of life” of the universe.

We must always be aware that G-d is the source of all blessing and the Creator *ex nihilo*. The beginning and starting-point of what we earn belongs to Him, and we return it to Him, so that we will be blessed. The Priest is G-d's representative to receive the Bikurim and Terumah.

At the same time, we must also make sure that we are not the end point in the food chain. If we wish to perpetuate the food chain's infinite, cyclical nature, we must give back part of it to Hashem, via His representatives for this purpose, such as the poor and the foreigner. As King Solomon tells us:

מְלוֹהָ ה' חוֹנֵן דָּל וְגַמְלוֹ יְשָׁלֵם לוֹ.

*He who gives graciously to the poor is [as if he] lends to G-d,
and G-d will repay him.* (Mishlei 19,17)

By not defining the minimum amounts of these gifts, the Torah helps imbue these sublime principles deep in our consciousness.

■ The Cyclical Nature of Nature

This beautiful concept of making sure always to “leave something over for the next guy” is also expressed in nature itself. Nature has many wonderful examples of “what comes around, must go around.” One fascinating example is that of the story of nitrogen gas – a very important component in our cells’ all-important proteins.

Plants absorb nitrogen from the earth, and use it to build up proteins within them. These plants are then eaten by living creatures, which are nourished by the plant’s proteins. People, too, eat either the plants, or the meat of plant-nourished animals, and are thus nourished and strengthened. The next step is that the creatures excrete waste, or die and rot, providing nourishment for bacteria, which break down the waste into amino acids and nitric acid – a form of nitrogen. This returns us to where we started, ready to begin the cycle anew with the plants’ absorption once again of the nitrogen.

Life is thus a chain of never-ending links. Other examples of the cyclical chain of life include the water we drink that ends up as rain; photosynthesis; and more. As human beings, we are links in this chain, taking from those before us and giving to those who come after us.

These words of introduction will help us understand a difficult Talmudic passage. R. Shimon is quoted in the Gemara (Shabbat 23a) as giving four different reasons why the Torah commands us to leave the Pe’ah corner at the end of our field, and not in the beginning or center of the land:

1. To prevent some poor people from losing out to others. If the Pe’ah was at the beginning of the field, close to the owner’s home, he might

seek a time when no poor people were around, and then alert his own indigent relatives to come and take it all for themselves.

2. To avoid having the poor people wait around idly, hoping to see the owner set aside the Pe'ah at any moment.
3. To avoid casting suspicion on the owner. If the owner leaves Pe'ah anywhere other than the end, people might think he did not leave Pe'ah at all.
4. Because the verse says, *“Do not consume the final corner.”*

The Gemara itself is perplexed at this last reason. How can R. Shimon explain the reasoning for the mitzvah simply by quoting the Torah's command? It is precisely these words of the Torah that R. Shimon sought to explain!

Though the Gemara itself answers this question, we can explain R. Shimon based on what we have learned above: R. Shimon is saying that the concept of *“do not consume the final corner”* means not to be the last of the beneficiaries; we must rather act as a link in a chain, knowing that there are other links before and after us. This is the principle that forms the basis of the entire mitzvah of Pe'ah! We must not totally consume and not destroy – and this is emphasized in the Torah's command to leave over the field's last part for others.

■ Pe'ah and the Left-Over Sacrifice

We know that the Torah often lists various mitzvot in proximity to others, thus alluding to a connection between them. In fact, one of the Biblical exegetical principles is that of “something that is learned from its context,” by which we derive details of one mitzvah from another one written nearby.

The mitzvah of Pe'ah appears exactly where it belongs, in Parashat Emor, which discusses the festival holidays of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. Immediately following Pesach, the Torah mentions the next day's mitzvot of the Omer sacrifice and counting, followed by the mitzvah of Bikurim of the first harvested grains on Shavuot – and then another harvest mitzvah, namely, Pe'ah. It is natural that the mitzvah of Pe'ah should appear in the context of the harvest season for wheat and barley.

How strange it is, then, to find that the mitzvah of Pe'ah also appears another time in the Torah, in a totally different context. In the weekly portion after Emor, in Parashat Kedoshim, we read again about Pe'ah, worded almost exactly the same as in Emor:

וּבְקִצְרְכֶם אֶת קִצִיר אֲרֻצְתְּכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֵה לְקַצֹּר...
לְעֲנִי וְלִגֵּר תַּעֲזֹב אֹתָם, אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not fully reap the corner of your field... you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger. I am the Lord, your G-d. (Vayikra 19,9-10)

What mitzvah is listed immediately before it? That of left-over sacrifices:

וְכִי תִזְבְּחוּ זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים לַה'... בְּיוֹם זִבְחֵיכֶם יֹאכַל וּמִמָּחֳרָת,
וְהַנּוֹתֵר עַד יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי, בְּאֵשׁ יִשְׂרָף.

When you offer a Sh'lamim sacrifice to Hashem, it shall be eaten on that day and the next; that which is left over until the third day shall be burnt in fire. (verses 5-6)

The meat of the offering must be eaten within a certain time frame. It is forbidden to leave over any of it, but if some is left over, it must be burnt. Given that adjacent mitzvot teach about and reflect upon each other, what connection can we find between Pe'ah and left-over sacrifices?

The connection this time is a negative one, in that the two mitzvot are opposites: Sacred meat must be totally consumed, but non-holy crops of the field must *not* be totally consumed; some must be left in the field. The contrast is emphasized by the wording of the two consecutive verses: *“That which is left over until the third day shall be burnt... When you harvest your field, do not consume the entire harvest...”*

What are we to learn from this blatant difference? Why must one be totally consumed, while leftovers must remain from the other?

The answer is related to the fact that the highest level the world can reach is that of holiness and sanctity. A sacrifice offering is “holy unto G-d,” and we must therefore, while in a state of purity, eat it totally and completely. This sacrifice can reach no higher level than the one it is on; it can only go downward from here, and must therefore be burnt.

But when dealing with a wheat field that is not sacred, we want to raise it to higher heights. We therefore leave over the end of it to G-d – in this case, to His representatives, the poor people.

■ The Public Mincha Offering

We said above that the Torah specifically avoided mentioning a specific quantity for First-Fruits, in order to teach us a lesson on a plane other than quantitative. Why, then, are there some First-Fruits of which we must bring a specific, Torah-mandated amount? For instance, regarding the first of our barley crop, the Torah tells us:

...וְהֵבִאתֶם אֶת עֹמֶר רֵאשִׁית קְצִירְכֶם אֶל הַכֹּהֵן.
 ... *Bring an omer of the first of your [barley]
 harvest to the Cohen.* (Vayikra 23,10)

An *omer* is a very specific amount, as the Torah states:

וְהָעֹמֶר עֶשְׂרִית הָאֵיפָה הוּא.
The omer is a tenth of an ephah. (Sh'mot 16,36)

Nor is this the only case. The Bikurim meal-offering sacrifice on Shavuot also has a very specifically prescribed quota:

מִמּוֹשְׁבֵי תֵיכֶם תָּבִיאוּ לֶחֶם תְּנוּפָה שְׁתֵּים שְׁנַי עֶשְׂרִינִים
 סֶלֶת תִּהְיֶינָה חֲמִץ תֶּאֱפִינָה בְּכוּרִים לָהּ.
*From your dwelling places, you shall bring bread for waving,
 two [loaves made from] two-tenths [of an ephah];
 they shall be of finely ground flour, baked leavened,
 the first offering to Hashem.* (Vayikra 23,17)

That is, on Shavuot, it is a mitzvah to bring two loaves of bread as an offering, each one consisting specifically of an *omer* of flour from the new harvest. Other First-Fruits have no required amount; why are these First-Fruits different?

To understand this, we must fine-tune our basic assumption: There is a specific difference between communal Mincha offerings, such as the Omer sacrifice and the Two Loaves, and Terumah, First-Fruits, and Pe'ah, which are offerings of the individual. The lessons we learn from both are totally different.

Our message from communal Mincha offerings is related to the following incident recounted in the Medrash. Taught on the above-cited verse (Vayikra 23,10), it is paraphrased here:

Rebbe invited all the Sages to the wedding of his son R. Shimon, but did not invite Bar Kapara. Bar Kapara anonymously wrote a public

letter to Rebbe, asking him what purpose his joy served. Rebbe surmised that the writer had not been invited, and so he inquired as to his identity; he was told it was Bar Kapara. Rebbe said, “Tomorrow I will make another feast and I will invite him.”

The next day, the guests came in and sat down to eat. But while the food was being served, Bar Kapara entertained them with 300 parables, and everyone was listening attentively. Rebbe inquired: “Why is the food not being eaten?” He was told that everyone was listening to one of the Sages...

Rebbe went to Bar Kapara and asked him, “Why don’t you let them eat?” Bar Kapara said, “I didn’t want you to think that I was upset that you didn’t invite me to the feast; I was upset that you kept me away from my colleagues.” (Vayikra Rabba 28,2)

This incident, and especially Bar Kapara’s insightful response, is recounted in the Medrash to teach us that Hashem does not want to simply take the place of idols as the recipient of our sacrifices. The energizer of the entire universe, G-d needs nothing from us. He wants only that we rejoice together with Him. The beginning of the wheat and barley harvest seasons is a time of joy, and the Nation of Israel is asked to remember that Hashem – source of all plenty – is their partner in their joyous accomplishments.

This concept is found in the many teachings of our Sages that emphasize G-d’s desire to partner with man in His actions, both in creating and maintaining the world. Consider the following Talmudic passage:

R. Hamnuna said: Whoever prays on Sabbath night and says *Vay’chulu* (B’reshit 2,1-3), the Torah considers him as if he became a partner with Hashem in the Creation of the world. (Shabbat 119b)

Many plays his role in this partnership by deepening his awareness that G-d created the world, and transmitting this insight to all of mankind. That is to say, the Heavens and Earth are not complete until the Crown of Creation – man – recognizes and recites *Vay’chulu* on Sabbath night: “*G-d completed on the seventh day all his work that He had done.*”

Let us return to the *omer* measure of newly-harvested barley. It connects us with the manna that fell daily from the Heavens in the desert, of which each person was able to gather one *omer* each day. The source for this comparison is found in the following Medrash:

R. Berechya taught: Hashem said to Moshe, “When I gave you the Manna, I gave an *omer* to each one... Now that you are giving to Me, I want only one *omer* from all of you together.” (Vayikra Rabba 28,3)

Once again we meet up with the basic fact that whatever we can give to Hashem is just a mere fraction of a fraction of what He gives us. He gave us an *omer* each, while we are asked to give only an *omer* from all of us – and even that is of barley, not wheat. This shows us clearly that whatever we give is merely symbolic of our unequal partnership with Hashem. We declare that there exists One Who is responsible for the growth of the grain, and we then “hand over” to Him, our Partner, His share of the profits.

On Shavuot, when we are bidden to offer two loaves, this relationship ascends to a higher level. Just like the two *cherubim* in the Mishkan and Mikdash symbolize the mutual relationship between Hashem and Israel, so too the Two Loaves – each of which is made of an *isaron* (tenth) of an *ephah* of flour (i.e., an *omer*) – stand for the same partnership. One loaf stands for our share in the partnership’s earnings, and the other symbolizes that of Hashem. G-d permits us to equate between the two loaves, one *omer* each, to show us His love for us – as if to say that in His eyes, the little that we invest in our partnership by working the fields is equal in value to what He gives us.

We can describe the link between the *Omer* sacrifice on Pesach to the Two Loaves on Shavuot as the passage of the Israelites from the Sinai wilderness to Eretz Yisrael. In the desert, Israel was passive; G-d operated alone, as a solo player, providing each individual with an *omer* of manna. In the Land of Israel, however, the Israelites planted and threshed and harvested, as true partners with G-d in bringing forth food from the earth. As such, on Pesach we bring an offering of one *omer*, symbolizing what Hashem gave each of us in the desert, and this leads us to Shavuot and its Two Loaves of two *omers* of wheat. The passage from oats to wheat, and from matza to chametz, is like the passage from childhood to adulthood, and from dependency to independence and partnership with others.

■ Leaving Over

Let us return to the prohibition of *bal tichleh* – “do not totally consume” – and we will reach heights that we could not have foreseen.

In the Book of Jeremiah, we find an astonishing prophecy promising that the Nation of Israel will live forever. Even if Israel sins and must be punished,

they will never be totally “consumed;” they are the Eternal Nation. The Prophet says:

אַתָּה אֵל תִּירָא עַבְדֵי יַעֲקֹב נֹאֵם ה' כִּי אֶתְּךָ אָנִי כִי אֶעֱשֶׂה כָלָה בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם
אֲשֶׁר הִדְחַתִּיךָ שָׂמָּה וְאֶתְּךָ לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה כָלָה, וְיִסְרַתִּיךָ לְמִשְׁפָּט וְנִקְּהָ לֹא אֲנַקְּהָ.

*“You, My servant Yaakov - do not fear,” says G-d,
“for I am with you; I will make a full end of
the nations unto whom I have driven you,
but I will not make a full end of you,
but will rather correct you in due measure.”* (Jeremiah 46,28)

This message is remarkable! G-d commands us not to “make a full end” of our fields, but rather to leave over Pe’ah – and in return, Hashem guarantees never to “make a full end” of us. We can say as follows: Hashem does all He can to ensure that the Nation of Israel will exist forever and will never be consumed – and this is why He commands us not to totally consume our fields.

This concept, as well, is also found in the Medrash (Vayikra Rabba, 29,2):

R. Berechya said in the name of R. Shimon bar Yochai: R. Meir used to teach: *I will make a full end of the nations* – they consume their entire fields, and so Hashem will consume them totally; but Israel, who does not totally harvest their fields, I will not totally consume...

Israel is, in fact, likened to “the field of G-d,” as we see in another prophecy in Jeremiah:

קֹדֶשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל לַה' רֵאשִׁית תְּבוּאָתָהּ...

Israel is holy to G-d, the first of His grain crop... (Jeremiah 2,2)

The Nation of Israel is G-d’s handiwork, the choice produce of His field and orchard, and lives an eternal life. *Am Yisrael Chai* – the Nation of Israel lives forever!

