



TIMELESS∞TORAH

Summer Reflections

KI TEITZEI: THE WISDOM TO LET GO

One thing is constant – and that is change. Life never stands still. Circumstances shift, opportunities appear and disappear, and every stage of life brings new challenges and new responsibilities. This is one of the central messages of Parshat Ki Teitzei. The opening word of the *parshah* itself captures this idea: *ki*, ‘when’. When this happens, this is the challenge that faces us. When that situation arises, this is the response that the Torah demands.

‘*Ki teitzei lamilchamah al oyvekha*’ (when you go out to war against your enemies). ‘*Ki yikach ish ishah*’ (when a person takes a wife). ‘*Ki tivneh bayit chadash*’ (when a person builds a new house). The Torah recognises that life is made up of changing circumstances. It does not imagine a world where nothing changes. Instead, it gives us the guidance we need for every new situation we encounter.

But there is another message running through the *parshah*. Change is not only about the moment itself; it is also about the direction in which those moments take us. The decisions we make create a trajectory. What happens today can shape the person we become tomorrow.

This is an idea that Rashi highlights several times. The classic example is the sequence of the *yefat to’ar* (the woman captured during war), followed by the *ishah senu’ah* (the unloved wife) and eventually the *ben sorer umoreh* (the rebellious son). One negative choice leads to another. A decision made today may only reveal its severe consequences years later.

The same is true in a positive sense. Rashi points to a progression beginning with *shiluach haken* (sending away the mother bird before taking the young) and continuing through the *mitzvot* that follow. One *mitzvah* creates the opportunity for another. Our actions are rarely isolated; they shape the path that lies ahead.

There is a fascinating parallel in the natural world. Edward Lorenz’s discussion of chaos theory, often associated with the ‘butterfly effect’, showed how a tiny change can eventually influence an entire system. The same is true of our own lives. Small decisions – where we live, whom we marry, the friendships we invest in, the opportunities we pursue – often shape our future far more than we realise. This is the message of the repeated *ki* of the *parashah*: *ki teitzei, ki tivneh, ki yikach*. When this happens, something follows. Life is always moving forward.

Yet there is one *mitzvah* in this *parashah* which seems to stand apart from this entire theme: *shichechah* (the forgotten sheaf in the field).

Jewish life is built around conscious choice. We are expected to understand our actions and to approach *mitzvot* thoughtfully. A person without *da’at* (awareness and understanding) cannot take full responsibility for their actions. The concept of *kavanah* (intention and focused awareness), therefore, occupies a central place in the world of *mitzvot*. Whether it is considered an absolute requirement in every circumstance or the ideal way to perform a *mitzvah*, it represents a fundamental Jewish value: we are meant to live thoughtfully.



Contemporary Perspectives on the Weekly Parsha with Rabbi Dr Yoni Birnbaum

Wednesdays: 8.00-8.45pm | In-person at Kinloss
(returning 26th August)

As Rav Soloveitchik (d. 1993) famously explained, the ideal human being is what he called 'Cognitive Man'. He described such a person as someone who thinks before speaking, who allows ideas to develop before translating them into action: 'Cognitive man prefers thought to speech, logic to statements. Every sentence expresses a thought, every phrase a concept. If an idea can be expressed in three words, he will not use four... The thought matures and ripens, and only then can the words come. The thinking *logos* precedes the speaking *logos*.'

And yet *shichechah* is different. The farmer does not decide to leave a sheaf behind. He only realises afterwards that something has been forgotten. The Torah states: '*Ki tiktzor ketzircha besadecha veshachachta omer basadeh, lo tashuv lekachto; lager layatom vela'almanah yihyeh, lema'an yevarechecha Hashem Elokecha bechol ma'aseh yadecha*' (when you harvest your field and forget a sheaf in the field, do not return to take it; it shall be for the convert, the orphan and the widow, so that Hashem your God will bless you in all the work of your hands).

The Tosefta in Pe'ah records a story about a righteous individual who forgot a sheaf in his field. When his son asked why he was happier about this *mitzvah* than any other, he replied that every other *mitzvah* is performed knowingly. This one, however, came to him without his awareness. How are we to understand this?

Rav Meir Goldvicht, in his work *Me'ir Panim*, explains that the *mitzvah* of *shichechah* is not performed at the moment the sheaf is forgotten. At that point there is no intention. The *mitzvah* takes place later, when the

farmer notices what has happened and accepts that this sheaf is not destined to become part of his own harvest. Hashem has decided that it has another purpose: to provide for someone else. The essence of the *mitzvah* is therefore found in the words '*lo tashuv lekachto*' (do not return to take it). The greatness of *shichechah* is not the forgetting. It is the acceptance that follows.

This is one of the hardest lessons in life. We all experience moments when reality does not follow the path we had imagined. A relationship does not develop as we hoped. An opportunity disappears. A dream that seemed within reach does not become reality. The natural instinct is to keep looking back, to keep trying to reclaim what we thought should have been ours.

But *shichechah* teaches us that sometimes faith means recognising that something was not meant to remain with us. This does not mean ignoring the past or failing to learn from it. Elul and *teshuvah* require honest reflection, identifying the moments of growth and goodness that shaped us. But reflection is not the same as remaining trapped in what has already passed.

Parshat Ki Teitzei teaches us that life is always moving forward. Sometimes serving Hashem means making wise choices. Sometimes it means accepting that not every path we hoped to travel was ever meant to be ours. The wisdom to know the difference may be the gift that the *mitzvah* of *shichechah* has to offer.

**The weekly Timeless Torah Parsha Shiur
resumes in person after the summer
break on 26th August**