

GUIDEBOOK TO LIFE

by Michael Alterman

A common misconception about Judaism is that its practice and observance is restricted to the synagogue sanctuary. Whether it be consciously or subconsciously, we are prone to thinking that upon leaving the synagogue grounds, anything goes. Of course, even a cursory glance through the Torah dispels this myth, as G-d's guidebook to life speaks to us in every place and circumstance imaginable. This lesson is beautifully demonstrated through a brief passage in Parshas Emor.

Amidst the discussion of the yearly cycle of festivals, the Torah speaks to the farmer and provides him instruction for the harvest of his crop. This important season commences with a command for the Jewish people to bring the omer offering of flour to the Temple on the second day of Passover (Leviticus 22:10), followed by the special "bread offering" seven weeks later on Shavuot (ibid. 22:16-17). As the harvest ensues, the Torah commands that the farmer abandon any forgotten sheaves in the field for the poor to gather, and the harvest concludes with the farmer leaving the corner of his field for the poor (ibid. 16:22). Mitzvot opportunities abound every step of the way, and this passage relates only a few of those precious gems just waiting to be seized. Through the careful observance of these mitzvot, the farmer can elevate his mundane work into an activity through which he can continually grow closer to Hashem.

Although most of us do not make our living by tilling the soil, like the farmer we are also constantly faced with the danger of becoming overly involved in our quest to put bread on the table. It is easy to lose sight of the reality that G-d is truly the one who provides for our needs. The Torah is replete with mitzvot to be carried out in every scenario of our lives and at all times of the day. By carefully following G-d's guidebook, we can transform every aspect of our lives into sanctified experiences, forging a meaningful relationship with our loving Creator.

Based on the early 20th century commentary on the Torah, Meshech Chochmah, by Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk.

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