

Torah On One Foot
Rabbi Matthew Berger



Be Who You Ought To Be

In this week's Torah portion, *Emor* (Speak), we learn about a *mitzvah* called gleanings. At its essence, it ensures that people are treated with kindness. *When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.* (Leviticus 23:22)

While the majority of us have no fields to glean, the obligation to care for others, especially the vulnerable, remains paramount. Living in an age where even basic facts are challenged, it is far too easy to become suspicious of people's motives. Standing before a stranger or someone in need, we may ask, "Who is this? What does this person want from me?" The sages of the Mishnah understood this. So they taught, "Find virtue in everyone. Greet everyone with joy."

Once when the Baal Shem Tov was sitting with his companions, a poor man entered. He had no special distinction, yet the Baal Shem Tov asked him to sit at the head of the table, by his side. Later, his companions asked why he had so honored this man. Was he a hidden *tzaddik* – a saint? The Baal Shem explained: When I ask for a seat of honor in the world to come, perhaps this simple gesture of providing a seat at the table will prove that I deserve it.

Treat others how you want to be treated. Become the person you ought to be.