

Ki Teitzei, Rabbi David Mahler

Let's begin with a riddle:

Of all the 613 *mitzvot*, there is only 1 that can be performed only if you don't want to perform it. And if you want to perform it, you'll never be able to perform it.

What's the *mitzvah*?

Answer – *Shikcha*

The *Torah* teaches (24:19), “When you reap the harvest in your field, and you forget a sheaf in the field, you may not go back and fetch it – rather you must leave it for the poor”.

The *Torah's* social ethic required that the farmer share part of his harvest with those less fortunate. For example, the corner of each field was consigned to the poor. A certain percentage of grain, fruits and vegetables were given as charity to the poor. Similarly, when binding the stalks into sheaves, stalks that fell to the ground were to remain for the poor.

An additional *mitzvah* incumbent on the farmer is where after he completes his chores and departs his field, he is prohibited from returning to retrieve what he forgot to collect or overlooked. The indigent benefits from the owner's forgetfulness. The prohibition of retrieving that which was forgotten is referred to as the *mitzvah* of *Shikcha*.

This commandment dramatically different from all others in the *Torah*. Whereas every other *mitzvah* is based on remembering the commandments, and therefore forgetting it removes the opportunity to perform it, the *mitzvah* of *Shikcha* is the exact opposite. One cannot perform this *mitzvah* without forgetting. Because forgetting in this case must be genuine forgetfulness, an individual cannot “set up” a situation where he conveniently forgets some wheat in the field. In such a case, he would not be obligated to leave the sheaf for the poor.

In the overwhelming majority of commandments, consciousness makes the *mitzvah* effective. Unless there is an intention, *kavana* to do so, the deed does not qualify as a *mitzvah*. If you eat matzo in your sleep, it is not a *mitzvah*! However, in this *mitzvah* it is the exact opposite: you can only

fulfill it if you were absent-minded. If you have intent to perform the *mitzvah*, you will never ever be able to fulfill it!

What is the logic here? Why should there ever be a *mitzvah* connected to forgetfulness?

There are myriad of commandments rooted in remembering and recalling events and wonders of *Hashem*, yet a *mitzvah* related to absent-mindedness is truly rare and unique.

What is the point of this *mitzvah*?

On a simple level, forgetting is built into the human psyche. Without it, we couldn't live as functional people. We couldn't go on. We couldn't live if we couldn't forget.

We'd be crippled by the loss of a relative or dear friend, the pain of being bullied, the graphic image of a car accident, the memory of being fired, cheated, abused or derided.

Only a world where *Shikcha* exists is habitable. Some *Shikcha* is healthy. It's a reality in our world and Jewish law reflects that reality.

However, there is a second level that is more instructive for us – especially at this point in time.

When we forget – we are acting like Hashem. We are being G-d-like (I'm not an apostate – please read on ☺)

Hashem obviously remembers and recalls each and every move we ever make. We refer to this *middah* of *Hashem* throughout *Rosh Hashana*. There is no forgetfulness in front of *Hashem*.

However, though *Hashem* does not forget like humans forget, He **chooses** to forget some things. If *Hashem* really focused and harped on every mishap, inconsistency, wrongdoing we involved ourselves in throughout the year – we wouldn't make until next *Rosh Hashana* and we wouldn't have even made it this far.

What would happen to each of us if *Hashem* never overlooked or “chose to forget” every word of *lashon hara* we uttered, every evil thought that

entered our mind, every time we organized our day during *Shemona Esre* instead of thinking about Him, spoke too harshly to our spouses, “borrowed” supplies from the office, clicked where I shouldn’t have on the internet, wasn’t 100% truthful on my tax return or didn’t show proper respect to my parents or in-laws (If you were batting 1.000 until the in-laws line, I gotcha there).

We need *Hashem* to choose to forget some of our indiscretions and therefore we must choose to look beyond the indiscretions of others.

Shikcha teaches us how to deal with other people’s shortcomings. Can I overlook someone else’s mistakes or misgivings?

If we want *Hashem* and others to overlook our wrongdoings, we must do the same to others.

Dovid HaMelech describes *Hashem* as our shade, “*tzilcha*”. *Hashem* protects *Am Yisrael* as the shade gives protection to those in need. The *Ba’al Shem Tov* defines “*tsel*” not as shade but as a shadow. *Hashem* is our shadow, the *Ba’al Shem Tov* teaches in that just as a shadow mimics each of our movements, so too does G-d. *Hashem* acts as we do. If we are merciful to others, He will show mercy to us. If we are patient with others, He will be patient with us. And if we look past and forget the misdeeds of others, He will do the same towards us.

As we inch closer to the days of judgement, may we be more sensitive, patient and forgiving of others so that *Hashem* can do the same towards us. Forgetting has never been so beautiful.

Shabbat Shalom