



TORAH VEHA'ARETZ

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# Shavuot and Matanot Aniyim – Gifts for the Poor

In *Megillat Rut*, we read about Rut who arrives in Beit Lechem and goes out to the fields to collect sheaves grain to support herself and her mother-in-law Naomi: “Rut the Moabite said to Naomi, “I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness ... and off she went. She came and gleaned in a field, behind the reapers ... “ (Rut 2:2-3). Here we see the application of the *mitzvah* of *lekhet*: (1-2) sheaves that fell during the time of harvest cannot be gathered by the reapers, rather they must be left for the poor, as the Torah states: “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall ... gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the L-rd am your G-d” (*Vayikra* 23:22).

According to some commentators, *shichechah* is also mentioned: “She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the

*omarim* behind the reapers” (Rut 2:7). A bundle of sheaves is called an *omer*. If forgotten in the field, it is called *shichechah* (lit. “that which is forgotten”) and is designated for the poor, as the Torah states: “When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook an *omer* in the field, do not turn back to retrieve it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow” (*Devarim* 24:19).

Do *Lekhet* and *Shichechah* apply today?

*Matanot aniyim* theoretically applies today as a biblical commandment, even without the Beit Hamikdash and while the majority of world Jewry does not reside in the Land of Israel. However, the Gemara states that *matanot aniyim* are meant for “the poor, and not for ravens or bats” (*Chullin* 134). That is, if it is clear that poor people will not come to harvest their gifts, and the produce left for them will be consumed by animals, there is no obligation to leave them in the field.

Today, poor people don’t go to fields to gather fallen sheaves, forgotten bundles, or even to harvest the corner of a field (*pe’ah*). They would need a car to access the field and then mill the grains. This is expensive and not financially worthwhile. Given that today’s poor won’t go to fields to engage in harvest labor, *matanot aniyim* (*lekhet*, *shichechah*, *pe’ah*, *peret*, *ollelot*) do not apply today (see Rambam, *Matanot Aniyim* 1:10). ■