ISRAEL ROUNDUP

MEITZAD

Making *Mitzvos* Come Alive



Avreichim of Kollel Dorshei Tzion harvesting wheat near Meitzad.





Meitzad, a *chareidi yishuv* at the southern tip of Gush Etzion, was recently host to 30 *avreichim* from Kollel Dorshei Tzion of Beitar Illit, who came with *Rosh Kollel* Harav Avraham Zweig to fulfill the *mitzvos hateluyos baAretz* in the most direct way.

"I planted wheat in a *hefker* field just outside of Meitzad, and we came with sickles and harvested the wheat by hand," Rav Zweig told *Hamodia*. "We did the *mitzvos* of *leket* and *pe'ah*, of leaving a corner of the field for the poor, and not gathering up the wheat that falls in the harvesting process. Rav Yechiel Michel Tikuchinsky wrote that today, since wheat kernels are not considered as valuable as they once were, the *mitzvos* of *leket* and *pe'ah* may no longer apply, but he added that if the poor live near the field, one can fulfill the *mitzvah*. And this was the case. A group of boys who unfortunately are managing on their own, without assistance from their parents, live on a farm near Meitzad, and they came to collect the *pe'ah, leket* and *maaser ani*."

After all the wheat stalks were harvested, the group did the *melachos* of threshing, winnowing and sifting.

"Once we had the wheat kernels, we separated *terumah* and *maaser,* and since this is a *maaser ani* year, we gave the *maaser* to that same group of *bachurim* who live near the field," said Rav Zweig.

The harvested kernels were split among all the participating *avreichim*.

"Most of the kernels remain for when we will bake matzos in the winter, *iy"H*, but everyone took home some kernels. What I took home I ground into flour, which I used to bake challos."

Rav Zweig claims that fulfilling the *mitzvos* that one studies in the *Gemara* can bring about a breakthrough in one's learning.

"A firsthand experience with *mitzvos* can change a person entirely — his understanding of the *mitzvah* broadens and when he comes to the *beis medrash* to learn the *sugyos* of this *mitzvah*, his learning goes up an entire level," says Rav Zweig, in explaining why he took his *avreichim* out of the *beis medrash* for most of that day.

As for why he chose Meitzad, Rav Zweig explains that wheat that grows on mountains is of higher quality.

"The *Talmud Yerushalmi* states that only wheat grown on mountains was brought for *bikurim*, because it gets more sun. The problem is it is much harder to grow wheat on mountains, and the yield is significantly less than that grown in plains or valleys, so commercial wheat is invariably grown in lowlands. Here [atop the Judean Hills] we did the *mitzvah d'Oraisa* of tithing wheat in the most *mehadrin* way."

The wheat seeds that yielded this crop are a story in and of themselves, notes Rav Zweig.

"This is not the commercial wheat that is used by large farming concerns. When modern farming was introduced in the Land of Israel, using tractors and combines, a new strain of wheat was introduced as well. During this period of transition, some farmers held on to some of the seeds that had been traditionally planted here, which was the same wheat that was grown here in ancient times. I received the seeds from a contact in the Agriculture Ministry."

The difference between this wheat crop and the modern strains of wheat is noticeable, says Rav Zweig.

"The wheat that we planted has a richer taste, and while I can't generalize and say that it has no problem of gluten, I will say that people who are sensitive to wheat have told me that the bread that we produce does not affect them adversely."

After the upcoming *Shemittah* year, Rav Zweig intends to expand his *kollel's* experiential approach to agricultural *mitzvos*. He has made many other *mitzvos* come alive experientially in the past. At a *siyum* of *Maseches Pesachim*, Rav Zweig and his *kollel* slaughtered a lamb and the *avreichim* went through the entire process involved in roasting the *korban Pesach* as per the *halachos* required during the times of the Beis HaMikdash. They roasted the lamb in a stone oven, using wood of a pomegranate tree as a skewer, the lamb remaining whole, and so on — in accordance with the *Gemara* and rulings of the Rambam.

"When we learned in the *kollel* the *perek 'shtei halechem,'* we studied *b'iyun* the laws of the *lechem hapanim*. The project we undertook then was to go through all the steps to produce the *lechem hapanim*. For this, we used pure semolina flour from Italy, flour made from the heart of the wheat kernels, without any chaff or starch — just the fat of the wheat. It's a flour that if you put your hand into it, the flour doesn't stick to you. An expert taught us that with this sort of flour it's possible to produce dough that is an entire *tefach* thick and yet still matzah, which was a halachic requirement for the *lechem hapanim* and for all the *menachos* [flour offerings] in the Beis HaMikdash," said Rav Zweig.

"There are Yidden who go out of their way to fulfill what are called 'rare *mitzvos*,' like *pidyon peter chamor* or *reishis hageiz* — the latter of which we've done as well. When people see a group of *avreichim* working with sickles to harvest a field by hand and give tithes, they assume that this is what we're doing as well, fulfilling the 'rare *mitzvos*.' I say no, the opposite is the case, we're trying to make it so that these *mitzvos* are *not* rare, to make them part of everyone's life experience."