

OzTORAH

Harvesting is Hard Work

Spying out the land of Israel involved checking out its produce.

The Torah tells us to take some of the fruit of the land but prefaces the command with the word "v'hit'chazaktem", "Strengthen yourselves" (Bamidbar 13:20).

Many commentators think the correct translation is "be courageous", i.e. do not be afraid of arousing the suspicion of the local population.

That's all very well since we always need to be aware of how other people will perceive what we are doing.

It is possible, however, to translate the Hebrew literally and it then suggests a lesson of some importance.

We hope to live long upon the land and become so entrenched there that we establish a "chazaka" - a presumption of permanence. But that comes at a price.

Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever reminds us that there are rules relating to how to harvest crops, including leaving a share for the poor and disadvantaged.

The easy way to do our harvesting is to act as if the Torah rules did not exist - just going ahead and thinking only of ourselves and our personal prosperity: but there's no morality in being selfish.

Rabbi Apple served for 32 years as the chief minister of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, and was Australia's highest profile rabbi and leading spokesman for Jews and Judaism there. He lives in J'lem and blogs at www.oztorah.com Rabbi Apple is currently the president of the Israel Region of the RCA.