And she shall spit before him (25:9)

Every *mitzvah* in the *Torah* makes demands on a person, enjoining him to leave his comfort zone to serve *Hashem*. Some *mitzvos* ask more than others—but that is part and parcel of the religious experience. At times, a *mitzvah* makes such demands that a person must go against his nature, character and even emotions. Nonetheless, this is the meaning of obedience. It does not always have to be *geshmak*, pleasant. The fact that we are fortunate to serve *Hashem* and carry out His dictates is what makes the endeavor *geshmak*. If we were to pick and choose only those *mitzvos* which we enjoy, and reject the others, then it would not be a *mitzvah*; we would be serving ourselves—not *Hashem*. All this is fine and well and totally acceptable. The *mitzvos* of *yibum* and *chalitzah,* however, the levirate marriage and releasing the obligation, appear to go against the grain of *mitzvah* obedience.

The *Torah* provides that, if a husband dies childless, his widow and brother should marry. If, however, the brother either refuses or is unable to follow through with marriage (*yibum*), the contingency of *chalitzah* exists, a process which severs the bond between them (brother-in-law and sister-in-law.) The brother may have one of various reasons why he does not want to perform *yibum*: he's married, and a co-wife would strain his relationship with his wife, (This was when one was permitted to have more than one wife.); he does not particularly care for his sister-in-law's personality or physical appearance. The fact that the *Torah* provides this man with a contingency plan is very telling about the *Torah*.

HoRav Gedalah Eismann, z"l (Mashgiach Kol Torah), emphasizes that *chalitzah* is not just an option—it abrogates the *mitzvah* of *yibum*. In other words, if the brother refuses to perform *yibum* for personal reasons, he opts for *chalitzah*, thereby neglecting the *mitzvah* of *yibum*. Where do we find such an option? What about the *mitzvah* of *yibum*? We just prefaced the *dvar Torah* with the idea that we do not have the option of picking and choosing *mitzvos*. Our comfort zone is not taken into the equation. Apparently, the *mitzvah* of *yibum* tells us something else. It conveys a poignant message about *Hashem's* "thoughtfulness" with regard to *mitzvos*.

When a *mitzvah* is simply beyond a person's ability to perform, the *Torah* gives them an opportunity to option out. Such a person cannot possibly fulfill a *mitzvah*, *bisheleimus*, to perfection. His heart is not in it. The *Mashgiach* cites a number of leniencies in order to improve the relationship between a man and wife. One may not marry a woman until he sees her, which, under other circumstances, contradicts the laws of *tznius*, moral modesty. This is despite the fact that a woman has been designated for him. Since marrying a woman whom he has not seen is counterintuitive to his nature, he is allowed some leeway. He is not an angel. He is human, and the *Torah* takes his humanity into consideration.

The lesson to be derived is powerful and inspiring. How often does one feel overwhelmed by the *Torah's* demands? We look at the *tzaddikim*, saintly *Jews* of our generation, and imagine that the *Torah* was written for them—not for us. We are ordinary people who are not yet ready to live the life

of a *tzadik*. The response to this common "excuse" is: *Hashem* does not expect you to be someone that you are not. He asks that you be you—but strive to elevate who you are, to grow from within, step by step, rung by rung.

We are human beings with human emotions, emotional desires, inconsistencies and frailties. Despite this, we all have incredible potential which should be our lodestar as we navigate through the challenges of our life's journey. The *Torah* does not ask us to recreate our character—but to refine it. A *chassid* once exclaimed to his *Rebbe,* "*Rebbe*! I want to be like you!" The *Rebbe* smiled, "*Hashem* already has one of me. What He wants is one of you—the best version you can develop."