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פרשת כי תצא
Parshat Ki Teitzei

Ashreinu | אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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Finding Yourself

Rabbi Avi Hochman

Everything written in the Torah was perfectly placed. Yet we find in this week's parsha a mitzvah that seemingly comes up out of nowhere. The Torah tells us:

לֹא תִרְאֶה אֶת שׁוֹר אָחִיךָ אוֹ אֶת שֵׂיוֹ נִדָּחִים
וְהִתְעַלַּמְתָּ מֵהֶם הָשֵׁב תְּשִׁיבֵם לְאָחִיךָ

"You may not observe your brother's ox or his sheep lost and conceal yourself from them; you must surely return them to your brother" (Devarim 22:1).

The Torah here teaches us about a mitzvah that we are very familiar with, the mitzvah known as *hashavat aveidah* (returning lost objects). It is interesting to note that it comes after the Torah just shared with us the mitzvah of the laws of going to war (as stated earlier in the previous perek). What is the nature of this juxtaposition? What is the connection between going out to war against your enemies and returning lost objects?

The Ibn Ezra (Rav Avraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra, 1089-1164) offers a tremendous insight regarding the placement of this mitzvah. He explains that the juxtaposition teaches that the obligation of *hashavat aveidah* applies even when one is going out to war.

One could have assumed that the intensity of emotion that overwhelmed the soldier as he readied himself to leave his home and fight for his people would have exempted him from the mitzvah of *hashavat aveidah*. Wouldn't it make sense for the Torah to exempt an individual who is about to go out to war from the performance of this mitzvah? Isn't readying one's self for battle considered a mitzvah, which should therefore exempt the soldier from

the performance of other mitzvot (in this case returning the lost object)?
The Torah here is teaching us an invaluable lesson. A military camp during war is a tumultuous, tense, and unstable setting. It is an environment in which people are naturally inclined to focus on self-preservation and, as a result, may rationalize ignoring the needs of others.

Therefore, the Torah is teaching us that we are to go above and beyond our natural human instincts and employ the highest standards of sensitivity, even during this most stressful and pressurized of situations.

Rav Henoch Leibowitz zt'l (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim, 1918-2008) explains that the Torah is teaching us that we have the ability (and obligation) to be sensitive to the needs of others, even in the most trying of times. Our minds may be occupied with our own survival; nevertheless we can, and must, be conscious of our neighbor's needs at all times.

There is a Chasidic story told about the Ba'al HaTanya, who was once learning Torah in the inner room of the house while, in the next room, his son was also studying. In the third, outermost room, his infant grandson, who had been sleeping, suddenly awoke and started to cry. The Ba'al HaTanya immediately jumped up and tended to the baby's needs while his son, whose room was closer to the baby, remained engrossed in his learning and oblivious to the sounds coming from the outer room.

On the way back to his room, the rebbe chastised his son, "If someone is studying Torah and fails to hear sounds of a crying baby, there is something wrong with his Torah learning."

There are times when we encounter personal difficulties and challenges. There are times when we feel like the only things we can focus on are our own problems as we are overwhelmed by the enormity of our circumstances. It can happen that during these times of personal stress we lash out at others and justify these behaviors by pointing to the intensity of our own circumstances. We learn from the mitzvah of *hashavat aveidah* that we must uphold the highest standards of interpersonal conduct even during personally trying times.

A *ba'al chessed* (kind individual) is not someone who engages in random acts of kindness, rather it is someone who maintains a continuous sensitivity to the needs of others in all circumstances and at all times.

Not Knowing

Owen Sausen ('24)

This week's parsha, Parshat Ki Teitzei is right in the middle of Sefer Devarim, which is essentially a recap of Moshe Rabbeinu reviewing several mitzvot for the Jewish People. This parsha goes through many mitzvot, including men not wearing female clothes, adultery, and concern for one's property. Two of the mitzvot that stand out are tzitzit and sending away a mother bird from its nest.

Many of the mitzvot in this parsha are not specifically given a reason, but we may be able to intuitively understand the importance of those mitzvot. However, I simply cannot think of any reason to send away a mother bird from its nest or wear tzitzit.

We know the basics, that if we send away the mother bird we will live long lives, and if we wear tzitzit we'll be protected, but we can't really determine a moral reason for either of these mitzvot. Nonetheless, we still do them.

With time, I've come to realize that although we do not have many reasons to do these mitzvot, we still do them because we know that Hashem has a greater plan. Sometimes in life Hashem will present you with challenges and most of the time you will sit there and ask yourself: "why is this happening to me?" What is the reason for all this? We still sit here thinking about the reasons

why something like this could happen or why you have to do this certain mitzvah, but the main goal of these challenges is not to find a reason but for you to realize this is all part of Hashem's plan.

I think that this is what these mitzvot are trying to teach us, that even if we don't know why something happened, why we're in the position we're in, or why we have to do all these mitzvot, Hashem is saying, "don't worry, I have a greater plan and I know that this will be what's best for you." That lesson and idea itself is what every Jew tries to perfect, and it's amazing if you understand that it doesn't matter what you do or what position you're in, as long as you know and trust that Hashem has a bigger and much better plan for you.

Don't Judge

Coty Benarroch ('24)

This week's parsha discusses 74 of the 613 mitzvot mentioned in the Torah. Some examples are the laws of the inheritance of the firstborn, the process of burying the dead, returning a lost object, and sending away a mother bird before taking its offspring etc. One mitzvah which stands out is *shiluach hakein*, sending away the mother bird before taking her offspring. This mitzvah, like *kibud av va'em*, is one of the only ones that has a reward attached to it. The difference between the two is that the mitzvah of respecting our parents takes a whole lifetime to do, while sending away a mother bird takes less than 30 seconds.

Considering this, how can we say that both have the same reward? Because we don't know Hashem's reasoning for His mitzvot and their rewards, we don't logically know that answer.

In our lives, we often judge people based on what mitzvot they do or don't do. We need to learn from this week's parsha that even if we don't know the reason for something or don't see the full picture, we shouldn't judge a book by its cover and make any assumptions. For this reason, we must do all mitzvot, seemingly big or small, as well as make sure to not judge anyone for the mitzvot they do. Shabbat Shalom!

Care for Others

Akiva Lanner ('26)

In Parshat Ki Teitzei we learn about the mitzvah of *shiluach hakein*. The mitzvah of *shiluach hakein* is shooing away the mother bird from her nest in order to take an egg.

The explanation for this mitzvah is to show sympathy to the mother bird, because even though we are taking her egg, we don't want to do it in front of her. Although the chicken is an animal, it can and does still feel a sense of love towards its babies. In the pasuk juxtaposed to *shiluach hakein*, the Torah discusses the mitzvah of *ma'akeh*: building a fence around the roof of your home.

The reason that this mitzvah is juxtaposed with the mitzvah of *shiluach hakein* is because, even though animals feel love for their children and family, they are not concerned for other animals. Humans, however, have to care for all other humans, which is why we have to put a fence on top of our houses. We do this to ensure the safety of anyone that goes on to our rooftops, whether they are a part of our family or not.

With this message of making sure other people do not feel bad and protecting other people, may we live our lives like that by always being careful of what we say in case it hurts or offends anyone.

Self Sacrifice

Gabriella Asher ('25)

In this week's parsha, Ki Teitzei, we discuss the mitzvah of *shiluach hakein*. There are only two mitzvot written in the Torah that promise a long

life. One of them is *kibud av va'em*, honoring your parents, and the other is *shiluach hakein*, sending away the mother bird before taking her eggs.

שַׁלֵּחַ תְּשַׁלַּח אֶת הָאֵם וְאֶת הַבָּנִים תִּקַּח לָךְ
לְמַעַן יִיטַב לָךְ וְהַאֲרַכְתָּ יָמִים

"Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life" (Devarim 22:7). Looking at these two mitzvot, the similarities are not explicit. Rav Yaakov Weinberg makes the suggestion that the common denominator of these specific mitzvot is *mesirat nefesh*, self sacrifice.

Self sacrifice is involved in honoring your parents because they have *mesirat nefesh* for their children. They sacrifice their heart and energy to help their children grow up in a Jewish environment and feel loved. They invest time and energy on account of their own wants and needs. As for the mitzvah of *shiluach hakein*, sending the mother bird away from her nest seems easy. What makes sending a mother bird away such a difficult task?

The answer is that the mother bird would never fly away when her nest is full of eggs. She is not just a bird, but a mother as well. The mother has a self-sacrificing responsibility to her children and will always protect them. A person should never be capturing or taking the mother bird because it goes against the mitzvah and lowers the bird's ability to do *mesirat nefesh* for her chicks.

When a person sends away the mother bird, they are first showing their respect and appreciation for her *mesirat nefesh*. In essence, when someone performs the mitzvah of *shiluach hakein* it is like honoring parents, thus connecting the two mitzvot of *shiluach hakein* and *kibud av va'em*.

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