

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Ki Teitzei
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פרשת כי תצא
י"ד באלול תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 21:10-25:19

In this *parasha*, Moshe enumerates many laws that relate to topics of family relationships, interpersonal ethics, and forbidden mixtures.

Twice in this *parasha*, the Torah lists a reward of long life for fulfilling a particular commandment. It is unusual for the Torah to cite a specific reward for completing a commandment, and this same reward is mentioned twice in a single *parasha* – quite an unusual occurrence.

The first commandment for which we earn long life is the *mitzvah* of *shiluach haken*, sending a mother bird away before taking her eggs or fledglings [22:6-7]:

כִּי יִקְרָא קוֹן-צִפּוֹר לְפָנֶיךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּכַל-עֵץ אוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ, אֶפְרָחִים אוֹ בִּיצִים, וְהָאִם רֹבֶצֶת עַל-הָאֶפְרָחִים, אוֹ עַל-הַבִּיצִים--לֹא-תִקַּח הָאִם, עַל-הַבָּנִים. שְׁלַח תְּשַׁלַּח אֶת-הָאִם, וְאֶת-הַבָּנִים תִּקַּח-לָךְ, לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לָךְ, וְהֵאֲרַכְתָּ יָמִים.

If a bird's nest chance to be before you in the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, and the mother is sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; you shall surely let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself; that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days.

The second instance of this reward is for maintaining honest weights and measures, or *ehven shelaimah*, literally “a complete stone.” This refers to a stone that was put on one side of a scale, while goods for sale were measured against the stone’s weight on the other side [25:13-15]:

לֹא-יְהִי לָךְ בְּכִיסֶּךָ, אָבֹן וְאָבֹן: גְּדוּלָה, וְקִטְנָה. לֹא-יְהִי לָךְ בְּבִיתְךָ, אֵיפָה וְאֵיפָה: גְּדוּלָה, וְקִטְנָה. אָבֹן שְׁלֵמָה וְצִדְקַת יְהוָה-לָךְ, אֵיפָה שְׁלֵמָה וְצִדְקַת יְהוָה-לָךְ--לְמַעַן, יֵאָרִיכוּ יָמֶיךָ, עַל הָאָדָמָה, אֲשֶׁר-הִיא לְפָנֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ.

You shall not have in your bag diverse weights, a great and a small. You shall not have in your house diverse measures, a great and a small. A perfect and just weight shall you have; a perfect and just measure shall you have; that your days may be long upon the land which Hashem your God gives you.

The only other specific commandment that appears in the Torah along with the reward of long life is *kibbud av va'em* – honoring one's parents [*Shemot* (Exodus) Chapter 20].

What messages can we derive from the three commandments that are associated with the reward of long life – honoring our parents, being kind to a bird, and maintaining a “complete stone”? These are paradigms of the three tiers of relationships each of us has on earth: the relationship between us and other people, the relationship between us and non-human living organisms, and the relationship we have with the inanimate aspects of the earth. We are bidden to be careful and conscious of our interactions with all of these: with our friends and family, with the flora and fauna surrounding us, and with the natural resources of this beautiful world.

Further, the stated reward for each of these commandments is long life. Perhaps it is less a reward in the usual sense of the word than it is a natural consequence. If we are in sync with the natural world and everything contained within it – the people, animals, plants, water, earth, and so forth – it stands to reason that we will live longer lives.

Let us all move forward with a raised consciousness about how we interact with the multiple and sundry co-inhabitants of our world, and may we all merit long and fulfilling lives.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What might be some reasons for sending a mother bird away from her nest before gathering the eggs or fledglings?
- Name some members of the inanimate world. How can we help protect them?
- Why are we commanded to “honor our father and our mother”?