

Shabbat Shalom.

This week's parashah is *ki tetzei*. In this parashah, God gives us a list of 72 laws, which cover an array of topics, such as war, marriage relations, community, nature, animals, health and safety.

While looking through these laws, I noticed a distinct connection between all of them. They all teach you how to be a better, selfless person towards other living things. For example, there was one law that caught my eye. Law #8, the mother bird and her chicks, *shiloach haken*. "If you happen upon a bird's nest on the way, in any tree or on the ground, with chicks or eggs...you shall surely send the mother away, and take the young for yourself."

The Rambam writes that the reason for the mitzvah of sending the mother bird away is to prevent suffering to animals. This links to what I mentioned earlier about teaching us to be better toward animals and humans. The Rambam also goes on to suggest that by the time the person has chased away the mother bird, he may realise that he does not really need the chicks after all -- they are usually not fit for consumption -- and will leave them alone. This tells us that there is no mitzvah to take chicks and to chase away the mother bird every time we see a nest. Ideally, we shouldn't take chicks from their nest, but if a person wants them, he is obligated to send away the mother bird first.

As the midrash points out, this mitzvah is only one of a few which has its reward specified in the Torah. The gift of a long life. The only other mitzvah that is specified with this reward is the mitzvah of *kibbud horim*, honouring parents. These two mitzvot are linked because you are thinking of the mother bird as a parent and make sure she is not there to suffer. By sending her away, we are honouring a parent, just as we are commanded to do.

But what about the long life promised as a reward? The person will get the gift of a long life if they take the chicks after sending the mother away, but what if they don't do anything at all? Surely by not taking the chicks one is certainly worthy of the reward. In answer to this, the Ramban writes that the reason for the mitzvah of sending away the mother, is actually for our benefit and God's desire to implant this concern within us, and to educate us not to be cruel, but to be better, selfless and kind.

These qualities in a person make up the foundations of a great community, which is exactly what we have. Perhaps God intended for these laws to be used as the basis for an ideal, welcoming community such as Kol Nefesh.

Shabbat shalom!

By Einav Diamond Limor