



The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Devarim

Parshat Ki Teitze

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Leges Sine Moribus Vanæ

By Jerry Weinberg

Wow, what a *Parsha* of do's and don't's! The *mitzvot* go on and on. In fact, there are more *mitzvot* in this *Parsha* than any other in the *Torah*. It's a compilation of laws that we must carefully follow and laws that we better not break. There are even *mitzvot* to observe for a Urologist like me — really! (Sorry, you'll have to look that up for yourself.)

At first, it appeared that there was no organization to the way these mitzvot were presented, which made it much tougher to follow and make sense of it all. But we learn from our commentators that there is indeed an order to the *mitzvot*. Here's an example: the laws of building and protecting a home are followed by the laws of harvesting fields and vineyards, and those are followed by the laws of *shatnez*, the rules about how our garments should be made. *Rashi* elucidates that this is an example of *mitzvah goreret mitzvah*, one commandment drags another one after it. If you abide by the laws of building a home, you will eventually have the opportunity to own a field, and if you follow the laws of harvesting, you will be successful enough to own nice clothes, and so on and so forth. One *mitzvah* begets another.

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In reading through the *Parsha*, one *mitzvah*, in particular, struck me as odd. Here was a *mitzvah*, one of the many listed, that comes with a reward that is the same as the reward for fulfilling one of the Ten Commandments. Odd indeed: a seemingly regular *mitzvah* with an outsized reward.

כִּי יִקְרָא קוֹרְצֵפוֹר ׀ לְפָנֶיךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ בְּבַלְעֵץ ׀ אֹו עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֶפְרָחִים אֹו בֵיצִים ׀ וְהָאֵם רֹבֶצֶת
עַל־הָאֶפְרָחִים אֹו עַל־הַבֵּיצִים לֹא־תִקַּח הָאֵם עִל־הַבָּנִים׃
שְׁלַח תְּשַׁלַּח אֶת־הָאֵם ׀ וְאֶת־הַבָּנִים תִּקַּח־לָךְ לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לָךְ ׀ וְהָאֶרֶץ תַּיָּמִים׃

If, along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young.

Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life. (Devarim 22:6, 7)

Look at how similar it is to the fifth commandment:

כְּבֹד אֶת־אָבִיךָ ׀ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ ׀ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוּ יָמֶיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ׃

Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you. (Shemot 20:12)

Our understanding of the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird comes mostly from 2 commentators. *Rambam*, Maimonides, learns that no parent, human or animal, should witness the demise of a child, that would be excessively cruel — don't do it. Don't take the eggs or chicks without first sending the mother bird away.

Ramban, *Nachmanides*, has quite a different understanding of the *mitzvah*. He views it as a way of avoiding species extinction. Yes, the Torah gives you the right to consume animals, but taking two generations of the same species is abhorrent — don't do it.

Well, of course, regardless of whose interpretation you follow, fulfilling this *mitzvah* certainly seems the right thing to do. But questions remain: why link this *mitzvah* to the observance of honoring your parents by offering the same reward? Who fulfills that reward? It does not say that it is *Hashem* that guarantees long life or that he will shorten life if you don't observe the *mitzvah*.

This Parsha is a Parsha of morality. Some mitzvot we will do instinctively, and for some, we need guidance.

I think the answer to these questions is that fulfilling these *mitzvot* triggers a self-recognition and understanding that you can live a more fulfilling life, a more sustaining life, by acting morally. The *mitzvot* are linked because the *Torah* wants us to realize that all mothers — animal or human — have similar instincts and will do whatever it takes to protect their young. We're being taught not to test these instincts by transgressing these *mitzvot*. We're being taught to act morally and do the right thing. The implication is clear: we wouldn't be able to live with ourselves if we didn't act morally — and that would shorten our lives.

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That's why the final *mitzvah* of this *Parsha* is to remember *Amalek*. Initially, it seems out of place, but on further consideration, it's another instance of *mitzvah goreret mitzvah*, one commandment drags another one after it. Understanding and recognizing the correct moral act is the thread that ties together the fifth commandment, a mother bird, and *Amalek*. Everything revolves around being able to recognize immoral people/acts and not be fooled by them. The lesson is straightforward: behave morally and *תִּמְחֶה אֶת־זֵכֶר עַמְלֵק*, blot out the memory of *Amalek* immorality, and *לֹא תִשְׁכַּח*, do not forget. (*Devarim* 25:19)

Jerry and Barbara Weinberg have enjoyed being members of the YIS and *shul* community since moving here in 1991. Barbara is a former Sisterhood president and YIS Board member. She is currently a member of the Reopening Committee. Their four children grew up here, are now married, and have blessed them so far with a gang of grandchildren. *Kein Yirbu!*

Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?

Please contact Steve Smith at stevenjsmith@yahoo.com

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