

PARASHAS VAYEILECH

The Secrets Of Longevity

Only two mitzvahs in the Torah come with the promise of a long life: *Kibud Av V'em* – Honoring our parents and *Shliach Hakan* – sending off the mother bird before taking the fledgling children.

These mitzvahs seem totally dissimilar and unrelated. In fact, the Midrash tells us that the two mitzvahs are the easiest of the easy, and the most difficult of the difficult, yet they should have the same reward. Honoring our parents is extremely difficult. Sending away the mother bird and taking the children is so easy. Why does the Torah designate the exact same reward? And why did the Torah designate these particular two mitzvahs? For the reward of a long life?

The commentaries explain that these two mitzvahs span the spectrum of human nature. The Torah wants us to perform the merciful act of sending away the mother bird before taking the children. Mercy is a common, human emotion. We instinctively feel a search of mercy and compassion when we see an animal in distress. This is because the animal poses no threat to us. Our base goodness emerges when there are no complications and prejudice that come into play. The Torah tells us to reinforce our mercy and compassion through the mitzvah of *Shliach Hakan*.

Honoring our parents, however, is one of the most difficult of all mitzvahs. It requires us to acknowledge what they have done for us, and forces us to admit how much we need them, and we could not have done it ourselves. It tests our egocentricity to the limit. We would like to be independent, self sufficient, and invincible. Recognizing our parents forces us to say "I owe it all to you" This then is the most difficult of the mitzvahs.

The Torah, however, does not designate the reward simply on the basis of what is easy and what is not. The infinite reward of mitzvahs is dependant on the spirit in which they were performed, and the love with which they were dispensed. Long life in the world to come can be secured by good deeds regardless of whether our body propels us to do it or creates obstacles. It's how much in a fuel we are contributing to the act that determines its true value. Thus the Torah designates the identical reward for when we are following our base instinct in the easiest of all mitzvahs, or we are countering it in the most difficult. It is the spirit that truly counts.

A king was being paraded along the highway. Jubilant cheers accompanied the row pageantry pomp and splendor. Nearby a fellow was swimming in the river when he heard news of the king's imminent passage. Jumping out the water he saw the king's chariot from the far. In a surge of passion and excitement, he ran up the riverbank and wildly waved and cheered the king in his bathing gear. People were taken aback at his lack of basic. The king noticed him from the far and to the sheer dismay and aghast crowds he welcomed him into his plush carriage. This fellow truly loves him. "He is not thinking of his honor, he is only thinking of mine,"

In our own lives let us be conscious of emphasizing the spirit of the mitzvah as much as the details. The details of the rituals are important, but it is the spirit that enables us to lift off the ground and connect to the heavenly spheres ensuring a life of infinite bliss.