

D'var Torah: Parashat Ki Tetze

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Of the two hundred and forty-eight positive commandments enumerated in the Torah, only two have a specific reward. The Torah promises long life to those who honour their parents and who fulfil the *mitzvah* concerning a bird's nest. In parashat *Ki Tetze* we find the injunction that if one chances upon a nest with fledglings or eggs and the mother bird sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, they must not take the mother together with her young (Deuteronomy 22:6-7).

Rashi explains that the commandment of *shilu'ach ha-ken*, "sending the mother bird from the nest" teaches us that if long life is promised for obeying a *mitzvah* for which there is no monetary loss and is easy to fulfil, how much more so would there be reward for observing a difficult commandment.

Rambam views the *mitzvah* as a method of instilling a sense of reverence for life and regard for animals: "If the mother is let go or escapes of her own accord she will not be pained by seeing that the young are taken away" (Guide for the Perplexed). Ramban views the purpose of the commandment as teaching us to be compassionate. If we are careful to consider the feelings of animals, how much more so would we consider the feelings of our fellow human beings.

It is no coincidence that the reward for observing the *mitzvah* of *shilu'ach ha-ken* is the same as that of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *kabed et avikha ve-et imekha*, "honour your father and mother". The rabbis likened one's teacher to one's parents, and according to Ben Zoma a wise person is one who learns from everyone. Thus by extension honouring one's parents means honouring all human beings. Similarly honouring a mother bird by not taking her along with her young extends to honouring all living creatures.

As we enter the period of *teshuvah*, of repentance, may we reach the ultimate spiritual state of a heightened sensitivity towards the feelings and well-being of all God's creatures, both animate and inanimate.