

Ki Teitzei – 5771

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

This parsha has the unique distinction of containing 74 Mitzvot. One of those Mitzvot is the Mitzvah of Shilu'ach HaKein [22:6-7]. We are commanded to send away a mother-bird before taking her chicks. The reason for this Mitzvah [Ta'amei HaMitzvah] is not stated and therefore is subject to a machloket between the RambaM and the RambaN.

RambaN explains that the purpose of Shilu'ach HaKein is for the person, the Oseh HaMitzvah, the one who sends away the mother bird. By demonstrating mercy to the mother bird and taking her chicks only after she flies away, the person improves his own midat HaRachamim and trains him against being cruel. RambaM contends that the goal of the Mitzvah is completely for the benefit of the mother bird; to assure that the bird does not suffer.

The basis of their machloket stems from the Mishnah in Berachot [33b] which states that a Shali'ach Tzibbur who says ,”Al Kan Tzipor Yagi'u Rachamecha” [“You (HaShem) are merciful to mother-birds”] must be silenced. There are two reasons offered in the Gemara for this necessity; one is that such a declaration implies that the Mitzvah is focused on rachamim, while in actuality, all Mitzvot are gezeirat, HaShem's decrees. RambaN agrees with this opinion because he asserts that the Mitzvah is not meant to be merciful to animals, but rather a teaching lesson for the person doing the Mitzvah. RambaM subscribes to the other opinion which argues that the Shali'ach Tzibbur must be silenced because his declaration makes G-d seem merciful to animals and not to humans.

Taking this a step deeper, Rav Moshe Tendler explained the Mitzvah of Shilu'ach HaKein as being an expression Kavod to our mothers and fathers. Mother-birds have a strong love and show a unique protective care for their chicks, so they do not leave their chicks even when a larger bird of prey approaches them. The mother-bird has such Mesirat Nefesh for her offsprings that is our responsibility to respect her acts of protection and motherhood feelings.

Translating this to our own lives we begin to appreciate the Mesirat Nefesh of our own mother and fathers, by giving birth to us, raising us and sustaining us. We never in their life time adequately express our HaKarat

HaTov to them, but when they see that we offer the same Mesirat Nefesh to our children then they realize that the lesson of parenthood was taught well, and that is the true HaKarat HaTov. *Perhaps this comparison explains why the reward for both Kibbud Av VaEim and Shilu'ach HaKein is "Arichat Yamim", long life. The only two Mitzvot in the Torah for which "Arichat Yamim" is promised.*