

"EASIEST OF THE EASY" AND "HARDEST OF THE HARD"

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #203, The Pre-War "Get." Good Shabbos!

The "Easiest of the Easy" and the "Hardest of the Hard"

This week's Parsha, contains the mitzvah of 'Shiluch HaKen.' The Torah commands us that when one finds a mother bird nesting on her eggs, if he wants to take the small birds he must first send away the mother. Only then is he allowed to take the children for himself [Devorim 22:6-7].

The pasuk [verse] concludes that if one keeps this mitzvah it will be good for him and he will have length of days. There is only one other mitzvah in the Torah, which carries this same reward. That is the mitzvah of Kibud Av v'Em.

The Medrash comments on the fact that both the "easiest of the easy" (kal she'bekalos) and the "most difficult of the difficult" (chamur she'bechamuros) have the same reward -- length of days. This teaches us, says the Medrash, that we do not really know the reward of the commandments.

Why is the sending away of the mother bird referred to as the easiest of mitzvot and why is honoring one's parents referred to as the most difficult of mitzvot?

The sefer Shemen HaTov suggests the following:

The Ramba"n on the Torah tells us that the reason the Torah gave us the mitzvah of Shiluach HaKen was to train us in the attribute of mercy. He takes pains to explain that this does not mean that G-d necessarily has mercy on the animals; what it does mean is that G-d is concerned that we should be compassionate people. We should train ourselves in compassion. If one is trained to be compassionate even to a bird, this will carry over and he will be compassionate to human beings as well.

If that is the case, this mitzvah is called the easiest of the easy because it is consistent with human nature. We can all relate to this mitzvah. We can all relate to the suffering a mother bird would feel if her children were taken away before her very eyes. We can understand its rationale. Therefore, it is

an easy mitzvah to fulfill.

If this is correct, it would follow that Kibud Av is spoken of as the most difficult of mitzvos because it goes AGAINST human emotions.

Why does Kibud Av v'Em run against human emotions? Because, the Rishonim tell us that the basis of the mitzvah of Kibud Av v'em is the concept of Hakaras HaTov -- showing gratitude. We, as human beings, do not like to show gratitude. Showing gratitude to someone is acknowledging that we needed that person. Our egos do not want to let us believe that.

We want to think that we are independent and can do things ourselves. To show appreciation means that the other person was needed. Even if it is possible to show appreciation to a stranger and say "Thank-you" for an occasional favor, appreciating parents involves dealing with the fact that, in essence, we owe EVERYTHING to our parents. Our very life was dependent on them. That is difficult to admit. It is difficult for us to say, "I owe you everything."

That is why Kibud Av v'Em is "chamur she'bechamuros" -- because it goes against everything that we would like to believe, as opposed to Shiluach HaKen which runs in concert with human emotions.

What Brings Amalek?

The parsha ends with the command to remember and eradicate Amalek. Immediately prior to the mitzvah of eradicating Amalek is the portion of honest weights and measures.

Rash"i, commenting on the juxtaposition of the two portions, says the connection is to teach us that if a person is dishonest with weights and measures, he is going to be attacked by Amalek. According to this Rash"i, the reason why we suffer at the hands of Amalek is because of dishonesty.

Parshas Ki Seitzei is actually the second time Amalek is mentioned in the Torah. Parshas BeShalach contains the first mention of the attack of Amalek. In the portion that proceeds the section of Amalek in BeShalach, Klal Yisroel [the Jews] ask the question, "Is there a G-d in our midst or not?" [Shemos 17:7] The faith of the Jewish people was lax. What happened? Amalek attacked. Why? Because Amalek represents that force in the world that does not believe in G-d (v'lo Yareh Elokim). We see from this portion that Amalek comes as a result of a lack of faith.

The question arises -- which is it? What brings Amalek -- a lack of faith or dishonesty and theft?

Rav Moshe Feinstein, z"tl, says that Amalek comes due to a lack of faith. The portion of dishonest weights and measures is not a portion that merely deals with theft and dishonesty. Failure to maintain honest weights and measures only occurs when people are lacking in faith in G-d!

One who believes in G-d, believes that it is G-d who gives him his livelihood. Ultimately, no matter how hard we work and how hard we try, a person's sustenance is determined for him on Rosh

HaShanna. If one believes in that, why should he have crooked weights and measures? Why is he cheating? What good will an extra dollar do for a person, if his annual income is already pre-determined?

The problem is that this person does not believe that it is G-d who gives livelihood. This is not a crime of passion, not a sin of dishonesty. This is a "theological issue." This person believes he has to steal to make money!

Therefore both BeShalach and Ki Seitzei are teaching the same lesson. Amalek comes when one says "Is there a G-d in our midst?" When one's belief is weak, Amalek comes. And if one thinks he has to cut corners and cheat to earn a livelihood, then his belief is weak!

The Secret to Eating With Satisfaction

On a related issue, in this week's portion, the Torah tells us that a worker is allowed to eat food from the field in which he is picking. The verse uses the expression "You should eat and be satisfied; but you should not put into your vessel" [Devorim 23:25]. On a simple level, this is teaching us that while it is OK to eat while working, one is not allowed to put the picked fruit in his shopping bag or suitcase for later consumption.

The Mikdash Mordechai says there is a tremendous lesson here: The key to eating and being satisfied is "do not put in your vessel." If one thinks he has to stash it away, because he doesn't know what tomorrow will bring, then he will never be satisfied with what he has.

There is never enough. One who has 100 wants 200. If one doesn't believe that ultimately, G-d will take care of him, then he will never be secure. There is never a big enough field. There are never enough clients. It is never enough.

If one wants to eat and be satisfied and secure, then one has to believe in the philosophy of not putting in one's vessel. One's hoarding and stashing away and certainly one's dishonesty will never make the difference. Therefore Parnossah becomes a matter of belief, not a matter of honesty.

That is why the Parsha of honest weights is next to the parsha of Amalek, who represents lack of faith in G-d (v'lo Yoreh Elokim).

Personalities & Sources:

Ramba"n -- (1194-1270) Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman; Gerona, Spain; one of leading Torah scholars in the Middle Ages.

Rash"i -- (1040-1105) Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki; classical Torah commentary; Worms, Troyes France.

Rav Moshe Feinstein -- (1895-1986) Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem, New York; leading posek of his time.

Mikdash Mordechai -- Rav Mordechai Ilan; contemporary, Israel.

Shemen Hatov -- Rabbi Dov Weinberger; contemporary, Brooklyn, NY

Glossary

Shiluach haKen -- Sending (the mother bird away from) the nest

Kibud Av v'Em -- Honoring Father and Mother

Rishonim -- early ones (classic Jewish commentaries from approximately 800-1500)

Hakaras HaTov -- recognizing the good (someone has done for you)

Parnossah -- livelihood

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- Tape # 020 - Non-Halachic Marriage Ceremonies
- Tape # 065 - Polygamy and the Cherem of Rabbeinu Gershom
- Tape # 110 - Mamzeirus: Possible Solutions?
- Tape # 156 - Reconciling Divergent Customs Between Husband and Wife
- Tape # 250 - The Mitzvah of Ma'akeh
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Rabbi Yissocher Frand: In Print

and is available through Project Genesis On-Line Bookstore: <http://books.torah.org/>
