

THE REWARD FOR SHILUACH HAKEN IS THE INVERSE OF THE REWARD FOR KIBUD AV V'EM

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Ki Seitzei

The Reward for Shiluach haKen Is the Inverse of the Reward For Kibud Av v'Em

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 823, Tzar Baalei Chaim: Does It Apply To People? Good Shabbos!

We learn in this week's parsha that a person who sees a bird sitting on its nest may not to take the chicks or the eggs in the presence of the mother (inasmuch as this causes great pain to the mother). Rather, one is supposed to first send away the mother and then take the chicks or eggs. This is the mitzvah of Shiluach haKen. The reward stated for doing this mitzvah is "so that it will be good with you and your days will be lengthened" [Devorim 22:7].

The only other mitzvah in the Torah that records this same formula for reward is the mitzvah of honoring one's parents (Kibbud Av v'Em). [Devorim 5:16] However, the Baal HaTurim points out a very interesting difference between the reward of Shiluch haKen and that of Kibbud Av V'Em. With Shiluach haKen, the Torah first writes, "It will be good for you" (l'ma'an yitav lach) and then "you will have long life" (v'ha'arachta yamim). However, with Kibud Av v'Em, the order is the opposite. There the Torah first says that you will have long life (l'ma'an ya'arichu yamecha) and then "in order that it will be good for you" (u'l'ma'an yitav lach). Why does the Torah reverse the order?

The Baal HaTurim has his own thoughts on this matter. However, I saw a very interesting approach to this question in the Shemen HaTov (chelek 4). The Shemen HaTov writes that by the mitzvah of Shiluach HaKen, the reward of "it will be good for you" will come relatively soon. If one is 20 years old when he performs this mitzvah, the promise of "long life" is something off in the distant future. At 20 years old, people think that they are going to live forever. The Torah therefore starts with the more immediate, "it will be good for you" as the primary reward and "long life" as an afterthought.

The Torah states the rewards in the reverse order regarding honoring one's parents because the

mitzvah of Kibud Av v'Em can be an extremely difficult mitzvah. This is particularly true for those of us who are fortunate enough to have aging parents when the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Em is really needed the most. If one has elderly parents that require a terrific amount of care, it can be exceedingly difficult and trying. The Torah tells us "Take care of your parents," particularly your elderly parents who need it the most. Therefore, the Torah does not start with "things are going to be great for you."

By Kibbud Av v'Em, instead of starting by promising that it will (immediately) be great for someone who performs this mitzvah, The Torah emphasizes a different reward: "One day you yourself will get old. Do you know who will take care of you when you get old? It will be your children. They will take care of you exactly as you took care of your own parents."

If children see parents taking care of elderly grandparents and they do it with love, kindness, and devotion, then when the parents themselves reach the stage of "Arichas Yamim" (long life), it will be "L'ma'an yitav lach". They will reap the reward of their own service to their parents by the fact that their children will serve them and "it will be good for them".

My father brought his elderly mother to this country when he came here in 1939. His mother lived with us for many years until she had a stroke and had to be put into an old age home because that is the type of care she needed. This facility was about 20-25 minutes by car from our home. Every single night, my father would go visit his mother who at that stage did not even know who he was. My grandmother died in 1960 when I was 12 years old. I used to go with my father almost every night to spend time in the old age home with my grandmother. It made an impression upon me regarding what it means to take care of an elderly parent.

My father unfortunately died suddenly and I never had that opportunity with him. I would like to think that with my mother who did have a long life and who was quite infirm in the end, I tried to take care of her the best I could, notwithstanding the 3000 miles between us.

The point is that the way in which parents treat their parents makes a profound impression on children. When parents treat their parents in an honorable fashion, it makes it far more likely that their children will treat them in an honorable manner as well, when the time comes. Therefore, by the pasuk by Kibud Av v'Em implies: Honor your parents in order that (when) you reach long life, it will be good for you (because of the example you set in Kibud Av v'Em for your children).

Guilt Is Good -- It Leads To Teshuva

The Torah teaches "Thou shalt not bring the hire of a harlot ... into the House of the L-rd thy G-d for any vow..." [Devorim 23:19] The Torah labels the ill-gotten gains of a harlot's hire as being an abomination unto the L-rd and considers it to be a very inappropriate offering for the Bais HaMikdash.

The Ramban suggests that the harlot specifically wants to take the payment she received for her

acts of immorality and do mitzvot with it in order to atone thereby for her sins. The Torah rejects such offerings, as the Ramban writes, so as not to encourage future behavior of this nature.

One of the most powerful of human emotions is that of guilt. People do things that they know are wrong and they feel guilty about it. Guilt can be a positive emotion. It is one of the great motivating factors in Teshuva [Repentance]. Unfortunately, in our society we try to relieve people's guilt. We say guilt is not a healthy emotion, one should not feel guilty, etc. This is not true. Guilt is a very important and healthy human emotion.

When we are eating, why do we get to a point when we stop eating? We sit down and we eat and eat and eat, but ultimately we have a satiation mechanism in our bodies that tells us we are satiated. This is a good thing. If we would not have this mechanism, we would eat forever. Guilt is an emotional mechanism akin to the physical emotion of satiation. What the satiation mechanism does for our bodies, the guilt mechanism does for the human psyche. It tells us "You have done something wrong. You should not do this again." It is a healthy emotion, which is the motivating factor behind repentance.

The harlot thinks to herself "I can get away with this behavior. I can do this." She thinks, "I will bring a sacrifice with my wages, what could be nobler than that? The only way I can afford to do such a noble thing is to engage in my profession. Therefore, I can do it again." This, according to the Ramban, is why the Torah rejects such offerings.

There is a much more common example of this in our own time. Many times, people make a lot of money in business dealings. However, sometimes people may make money illegally and then they decide they will donate some or all of the money to "religious causes". They give it to a shul or a yeshiva or have a building named for them. This plays with their psyche the same way the harlot's gift to the Beit HaMikdash plays with her psyche. "Listen, the only reason I was able to make such a donation was because I made the money." This acts as a guilt suppressant. The result is that this encourages such illegal behavior and allows them and others to continue in their pursuit of ill-gotten gains so that they might make future contributions of this nature, again all "for the welfare of the Jewish community".

There is no explicit prohibition in the Torah prohibiting the acceptance of ill-gotten money for the benefit of religious institutions. However, it is the spirit of the law of "Esnan Zonah" to refuse such donations. Trying to sanctify such donations of ill-gotten assets only encourages more such behavior in the future.

The Torah says do not take this money. Let the person feel guilty. The only way to stop bad behavior is to let the guilty feeling run its natural course. When guilt gets to us, to the point that we feel we must stop and repent our ways, we are making progress and Teshuva is at hand.

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