



מצוה גוררת מצוה One Good Deed Leads to Another

■ Easy Mitzvot, Difficult Mitzvot

Some of the Torah's commandments appear to be simpler to perform than others. For instance, we learn in Parashat Ki Tetze (D'varim 22,6-7) of the mitzvah of *Shiluach HaKen*, sending away the mother bird before taking her chicks. This would seem to be an "easy" mitzvah. Does this mean it is less valuable or important than others? Should we relate to the commandments differently based on their complexity or difficulty?

The answer is provided in Pirkei Avot (Chapters of the Fathers) by Rebbe, R. Yehuda HaNasi:

Be as careful and meticulous regarding an easy mitzvah as for a difficult one, for you do not know the reward for each one. (Avot 2,1)

Rebbe is telling us that the ease with which mitzvot are carried out means nothing about their relative value, nor about the reward promised to those who fulfill them. The Jerusalem Talmud provides support for this position in Tractate Peah (1,1):

R. Abba bar Kahana says:

"The Torah equated the lightest of the easy mitzvot with the gravest of the difficult mitzvot. The 'lightest of the light' is the mitzvah of *Shiluach HaKen*, and the 'gravest of the difficult' is that of honoring one's parents. They are equated in that the Torah writes regarding both of them (D'varim 5,16 and 22,7), '*you shall have long life.*'"



Why is this? It would seem logical that the reward for a mitzvah shows its “gravity,” or true weight. How, then, is it fair that we are rewarded equally for the above two mitzvot, which are of vastly different levels of difficulty? There must be a missing link that can explain this seeming injustice.

In fact, a famous dictum in Pirkei Avot (5,21) teaches that *Lfum tzaara agra*, “the reward is determined according to the effort expended.” Our question is now stronger: How can it be that honoring one’s parents - which often requires tremendous effort, both physical and emotional - garners the same reward as the mitzvah of simply sending away a mother bird?

■ One Mitzvah Leads to Another

The missing link we seek is found elsewhere in Pirkei Avot, where we learn:

Ben Azzai says:

“Run towards easy mitzvot just like to difficult ones, and flee from sin. For one mitzvah leads to another, and one sin leads to another; the reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and that for a sin is another sin.” (Avot 4,2)

Every action has an inner rhythm that pushes and leads to another, similar, action.

We know from the world of physics that there are two types of movement: Kinetic and wave. In the former, the physical particles themselves actually move, while in the latter, only energy moves. A perfect example of wave movement can be seen when a stone is dropped into a lake; the ever-spreading circles of water are merely the movement of energy. We know this by watching a floating item atop the gentle waves; it does not travel away with the waves, but only up and down in one place. The spreading of the ripples is only the movement of energy.

Every movement influences its environment, causing another movement, which itself influences its environment, and so on and so forth. This is reminiscent of the way gossip and rumors work as well; they seem to have “movement” of their own as they pass speedily from mouth to ear to mouth to ear, in a seemingly endless course, even though no person leaves his place.

Sound waves, too, spread in the air via wave-energy movement. The vibrations of one’s vocal chords rattle the air in the vicinity, causing the air next to it to vibrate, and so on. It is the energy that moves, and not the material particles.



How is this concept manifest in the mitzvot? Their movement is of the “energy” type. When a person fulfills a mitzvah, a form of spiritual energy is aroused, influencing him to perform another mitzvah, which leads him to do yet another one, and so on. Thus, one mitzvah truly leads to another.

Let us see how this works with the commandment of *Shiluach HaKen*. The Torah states:

שִׁלַּח תְּשַׁלַּח אֶת הָאֵם...
 ...שִׁלַּח תְּשַׁלַּח אֶת הָאֵם...

You shall surely send away the mother... (D'varim 22,7)

This mitzvah has an element of honoring parents: By not taking the chicks in the presence of the mother, we are showing honor to motherly instincts in general. This is a form of respect to the mother bird as she risks her life to sit atop her chicks and warm them. Via *Shiluach HaKen*, we create spiritual “waves” of honor for one’s parents, and the depth of the ethical obligation of honoring one’s parents thus penetrates our consciousness. This is how “one mitzvah leads to another.”

By the same token, any “light-weight” mitzvah has within it the power to awaken our willingness to perform a “heavier” mitzvah on the same plane. This is why the easier one is so important, and even equal to the harder mitzvah.

Similarly, King David formulated a principle of war by which the loot gained in war must not be divided only among the fighters:

...אֵת אֲשֶׁר נָתַן ה' לָנוּ, וַיִּשְׁמֹר אֶתָּנוּ וַיִּתֵּן אֶת הַגְּדוּד הַבָּא עָלֵינוּ בְּיָדוֹ...
 ...בְּחֶלֶק הַיָּרֵד בְּמִלְחָמָה וּבְחֶלֶק הַיֹּשֵׁב עַל הַבָּלִים יִחָדְדוּ יַחְלֶקוּ...

*Do not [divide unequally] that which G-d has given us,
 guarding us and delivering our enemy into our hand
 ... for as the share of he who goes into battle,
 so is the share of he who stays with the baggage;
 they shall share alike.* (Shmuel I 30,23-24)

King David explained that it is in the merit of those who guard over the baggage that the warriors can fight and win; everyone deserves an equal share. But in addition, David also noted the Divine help that contributed to their victory – and the contribution towards G-d’s aid by those who watched the baggage was no less than that of the fighters.

Similarly, the fulfillment of commandments is dependent on Divine help. We can say as follows: The merit of performing an “easy” mitzvah brings



about Divine aid in fulfilling a “hard” mitzvah. This is what Ben Azzai meant when he said, as we saw above, that the reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and the “reward” for a sin is another sin. The ultimate value of even seemingly simple mitzvot is equal to that of much more weighty ones.

■ A New Home

The inner rhythm of “a mitzvah leads to another” is manifest in the inner rhythm of some of the verses in Parashat Ki Tetze. We get the sense as we read them that each passage, describing a given mitzvah, “pushes” and leads to the next one. Let us analyze this list of verses in Chapter 22:

(Verses 6,7) – the commandment of *Shiluach HaKen*

(Verse 8) – the mitzvah of building a fence, a *maakeh*, around one’s roof

(Verse 9) – the prohibition against planting wheat or vegetables in a vineyard

(Verse 10) – the ban on plowing with an ox and donkey together

(Verse 11) – the ban on wearing *shaatnez*, wool and flax together

(Verse 12) – the mitzvah of *tzitzit*

From this sequence, the Medrash (Tanchuma, Tetze 1) learns the following sequence of events:

If you fulfill the commandment of ***sending away the mother bird***,
you will merit to build a new house with a ***fence around the roof***,
and then you will merit to have a ***vineyard*** and to ***plant a field***,
and to have ***oxen and donkeys***
and ***beautiful clothing***,
and to ***wear tzitzit***.

On another level, sending away the mother bird enables it to build a new nest, i.e., a new house – and then, in this merit, the person who fulfilled this mitzvah will himself merit to build a new house, plant an orchard, and acquire a field and beautiful clothing.

■ Chains of Mitzvot

The chapter that we are discussing begins with a similar pattern of three positive mitzvot:



- The mitzvah of returning a lost object that one has found (D'varim 22,1);
- that of helping up an animal that has fallen, and helping reload it (verse 4);
- the commandment of sending away the mother bird (verse 6).

The common denominator of these three can be expressed simply: *Joining together*. Let us examine each on its own:

- Returning a lost object: Reuniting the lost object with its owner.
- Helping a struggling animal to get up: Strengthening our communal ties by connecting with someone who needs help in getting his animal loaded up and going again.
- *Shiluach HaKen*: Helping establish a new nest in which the mother bird can once again connect with baby chicks of her own.

But immediately after these three, we find another series of three consecutive mitzvot with the opposite common denominator: *Detachment and separation*. They are:

- Building a *maakeh*, a fence around one's roof (verse 8);
- *Kil'ayim*, the prohibition against forbidden mixtures in planting and plowing (verses 9-10);
- *Shaatznez* (verse 11).

This aspect of “detachment” is expressed in *maakeh* as follows: A roof without a fence means an “uncontrolled connection” between the roof, with its high level of potential energy, and the ground. This unfettered link can lead to a great fall and crash, and therefore a buffer is required between the two.

Let us now study the prohibitions of *kil'ayim*, forbidden mixtures in planting, plowing, and the clothing we wear. All three are models of opposing energy levels that must not be joined together in an uncontrolled manner, in order to avoid disastrous spiritual consequences. The **first** model is:

לֹא תִזְרַע בְּרִמָּה כְּלָאִים...

Do not plant different species in your vineyard...

This mitzvah prohibits the planting of wheat, barley and grape-seeds together from one handful. Each of these seeds represents something else: **Wheat** symbolizes knowledge, understanding and the ability to



differentiate. As a baby develops, the stage of nursing is followed by that of being able to eat wheat products. Until now, he knew his mother – but now he also knows his father, and is able to call out to them, “Abba, Ima!” and to connect meaningfully with them.

On the other hand, the eating of grain also adds a bad odor to the waste excreted from his body – thus teaching him the important lesson of staying away from that which is bad.

What does the **barley** symbolize? It stands for the opposite of what wheat symbolizes: lack of wisdom. Barley is known as “the food of animals;” animals have no understanding. And the third species, **grape-seed**, stands for grapes and wine, which can bring about drunkenness of the senses and blurring of the intellect. Drinking wine can lead to great joy and uplifted spirit, but it happens via blurring reality and diminishing awareness.

Combining the above three - wheat, barley and grapes - in one planting, creates a harmful and destructive combination of totally contrasting energy levels. Knowledge, lack of knowledge, and blurring of awareness cannot serve together. The dropping of the various seeds in one hand-throw is reminiscent of the “fall” from the roof and the crash to the ground - the original example of a wrongful joining of mismatched energy levels.

The **second** model of opposing energy levels and mismatched forces is:

לא תִּהְרֹשׁ בְּשׂוֹר וּבַחֲמֹר יַחְדָּו.

Do not plow with an ox and a donkey together. (verse 10)

The ox is a symbol of strong work power that bursts forward speedily. The donkey, in contrast, stands for endurance; it carries heavy loads - and lumbers slowly along. Joining these two opposite powers together in an uncontrolled manner can lead only to destructive results – and this is why the Torah forbids hooking them up jointly to a plow.

And the **third** model is this:

לא תִּלְבַּשׁ שְׂעֵטָנָה וְצִמְרֵי וּפְשֵׁתִים יַחְדָּו.

Do not wear shaatnez: wool and flax together. (verse 11)

Wool comes from an animal; it is the sheep’s natural clothing or covering. Flax, on the other hand, is a fiber that grows from the ground. Joining them together to help cover and keep man warm is an uncontrolled, misguided way of combining animal life and plant life.



Our Sages teach that the sacrifice brought by Adam's son Kayin (Cain) was of plant origin, namely, flax: 'מִפְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְּחָה לֵּהּ, "*Kayin brought from the fruit of the earth as an offering to Hashem*" (B'reshit 4,3). His brother Hevel (Abel), on the other hand, brought an animal offering: מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִלְבָּהֶן, "*Hevel brought from the first-born of his flock.*" (verse 4)

This encounter between the two brothers ended, as we know, with a tragic murder – the result of an improper combination of plant and animal, flax and sheep. The Torah is teaching us that the hidden forces in these three models of prohibitions work against each other, and that we must be careful and not join them together - lest the result be a crash and fall, as from a roof to the ground.

■ **Opposing Forces in Mitzvot**

Some of the forbidden combinations can be rectified via the fulfillment of appropriate mitzvot in which opposing forces *can* be joined.

For instance, the mitzvah of tzitzit - the ritual fringes on four-cornered garments - actually involves a combination of wool strings on a flax garment! That is to say, *shaatnez* is permitted in tzitzit. Furthermore, the mitzvot of the Holy Temple include the High Priest's wearing of a vest made of both wool and flax together. Why do these combinations not produce harmful results?

We can understand this by studying electricity. An uncontrolled or improper meeting of the positive and negative charges will cause an explosion and a short circuit. But if the joining is done properly, with the current passing through the resistance of an electric appliance such as a motor, a bulb, an iron, or the like, the resulting meeting of the forces is very effective and can produce light, heat, and power.

The same is true with the Torah's commandments: When opposing forces pass "through" mitzvot, they create controlled and proper combinations that bring blessing to the world.

Another example of this concept is found in the sphere of male-female relations. When carried out in an improper, uncontrolled manner, they bring destruction to the world - as seen most blatantly during the Generation of the Flood. But if they are governed by the sacred mitzvah of marriage, with its guidelines and restrictions, then the results of the joining of the male and female are blessed and will bring light and happiness to the



world. When the opposing male and female forces are joined properly and as the Torah teaches, the destruction becomes construction - the building of all future generations to come.

Parashat Ki Tetze thus contains a consecutive series of verses that give us a picture of a consecutive series of incidents, which in turn create a wave phenomenon of mitzvot influencing other mitzvot. Thus, one commandment truly leads to another. The fulfillment of the mitzvot that we can readily comprehend leads us to fulfill other commandments whose reasons we don't quite understand. This is what Pirkei Avot means when it teaches that "the reward of a mitzvah is another mitzvah."

