

Devar Torah Parashat Ki Teizei

We learn in this week's Parsha that a person who sees a bird sitting on its nest may not 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 honouring one's parents (Kibbud Av v'Em). [Devorim 5:16] However, the Baal HaTurim points out a very interesting difference between the reward of Shiluach 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 Kibbud 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 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 Kibbud 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 {Rabbi Frand’s} 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 honourable 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: Honour 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).