

Parsha Ponders

Ki Seitzei | August 20, 2021 | 12 Elul 5781

Honoring parents, chasing birds, and long life¹

שלח תשלח את-האם ואת-הבנים תקח-לך למען ייטב לך והארכת ימים

You shall surely send away the mother bird, and [then you can] take the chicks, in order that it will be good for you, and you will have long life²

כבד את-אביך ואת-אמך כאשר צוך יקוק אלקיך למען יארכך ימך ולמען ייטב לך על האדמה אשר-יקוק אלקיך נתן לך

Honor your father and your mother, as Hashem commanded you, in order that you have long life and in order that it be good for you³ on the land which Hashem your G-d gives you⁴

There are two *mitzvos* in the Torah which are often compared. The *mitzvah* to honor one's parents, commanded in the Ten Commandments, and the *mitzvah* of sending away the mother bird, which appears in this week's *parsha*. What they share in common⁵ is the promise of a long life for those who observe them. Our Sages teach us⁶ that we should not be misled into thinking these *mitzvos* promise us long life in this world. The proper interpretation is that their fulfillment promises long life in the World to Come. What's so special about these two *mitzvos* that they share this quality?

What takes primacy, this world, or the next world? While it's true that we start off in this world, everything we do is investing towards the World to Come. Any reward we receive for our *mitzvos* in this world is merely to help us with our Divine Service. The true reward is reserved for the World to Come. This would imply that the next world takes primacy, and this world is just a means to an end. How could that be? The next world seems to be the byproduct of this world. How could the "offspring" (the next world) take primacy over the cause (this world)?

The validation of this assessment is attested by the *mitzvos* of honoring one's parents and sending away the mother bird. Initially, it would seem that parents take primacy over their children, as the children are required to honor them. They did birth them after all. However, as the parents age, their ability to be self-sufficient wanes. They become more dependent on their children than they used to be. It ends up developing that the children play a central role in the parent's lives. Even though they are their offspring, they end up becoming the dominant player in the relationship.

¹ Based on Minchas Ani parshas Ki Seitzei s.v. וביה יובן, written by Rav Yaakov Ettlinger, known for his Aruch LaNer

² Deuteronomy 22:7

³ See Chasam Sofer Al HaTorah to ibid 22:7 who discusses why the order of "good for you" and "long life" are switched between these two *mitzvos*. Interestingly, in Exodus 20:12, when it first mentions honoring one's parents, there's no promise of either of these things

⁴ Ibid 5:16

⁵ There's actually a third *mitzvah* which promises long life and is often overlooked (and also appears in this week's *parsha*), that of having honest weights (ibid 25:15). Although, that *mitzvah* specifies long life *on the land*, and perhaps could be argued as solely promising the right to live in the land of Israel. However, honoring one's parents also mentions *on the land*. I've heard it suggested that *mezuzah* is also a *mitzvah* which promises life, as it would seem from the second paragraph of Shema (ibid 11:21). Although, it's not clear to me that it's specifically going on *mezuzah*, as the promise follows a long list of *mitzvos*, including placing Hashem's words on our heart and soul, wearing *tefillin*, teaching Torah to our children and speaking words of Torah, and finally writing a *mezuzah*. Again, this promise specifies long life *on the land*

⁶ Kiddushin 39b; Chullin 142a

This idea is also evident from the *mitzvah* to send away the mother bird. When a person finds a mother bird perched on top of her eggs or chicks, it is forbidden to take the children away from her. Rather, the Torah commands us to send away the mother bird, and only then take the eggs. It's even forbidden to simply take the mother bird away from her children⁷. We are obligated to send her way. If the children weren't there however, the mother bird would have been permissible for the taking. It turns out then that the mother bird's whole existence is due to her children. Without them, she would have been Shabbos dinner. Again, the "offspring" take primacy over the "parent".

The Torah promises long life in the World to Come specifically with these two *mitzvos* because they teach us to have the proper attitude. This world is merely a corridor to the next world⁸. It's not so surprising then that this world isn't considered primary, even though it provides our existence in the next world. We see from honoring one's parents and sending away the mother bird the very same idea. Something which came from something else can eventually take primacy.

Good Shabbos

⁷ See Minchas Chinuch § 544

⁸ Avos 4:16