

PARSHAT KI TEITZEI: HOW TO MERIT A LONG LIFE

This guide corresponds to the video: [How To Merit Long Life](#)

SABBATH TABLE OUTLINE

- I. The Torah tells us to honor our parents - Why?
 - a) Well, the most obvious answer is that our parents gave us the greatest gift of all - life itself
 1. Obviously some deference is due to them
 2. When we honor them, we are doing the least we can to those who have given us life
 3. That is the conventional interpretation of why we honor our parents
 - b) Rabbi Fohrman has recently come to perceive a new wrinkle in why we honor our parents
 1. Something that makes the mitzvah jump to life in a whole new way
 2. The insight came from something in this week's parsha that seems to have very little to do with honoring your parents
 - c) Now, for everything Rabbi Fohrman said about honoring parents, we'll focus on this week's parsha then come back to it



- II. Parsha contains the famous mitzvah of sending away a mother bird
 - a) If you see a nest with chicks in it or eggs in it, and a mother bird is crouching over them, it's a mitzvah to send away the mother before taking the young (Deuteronomy 22:7)
 - b) What is the rationale for this mitzvah?
 1. It seems to have some sort of ethical message, but what is that message?
 - c) The major medieval commentators break into two groups
 1. Maimonides (Guide for the Perplexed III:48) - the worst thing you could do to a parent – human or animal – is to force them to witness their child's demise
 - Not something unique to us that we cannot deal with that
 - It's true for animals as well
 - The mitzvah of sending away the mother bird is to not impose that kind of cruelty, even upon a bird
 - The Torah gives permission to take eggs or the chicks, but don't force the mother to helplessly watch – send her away
 2. Nahmonides (commentary on Deuteronomy 22:6-7) - species extinction
 - While the Torah gives human beings the right to consume animal products, there is a difference between killing a cow for food and killing the entire species of cow – abhorrent to drive a species to extinction



- Even though you're not actually doing that here, killing mother and child, two generations, together, that's a kind of unconscionable overextinction of the species
- If you are going to take the eggs or chicks, save the mother bird

III. Explore the actual text of the mitzvah itself as given in this week's parsha (Deuteronomy 22:6-7)

- a) If we pay careful attention, we will discern another layer of meaning beyond the understanding of Maimonides and Nahmonides – let's ask some questions
1. Why is this mitzvah phrased in reference to birds?
 - If it's re: cruelty to a parent, like Maimonides says, true for any species
 - If it's re: species extinction, like Nahmonides says, true for any species
 2. Problematic text - what does it mean, "don't take the mother **upon** the young"?
 - The phrase is strange according to both Maimonides and Nahmonides
 - According to Maimonides' reasoning, it should read not to take the children **in front** of the mother
 - According to Nahmonides' reasoning, it should say not to take the mother **with** the children
 - Why the emphasis on taking the mother?
 - Unless there is another layer of meaning



- b) The key to seeing it is to look at the reward
1. Sending out the mother comes with a reward of long life
 2. Only one other positive command in the Torah comes with a promised reward – and it's also long life
 - Honoring your mother and father (Exodus 20:11)
- c) What common denominator could there between the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird and honoring your parents?



1. The honoring of parenthood
2. Is it easy to capture an adult bird?
 - Nope – and that's the point
 - If you're walking down the street, and you see a mother hovering over its young, that is the one chance you have to take a mother bird with your bare hands
 - Because that mother bird will do anything to protect her young
 - She will sacrifice herself, hovering over the nest, to fend you off
 - Therefore, you might say to yourself that you could take, not just the eggs, but her too
 - Send her away and then take the eggs
 - Why? Because it's a desecration of motherhood
 - Originally, human beings could only eat vegetation
 - Later, God lets us eat animals too, but there are restrictions
 - God gave animals various abilities to evade predators
 - i. For a bird, that ability is flight – its wings protect it
 - In effect, God says, we can have as many birds as are caught, but not that many will be caught



IV. What is the Torah saying in this parsha, when there's a nest with eggs/chicks and a mother bird?

1. God gave us a right to the eggs
2. But what's the only reason you could capture the mother?
 - She's protecting her young, and she won't fly away
 - You're using her own maternal instincts against her
 - That's a desecration of motherhood

b) Let the mother bird go free - you don't have a right to capture her



V. Here is where you get the most amazing insight as to honoring parenthood

a) A mother will do anything for her young, even sacrifice herself

1. We must honor that, not turn her instinct against her
2. That's not just true for the mother bird; that's true for your own mother too
 - Your own mother will do anything for you
 - Even if you disregard her wishes, she will still love you, you are her child

b) Do not desecrate that love and take advantage of it

1. That parental love is intended to help you
2. Do not take that love and use it as a trap against her when you give nothing in return
3. Honor your parents, and, if you do, and if you send away the mother bird, your own life will be strengthened
 - You may well find that you, yourself, will live a long life
 - It's only fitting to show deference to the one who gave you your life

