

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter XLIX: Ki Teitzei (Deut. 21:10–25:19)

Essay 5. The two commandments that mention prolonging one's days

חולין פרק י"ב לא יטול אדם אם על הבנים, אפילו לטהר את המצורע. ומה אם מצנה קלה שהיא באיפור, אמרה תורה "וילמען ייטב לך" וכו', קל וחומר על מצות המורות שבתורה.

Chullin, chapter 12:

A person may not take the mother [bird] with the offspring even [if he takes the mother bird for use as part of the ritual discussed in Lev. 14:1–9] to purify the *metzora*.¹ And if for an easy commandment [such as sending away a mother bird], [worth only] an *issar*,² the Torah says: “that you may prolong your days, and that it may be well with you,”³ there is an *a fortiori* inference [that the reward] for the stricter mitzvot in the Torah [would be at least as good].

- Mishnah Chullin 12:5; Chullin 142a

יש לדקדק במאי דאמרינו בירושלמי דפיאה שקל הכתוב הקלה שבקלות דהיינו שילוח הקן, כחמורה שבחמורות דהיינו כיבוד אב ואם, הדא הוא דכתיב "ארח חיים פורתפלס", שכל המצות מתן שכרן אריכות ימים.

One must examine what is stated in the Jerusalem Talmud of Peah (1:1): The Scripture equated the lightest of the light commandments, namely the sending away of the mother bird from the nest before taking the offspring, with the most severe of the severe commandments, namely honoring father and mother. The Torah states that one who honors his parents will also have his days prolonged.⁴

That is the meaning of what is written, “She does not smooth the way of life, her tracks deviate and you will not notice it,”⁵ as even though the reward for all the commandments is length of days, this reward of length of days has been moved to the World-to-Come.

* English translation: Copyright © 2025 by Charles S. Stein. Additional essays are available at <https://zstorah.com>

¹ *Tzara'at* is a skin disease. Many English translations refer to it as leprosy and to the person afflicted as a leper. However, this skin disease was not related to leprosy. Rather, it was considered a physical manifestation of a spiritual ailment.

² A coin of minor value, worth about one-tenth of a day's wage of a laborer.

³ Deut. 5:16.

⁴ Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16.

⁵ Prov. 5:6.

דמרתמי למה לי, והא משילוחם הקן לחונה איכא קל נחמר, ואדרבא הואיל שנגכתבו שנים אין למדין לשאר מצוות דשגוי כותובים הבאים פאחד אין מלמדיו. ויש לומר שבאמת לא הנה ליה לכתוב המתן שחר אלא בשילוחם הקן שהיא קלה וקל נחמר לשאר המצוות, אלא דאי לא הנה פתיב אלא בשילוחם הקן הייתי אומר קל נחמר, כיבוד אב ואם דיש ביה חסרון פיס גדול יותר משילוחם הקן, דהא מצנת כיבוד הוא עד שישול ארנקי ויזרקנו לים, כדאיתא בקידושין, ואתו נמי כל שאר המצוות דאית בהו נמי חסרון פיס, אבל המצוות דלית בהו חסרון פיס לא, דאיכא למפרך מה לשילוחם הקן שיש בו קצת חסרון פיס. ואי הנה פתיב כיבוד אב ואם לחוד, הייתי אומר מלחם תפשת מועט תפשת, שנה השכר גדול היינו דנקא פשיש בו בכיבוד חסרון פיס גדול, ולא הנה אתי מיניה שילוחם הקן וכיוצא. ומשום הכי איצטריכו תרנוייהו, שהרי הכיבוד היכא דאית ביה חסרון פיס אנו לומדים אותו מקל נחמר דשילוחם הקן, ומדכתביה גבי כיבוד, שמע מינה דאתא לאורווי דאף במקום דלית ביה חסרון פיס מתן שכרה אריכות ימים, ומנה אנו לומדים אף שאר מצוות, נמצא שכל המצוות שוות הן.

Why do I need two examples from the Torah cited as prolonging one's days, both sending away the mother bird and honoring one's parents? For from the sending away of the mother bird from the nest alone there is an *a fortiori* inference. To the contrary, since two verses were written promising length of days, that is actually damaging to the *a fortiori* inference, for the Sages hold that when two verses teach the same thing, one cannot derive for the other commandments, for two verses that come as one do not teach their common element to other cases.⁶ Thus, one could say: In truth, [the Torah] should not have written the reward except with regard to the sending away of mother bird from the nest, which is a light commandment, and from there an *a fortiori* inference to the other commandments.

But if it had written only regarding the sending away of the mother bird from the nest, I might have said an *a fortiori* inference only to honoring father and mother, which involves a greater financial loss than sending away the nest. For the commandment of honoring one's parent is until the point that he takes a purse and throws it into the sea, as it says in Kiddushin (32a). So too all other commandments that involve financial loss. But for commandments that do not involve financial loss, it is not so. For one could refute: what about sending away the mother bird from the nest, which still has within it some financial loss?

If [the Torah] had written only honoring father and mother, I would say, following the principle of "If you grasp a little, you have grasped [something],"⁷ that this great reward is only when there is a potential for a large financial loss, and it would not extend to a commandment for which there is not such a large financial loss, such as sending away the mother bird from the nest and the like.

Therefore, both were necessary. For with honoring parents, where there is financial loss, we learn it by an *a fortiori* inference from the sending away of the mother bird from the nest. Since it was written regarding honoring parents, we learn from this that it comes to teach that even in a case where there is no financial loss, its reward is length of days. From this, we also learn for the other commandments; thus, all the commandments are equal.

⁶ Kiddushin 24a, 35a, 37b, 42b, 43a, 58a; Bechorot 49a; Chullin 113b.

⁷ Sukkah 5a.

ועדיין צריך עיון למה סמך התנא ענגן קל וחמור זה על הדין שלא יטול אם על הבגים אפילו לטהר את המצורע, דמה ענגן זה לזה. וגיש לומר שכוננת התנא היא להשמיענו שאין אנו יודעים טיבן וערכן של המצות, שלפעמים נראות קלות מצד עצמן והן חמורות מצד אחר, שגרי שילוח הקן שהיא באיסור נראית קלה, ואף על פי כן לא יטול אפילו לטהר את המצורע, שהיא מצוה חמורה לעשות שלום בין איש לאשתו וביטול פרקה ורבקה. ועיין בתוספות יום טוב סוף חולין, קל וחמור על מצות שגראות חמורות מצד עצמן.

Yet it still requires investigation: why did the Tanna connect this *a fortiori* inference to the law that one may not take a mother bird with its young, even to purify the *metzora*? For what connection is there between this and that?

One may say that the intention of the Tanna is to make known to us that we do not know the nature and value of the commandments. For sometimes they appear light in one respect, but are severe in another. For behold, the sending away of the mother bird from the nest, which is worth only an *issar*, appears light, and nevertheless one may not take it even to purify the *metzora*, which is a commandment of great weight, for it makes peace between a man and his wife and corrects the suspension of being fruitful and multiplying. See Tosafot Yom Tov, end of Chullin (Chapter 12, Mishnah 5): *a fortiori* for commandments that appear severe by themselves.

וכן היא דשקל הכתוב קלה שבקלות וכו' כך משמעו, דשילוח הקן שהיא באיסור היא קלה, ועוד שהלאו שלה ניתק לעשה ואין בו מלקות, וזו היא קלה שבקלות, ונחמורה שבחמורות היינו מצות פיבוד דאיתקוש כבודם לכבוד המקום ועדיף מיניה, כמו שכתבו התוספות בפרק קמא דקידושין (דף ל"א ע"א ד"ה "כבוד אתה' מהוה") דאם יש לו ממון חייב ואם לאו פטור, וכיבוד אב ואם כתיב "כבוד את אביה" וכו' דמשמע בין יש לו ממון בין אין לו, והיכא דלית ליה, חייב לחזור על הפתחים לזון אביו ואמו עכ"ל.

Likewise, that which is stated, that Scripture equated the lightest of the light commandments, namely the sending away of the [mother bird from the] nest, with the most severe of the severe commandments, namely, honoring father and mother.

This is its meaning: first, that the sending away of the mother bird from the nest, considering that the mother bird is worth only an *issar*, is a light commandment, and moreover, its prohibition is remedied by a positive commandment, and therefore there is no flogging for it.⁸ This is the reason that it is referred to as the lightest of the light.

The most severe of the severe is the commandment of honoring parents, for their honor was compared to the honor of the Omnipresent, and is even greater, as Tosafot wrote in the first chapter of Kiddushin (page 31a, text beginning "Honor the L-rd with your wealth"⁹): that if one has money, one is obligated in the honor of the Omnipresent, and if not, he is exempt. But with honoring father and mother it is written, "Honor your father," which implies whether he has money or not, and where he does not have, he is obligated to go begging at the doors to provide for his father and mother.

⁸ Makkot 16a.

⁹ Prov. 3:9.

וְהִשְׁתָּא דְאִתֵּינן לְהִכִּי אֵינָם עוֹד שְׁנֵי כְתוּבִים הַבָּאִים כְּאֶחָד מִטַּעֲמָא אֶתְרִינָא, דְאִי הֵנָּה כְּתִיב אַרְיִכוֹת יָמִים בְּשִׁילוּתֵי הַקֶּן לְחֹדֶיֶה לֹא הֵנָּה אֲתִי כְבוֹד אָב וְאָם מֵינִיָּה, דְהֵנָּה אֲמִינָא שְׁאֲנִי הֵתָם שְׁאֲפִילוּ לְטַהַר הַמְצוּרַע שְׁהִיא מְצֻנָּה רַבָּה לֹא יִטוּל, מַה שְׁאִין כּוֹן כְּבוֹד אָב וְאָם שְׁאִינוּ דוֹחָה שׁוּם מְצֻנָּה שְׁבַתוֹרָה, דְאֶדְרַבָּא אֲמִרִינָן בְּיָבָמוֹת אֲנִי ה' מְלַמֵּד שְׁכַלְכֶם חַיִּיבִים בְּכְבוֹדֵי. וְאִם אָמַר לוֹ אָבִיו הִטְמֵא אוֹ שְׁאֲמַר לוֹ אֵל תַּחֲזִיר, לֹא יִשְׁמַע לוֹ, וְאִי הֵנָּה כְּתִיב אַרְיִכוֹת יָמִים בְּמְצֻנַת כִּיבוֹד לֹא הֵנָּה אֲתִי שִׁילוּתֵי הַקֶּן מֵינִיָּה, דְשְׁאֲנִי הֵתָם דְאִיתְקוּשׁ כְּבוֹדֵם לְכְבוֹד הַמְקוּם וְעַדִּיף מֵינִיָּה כְּנֹזְכָר לְעִיל, וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי אֶצְטְרִיכוּ תַרְנֻיָּהּ.

Now that we have arrived at this point, they are no longer considered two verses that come as one, for a different reason. For if it had written “length of days” only regarding the sending away of the mother bird from the nest, honoring father and mother would not have been derived from it. For I would have said, it is different there, since even to purify the *metzora*, which is a great commandment, one may not take [the mother bird], whereas with regard to honoring father and mother, it does not override any commandment in the Torah. On the contrary, as we say in Yevamot (6a): “‘I am the L-rd’ teaches that you are all obligated in My honor.” For example, if his father tells him to become impure, or tells him not to return a lost object, he must not listen to him; he must obey these commandments and not violate them, even when instructed to do so by his father.

If [the Torah] had written “length of days” only with regard to the commandment of honoring parents, sending away the nest would not have been derived from it, for I would have said, it is different there, for their honor was compared to the honor of the Omnipresent and is greater, as mentioned above. Therefore, both the commandment to send away the mother bird from her nest and the commandment to honor one’s parents were necessary.

* * *