

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Shmuel *ben* Ya'akov *a"h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Fuel for Flight

PARSHAS KI SAVO 5775

Feeding the birds is a very popular activity in many yards across the globe. More than an opportunity to see these feathery creatures up close and “connect with nature,” it appears from the *sefarim* (sacred works) that significant spiritual ramifications emanate from this practice.

Emulation

One area in which this idea surfaces is in connection with a mitzvah in this week's *parshah*, which commands us: וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָיו – “And you shall walk in His ways” (*Devarim* 28:9). The *Sefer Hachinuch* (§ 611) lists this directive as a *mitzvas aseih* (positive commandment) to emulate the ways of Hashem and cultivate those attributes and practices with which He is associated. As Chazal state: “Just as Hashem is known as ‘Merciful,’ so should you be merciful...” (*Sifri, Parshas Eikev*); “Hashem visits the sick... so should you visit the sick...” (*Sotah 14a*).

The *mussar* classic *Tomar Devorah*, in its opening chapter, delineates the numerous merciful attributes of Hashem that one should develop in order to emulate His ways. At the close of this chapter, he adds that a person who conducts himself in this manner will reap much benefit and Celestial assistance. For if a person below adheres to such conduct, there will be a reciprocal reaction from Heaven, such that one who acts mercifully will merit an outpouring from Above of the corresponding Divine attribute.

One relatively simple way to achieve this is through the practice mentioned at the outset. The *Sefer Chareidim* (14:1) states that feeding Hashem's needy creatures is subsumed within this mitzvah of “*V'halachta bidrachav*.” Such behavior is in consonance with that conduct of Hashem described in the *Ashrei* prayer: טוב ד' לכל וְרַחֲמָיו עַל-כָּל-מַעֲשָׂיו – “Hashem is good to all, and His mercies extend to all of His creations” (*Tehillim* 145:9). Thus, the *Shulchan Hatahor* (*ch. 2*) relates that it is a customary practice of the pious to put out food for the birds during times of extreme cold and that doing so arouses the attribute of Divine mercy upon the world.

In certain noteworthy passages, Chazal likewise refer to this aspect of Hashem as the Benevolent Provider of the needs of all of His creatures – from the most majestic and large to the most insignificant. As the Gemara states: יושב הקב"ה וְזוֹן מִקְרָנָיו רְאֵמִים וְעַד בֵּיצֵי בָיִים – “Hashem sits and provides sustenance to (all; from) the horned *re'eimim* (certain herbivores of considerable size) down to lice-hatchlings” (*Avodah Zarah 3b*).

Likewise, special reference is made to the kindness Hashem demonstrates toward birds of the nest. This is done in the context of considering the suitability of certain prayer-formulations; as the Mishnah states (*Berachos* 5:3):

הַאֲמַר עַל קֶן צִפּוֹר יִגִּיעוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ... מִשְׁתַּקִּין אוֹתוֹ.

“One who says, ‘Your mercy extends to a bird's nest,’ is silenced.”

The commentators point out that it is not the actual substance of this declaration that is objectionable, but rather, the implication as it relates to the mitzvah of *shilu'ach hakan* (sending away the mother bird from the nest before taking the eggs [*Devarim* 22:6,7]). The

individual mouthing this praise is insinuating that this is the primary reason we should follow the mitzvah: *because* it is merciful. This is a tremendous error, one which Chazal state must be vehemently corrected; we follow the *mitzvos* because the King has so commanded, whether we understand their underlying reasons or not. But it is definitely true that Hashem's mercy is displayed through this mitzvah, as Chazal themselves state: "Hashem is filled with compassion upon the birds. From where do we know this? As it states (*ibid.*): 'When you encounter a bird's nest...'" (*Devarim Rabbah 6:1; cf. Peirush Maharzu*).

Salvation through Bird-Feeding

Furthermore, neglecting the needs of birds in one's care and causing them to suffer deprivation can result in severe consequences. The *Sefer Chareidim (ibid.)* relates a frightening account in this regard, involving the saintly Arizal. This venerable sage had so refined his character that his spiritual senses were exceedingly sharp; he could discern a person's spiritual standing by merely looking at him. So it happened that he once peered at the face of a certain Torah scholar and informed him that he could tell from his face that he had violated the prohibition against causing pain to animals (*tza'ar ba'alei chayim*).

A conscientious fellow, the scholar was perturbed and perplexed. He was not a vicious person. When did he ever cause harm to animals? Further examination uncovered the fact that his wife, who cared for the chickens, had been somewhat negligent in providing the birds' morning fare. Instead of placing food before them, she merely allowed them to wander the courtyard to fend for themselves, sufficing with whatever morsels they happened to come upon.

After this discovery, the scholar advised his wife to prepare the proper chicken-victuals each morning and place them in the chickens' yard. She did so, and the next time the man appeared before the Arizal, the sage told him: "I see that the iniquity has been erased."

R' Yitzchak Zilberstein relates a similar incident reported to R' Chaim Kanievsky. A couple had been childless for a while, and the husband would visit R' Chaim for advice and blessings.

One day, the man appeared before R' Chaim with glad tidings that they had been blessed with a child. He told R' Chaim what had transpired.

Some concerned friends of his had shown him *sefarim* citing the mistreatment of animals as a reason why one might be prevented from childbearing. The couple wondered how this could be applicable to them – until they recalled something. For some time, their porch had been "infested" by the local pigeons, who apparently found this particular location to be the perfect spot to congregate. The owners then poured tar around the area, which chased away the "pests."

"After learning that such behavior could be responsible for our situation," the man continued, "we decided to engage in a form of penance. I scattered breadcrumbs on the porch, and soon enough, the birds came back. Shortly after that, we were blessed with a child" (*Tuvcha Yabi'u, Parshas Ki Savo*)