

Our Relationship With Everything Around Us



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Ki Teitzei is packed full of mitzvot - 74 in total! I'd like to explore a common theme between the majority of them - that of properly interacting with everything around us.

Firstly, let's discuss the mitzvah of *Shiluach HaKen*, sending away the mother bird. If one encounters a bird's nest and wants to take the young birds or the eggs, they must first send away the mother bird so she will not see her offspring being taken. Rambam (1138-1204) in *Moreh Nevuchim* (Guide for the Perplexed, III:48) explains that this mitzvah teaches us to have compassion, preventing even the emotional suffering of animals. Ramban (1194-

1270) on the verse in Devarim (22:6), however, disagrees and instead writes that the goal of this mitzvah is centred on ourselves as human beings, not the animals. He suggests that the mitzvah teaches us to work on ourselves, making us more compassionate and less cruel as people. Though Rambam and Ramban disagree over whether the starting point for our compassion is external (the animals) or internal (ourselves), both agree that we learn from this mitzvah the importance of being sensitive and caring in all our interactions.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook (1865-1935), in *Otzarot HaRe'iyah* (vol. II, p. 97) and *Igrot HaRe'iyah* (vol. I, p. 104), derives this same lesson from the mitzvah of *shatnez*, the prohibition of wearing linen and wool together. He explains that in the future, animals will be elevated to a

greater spiritual level and in such a time, taking wool from a sheep will be similar to stealing. By contrast, plants do not have a status like this and therefore we can make use of linen without concern. He notes that the Torah teaches us to recognise these two separate groups, animals and plants, and treat them both with the sensitivities they individually require. We learn from this that we need to consider what we're interacting with, and then engage with it in the most suitable, individualised way.

Taking these two mitzvot, we learn the importance of interacting with everything, and everyone, around us properly, in the way that is specifically required, in a sensitive, kind and caring way.

Quiz Time!

Choose the correct answer.

1. When seeing a bird's nest: help yourself to the eggs/send away the mother bird before taking the eggs.
2. When Jewish men went out to war, amongst those exempt were: newly married men/new fathers.
3. When you find a lost object and you want to find the owner, you need to be: very specific with the description/very vague with the description.
4. According to Torah law, a firstborn gets twice/three times as much inheritance as his siblings.
5. The parasha ends with a reminder. "Don't forget: Shabbat/What Amalek did to the Jewish people".

