

## **If a bird's nest happens to be before you on your way, on a tree or on the ground – young birds or eggs – and the mother is roosting on the young birds or the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. (22:6)**

The laws of *shiluach hakein*, sending away an ownerless bird which is roosting on her young, is a *mitzvah* for which a number of humanistic “rationales” are suggested. Obviously, these explanations are primarily for us, human beings, with our mortal minds, so that we have an understanding of a *mitzvah* which seems to be simple to perform and carries with it the awesome reward of longevity. Like everything else in the Torah, there is also a homiletic and esoteric side to it, which often sheds a completely new perspective on the *mitzvah*.

*Horav Levi Yitzchak m'Berditchev, zl*, explains the *mitzvah* of *shiluach hakein* from an esoteric perspective. The inspiration, *hisrorerus*, that motivates the individual to seek and attain spiritual awakening emanates from two sources (so to speak): The first is *Isarusa d'l'eila*, from Above; Hashem sends a feeling of inspiration to a person who has done nothing to elicit this inspiration. He is “turned on” by Heaven. The second is *isarusa d'letata*, an inspiration which comes from below; he is inspired on his own by something, by a choice that he makes. Hashem then supplements his inspiration as it is written in *Sefer Daniel* (2:21) that Hashem – *Yaheiv chochmasa l'chakimin*, “He gives wisdom to the wise.” (Why the wise? Because they know what to do with this wisdom.) When a person achieves wisdom on his own, he thereby elicits additional wisdom from Above. Obviously, Hashem derives greater pleasure from he who is personally aroused from below. He achieved it on his own; thus, he is deserving of Hashem's recognition and help to achieve even greater spiritual heights.

At times, Hashem sends inspiration to a person, who, like an infant, lacks the wisdom to seek it himself. He does, of course, prefer that a person be self-inspired, his inspiration originating from below, such that it be earned and deserved. David *Hamelech* says in *Sefer Tehillim* (108:3), *A'irah shachar*, “I will awaken the dawn.” Dawn is the symbol of wisdom and enlightenment. It is far better, says the *Berditchever*, to precede the dawn, to discover wisdom within the darkness, thus stimulating the dawn, rather than to be awakened from a dark slumber by the dawn.

This is the spiritual message of the *pasuk* concerning *shiluach hakein*. “If you encounter a *kan tzippor*, bird's nest” – this refers to a spiritual awakening, *tzippor* being a cognate of the *Aramaic tzafra*, which means dawn; if you suddenly sense an inspiration that comes upon you “along the way” – a reference to the path of righteousness, the road towards spiritual ascendancy; “or on a tree” – referring to the tree of life, and the mother is roosting over the fledglings; referring to the *Shechinah*, Who is sending down the inspiration from Above, because the fledglings are incapable of acquiring wisdom on their own. “Send away the mother and take the young for yourself” – this means take this inspiration from Above as a sign that you lack the wisdom to seek inspiration on

your own; thus, you should make the effort to pursue inspiration through your own means.

While there is no question that allowing Hashem to take the lead and inspire from Above is a lofty *madreigah*, spiritual plateau, it pales in contrast to the individual that inspires himself to come closer to Hashem.

One of the more eminent Jewish members of the Communist party was Professor Burchis. Like so many others, he thought that sicophanting to *reshaim*, wicked, evil people, would get them ahead, he fell into disfavor with dictator Stalin, and he was sent to a Siberian prison camp. Although a prisoner, he was recognized by the prison authorities and guards as a “distinguished” inmate. As such, he was accorded favors, like a lighter work load, and he was permitted food packages from his family in Moscow. During Burchis’ internment, an Orthodox Jew with a long, white beard was brought to the camp. Apparently, his religious activities were considered seditious by the Communist regime.

One day, Burchis approached the religious Jew and gave him a jar of prune butter, which was like gold to a prisoner. The Jew refused to accept it, claiming that it was too valuable a gift to accept without some form of payment – and he had nothing. Burchis replied, “This is not a gift. It is payment.”

“Payment for what?” asked the Jew.

“Do you know my name?” Burchis asked. “It is Burchis, which is a contraction of the words *Baruch Hashem*. I am a descendent of the holy *Rav Levi Yitzchak Berditchiver*. Sadly, over the generations, my part of the family assimilated, chasing after the wild promises proffered by the new, exciting movements that took the world by storm. I once believed that Communism was the cure for all of the world’s ills. Now, I see it a malignant growth that metastasizes and eats up your very life. I am an old man who must atone for his sins. You must help me ‘return’ home. The prune butter is my payment for imposing on you.”

“I will be honored to help you – and I require no payment. It is a privilege to help a fellow Jew. How can I help you?” the religious Jew asked.

“I am ignorant,” Burchis began. “I cannot *daven*. I would like to pray in the original text, but I barely know *Aleph Bais*. I cannot read. Please teach me a short *tefillah*, prayer, so that in the darkness of my solitude, I can reach out to Hashem in accordance with the traditions of my forebearers. I have no merits of my own, but if I can in some way connect to the merits of my ancestors... To do this, I must be able to speak in their language, to say what they would have said. Please teach me.”

For the next few days, the religious Jew with the long, flowing white beard and the professor sat together attempting to learn the *Shema* – which is the staple of every Jew. Unfortunately, the professor had difficulty forming the words coherently. They were both becoming frustrated. Finally,

the religious Jew asked Burchis, “Do you speak *Yiddish*?” “Yes,” he replied. “Then I will teach you a *tefillah*, prayer, in *Yiddish*. It is simple, but it touches upon the bare essentials. Say, ‘*Ribono Shel Olam*, in the merit of Levi Yitzchak *ben Sorah Sasha* (the *Berditchiver*), please forgive my sins, and bring the Jewish People out of exile and into Your holy Presence.’” The professor repeated the prayer a number of times until he had it down flawlessly. Then the professor embraced and kissed his “*rebbe*.”

A few days later, Professor Burchis passed away peacefully in his sleep. His *teshuvah* was *isarusa d’letata*. He inspired himself to return home when he realized how far he had wandered – and what a waste it had been. His last days on this world earned him a place among the sincere *baalei teshuvah* who have returned home. The light is always on, and the door is always open. You do not even have to knock. Just come in and make yourself comfortable. After all – it is your home.