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Letters

Continued from Page Four

The person in charge explained to me what causes this. He said that they calibrate their scales on Friday afternoon. Since, he continued, they have to rush home for Shabbos they don't have time to make sure that their scales are accurately calibrated.

AARON M. BERNSTEIN
Lawrence

Singles stay home

To the Editor:

I read Eita Chinskey's article (Long Island's Singles Go West; August 28 2009) and sympathize with her situation. There definitely is more pressure on religious singles to marry at a young age than secular singles. After all, "pru urvu" [be fruitful and multiply] is the first mitzvah in the Torah.

I am a married West Sider and over the past 30 years have observed the West Side become the

capital city for Orthodox singles from all over the world. However, I would discourage Orthodox singles from moving to the West Side.

In this community of singles there is a lot of Hachnosos Orchim [hospitality]. My friends and I host many singles for Shabbos and Yom Tov, hoping that they will meet their bashert at the Shabbos table, but it rarely happens. There is lots of camaraderie and socializing among singles but these friendships usually do not end in marriage. The singles feel very comfortable on the West Side because it's a community of singles and a way of life but they do not necessarily move to the next stage. This comfort zone is almost a deterrent to marriage and singles who wish to marry might be better served by living in a neighborhood where there is pressure to marry.

KARIN FELDHAMER
Manhattan

Parsha responses

To the Editor:

I very much enjoyed Rabbi Billet's article on Shiluach Hakan ("Baby birds and their mothers"; August 28 2009). His words beautifully articulate the issues I have had with understanding this mitzvah for years. I have no ready answer for you except that at the very least it seems to me that if you don't need the eggs/baby birds leave the nest alone. But I am not sure that I am correct. More sensitive minds than mine disagree.

ELLIOT GOLDOFSKY MD
Great Neck

To the Editor:

I don't know if I have a "good answer" to the questions posed by Rabbi Billet (Baby Birds and Their Mother; August 28 2009), but I do have a different perspective.

Rabbi Billet concludes that shiluach haken (the law requiring sending the mother away before taking eggs or young birds from a nest) cannot be based on compassion to animals because the Mishnah (Berachot 5:3) states, "One who says (in prayer) 'Your mercy is demonstrated through the treatment of the mother bird' is to be silenced." But the Talmud (Berachot 33b) gives two possible reasons why this prayer may be objectionable. One interpretation (which Rabbi Billet accepts) is that the prayer suggests that G-d's laws are based in mercy rather than fiat.

NCYI reevaluated

To the Editor:

My admiration to Mr. Jonathan Bell for his courage and insight calling for the reevaluation of a National Council of Young Israel and Orthodox Union merger (Letter to the Editor; Sept. 4, 2009), realizing that the NCYI is no longer what it was. With NCYI's abolition of delegate meetings as well as regional and national conventions, the Council is no longer accountable to its membership and in turn, its member synagogues. Adding the National Council's irrelevancy on the social and political scene, is all the more reason to seek a merger with the OU.

Some 18 or 19 years ago, at the behest of the president of the Orthodox Union, my father, Rabbi Ephraim Sturm, was asked to prepare a position paper for an OU/NCYI merger. The plan had 3 phases which called for joint ventures, followed by a merger of the lesser departments with the larger departments of the other, and then, the final phases of unity. Since the Council's then-president rejected the paper outright, there was no need for an OU response.

Today unity is much more difficult. The NCYI's excellent financial position with millions of dollars in the bank gives it a negative incentive to merge. However, Mr. Bell may be successful in abolishing the Council's mandate of branch dues in favor of the OU's position of free synagogue affiliation and individual (not synagogue) voluntary membership dues. This can be achieved by a strong leader or core group encouraged by a groundswell response of the Young Israel membership. Otherwise Mr. Bell's courageous observation will be just a cry in the wilderness of indifference.

AVA STURM STRAUSS
Far Rockaway

The other interpretation is quite the opposite — that the prayer is objectionable because it implies that G-d is more merciful to one species than another. Maimonides (Guide For The Perplexed 3:48) accepts this latter interpretation, because Maimonides argues that all Torah commandments have reasons (note Bamidbar Rabbah 19:6 says that G-d revealed the reason for the Red Heifer to Moses).

Rabbi Billet's more powerful point is that it would have been more merciful to forbid disturbing the nest altogether (see Ikkar Tosafot Yom Tov on Berachot 5:3). But sometimes the Torah limits its demands on humanity, knowing that our capabilities are limited (see Maimonides, Guide 3:22, discussing why G-d commands animal sacrifice when the practice has many troubling theological implications). Many (e.g. Rav Kook) have argued that the very permission to eat meat is a divine concession to human needs. Perhaps G-d made a judgment that requiring shiluach haken, rather than asking for the nest to be left alone, would be the best way to get the most compassionate behavior out of the most number of people.

RABBI NOAH GRADOFSKY
Temple Israel of Long Beach

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