

Baby Birds and Their Mother

BY RABBI AVI BILLET

Here is a contradiction for you. The Torah commands that if a person happens to come across a bird nest with a mother bird sitting with her eggs or babies, we are to send away the mother in order to take her offspring. (Devarim 22:6-7) This mitzvah is one of two mitzot directly linked to lengthening a person's life. It is so special, Naftali Weinberger wrote a 314-page practical guidebook on how to do it properly (Shiluach Hakan: A Practical Guide; Feldheim Publishers).

On the "Bird Watch Ireland" website, I found a page which states strongly that a bird's nest that contains eggs or baby birds in it should be left alone (<http://tinyurl.com/shiluach>).

They suggest that if one comes across a bird's nest, the nest "should be left strictly alone! Even casual observation of the nest can cause stress to the parents and young birds. Unless you have experience of caring for birds, taking a baby bird in to care may often reduce its chances of survival; the

majority of hand-reared baby birds do not survive." The people who write this are experts in the care of birds, and are very sensitive to the fact that an untrained human touch can be detrimental to bird survival.

We, who are commanded against "Tzaar baalei chaim" – causing pain to animals (Bava Metziah 32b) — should be particularly sensitive to living animals, and even respectful with animal meats and skins when we use them for such purposes as food or to produce Torahs and tefillin. Yet the Torah tells us (Devarim 22:6-7), "When you come across a bird's nest with eggs or baby birds — do not take the eggs or babies while the mother is there. Send the mother away and then take the babies, in order that it be good for you and you merit long life."

Jewish law requires the sending away of the mother bird to teach a person to be a compassionate being (Ramban). The compassion is learned from the fulfillment of a different commandment of, "Do not slaughter the parent [animal] and baby [animal] on the same day." (Vayikra 22:28) We are

not permitted to wipe out an animal family in one day, as this would be an evil characteristic, even though animals are "merely" animals. We should not become insensitive through our domination over animals.

Would it not be more compassionate to leave the baby birds alone? In fact, this commandment is not meant to teach us to show compassion to animals, because the Mishnah in Brachot 5:3 states, "One who says 'Your mercy is demonstrated through the treatment of the mother bird' is to be silenced."

I am comfortable saying I do not understand the mitzvah. Why would anyone want to take the baby birds? If they are fertilized eggs at the earliest stage of development, I understand. If they are unfertilized eggs, I understand. (If they are unfertilized, perhaps there is no mitzvah, because the bird is not a "mother.") But if the baby birds are developed in the egg, or if the baby bird is already born, what is the point of taking the baby bird? The egg is useless, unless you plan to feed it to your pet alligator, and for what purpose would one want a baby bird? For

its meat? Because it will grow up in captivity? Because it will become a parent to more baby birds?

It has no meat on it, it will most likely die on its own, rendering it neveilah (Biblically prohibited from Jewish consumption), and will be no more useful than the bug you stepped on last night.

In Weinberger's book, he notes that according to halakha one may "make a kinyan hagbahah" on the eggs or babies (pick them up for a moment and say their yours) and then put them back — meaning you need not keep them. While this partially answers the question — what if someone chooses to keep the baby birds? What is the point if they will most probably die?

How is this cruel behavior to the babies (as compassionate as it may be to the mother, which the mishnah in Brachot has declared irrelevant) justified in the Torah? Please don't misinterpret this question as an animal rights protest. If there were a way that the baby birds somehow benefit humans, I would understand.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch says the focus is not on the babies for a reason. "If she is occupied with her maternal functions, she is protected from harm and must be let free." The focus is on the mother bird — not on her feelings, but on her role.

In essence, the mitzvah is symbolic, emphasizing the highly valued role of motherhood. The ability to produce and sustain life, to raise babies from their infancy until they are ready to go out into the world, must be preserved. Sparing the mother bird teaches us to value the role mothers play, even though in our human existence, we have domination over animals.

While Rabbi Hirsch's approach is helpful in understanding the meaning of the mitzvah, I am still unsatisfied with the treatment of the eggs or babies, if they are not returned to the tree. Do you have a good answer?

Email answers to letters@thejewishstar.com (write Parsha answer in the subject) or submit as a comment to the article at www.thejewishstar.com.

ON THE Calendar

For a complete listing of upcoming community events, including items that didn't make it into the print edition, go to www.thejewishstar.com.

Cedarhurst - The JCC of the Greater Five Towns "Kosher Culinary Institute" cooking classes are scheduled to begin Wednesday, September 9, 2009. The class meets at 10:00 a.m. Pre-registration is required. For further information please call the JCC office at 569-6733.

Cedarhurst - The JCC of the Greater Five Towns invites its "LIFE" members to a BBQ on Sunday, September 13, 2009, from 4:00 - 6:00 p.m., to be held at the JCC, 207 Grove Avenue, Cedarhurst. For further information and/or to register please call 569-6733, ext. 205.

Cedarhurst - The JCC of the Greater Five Towns "Sunday Funday" program begins in October. "Clay Creations" is one of our new programs for children grades 4 and up. For further information please call the JCC office at 569-6733, ext. 218.

Lido Beach - Lido Beach Synagogue will be holding a Rosh Hashanah seminar Wednesday evening, September 9th at 8 PM with Rabbi Mehlman. He will be discussing the whys and wherefores of the High Holidays. At Lido Boulevard and Fairway Road. Contact 516-889-9650

ONGOING EVENTS

Stony Brook - Sexual abuse and abduction prevention educational workshops - Parents for Megan's

Law and The Crime Victims Center is now offering age appropriate sexual abuse and abduction prevention educational workshops for children, teens and adults. We'll come to your school or community organization. We've educated over 50,000 Long Island children and parents in public and private schools and in community organization! Call our Helpline for more information or to schedule a workshop today (631)-689-2672

Far Rockaway - Rabbi Eytan Feiner's Machshava Shiur in Sifrei Maharal on Chumash and Mo'adim for men and women has resumed Tuesday evenings 8:15 p.m. to 9:15 p.m. at Cong. Knesset Israel, 728 Empire Ave., Far Rockaway. For more information call (718) 327-0500 or www.whiteshul.com.

Cedarhurst - The Beis Medrash of Cedarhurst holds a Flexible Morning Learning Program every Monday through Thursday from 10:30 a.m. until 12:45 p.m. There are shiurim and chavrusas in Chumash, Gemara, Halacha and Chovos Halevavos. Learners may come and go as they please. The Beis Medrash of Cedarhurst is located at 504 W. Broadway (off the corner of W. Broadway and Cedarhurst Ave.) For information, please contact Rabbi Moshe Kaufman at (718) 471-2780 or moshelkaufman@gmail.com.

Cedarhurst - The "Sunday Night Torah Lecture Series" in memory of Shari Siman-Tov '21 is held weekly at 8:00 p.m. at Congregation Shaare Emanuh, the Sephardic Congregation of the Five Towns, 539 Oakland Avenue (Corner Oakland Ave. & Peninsula Blvd). Men and women are invited. Ner Sarah

is a network of Torah and chesed projects in memory of Shari Siman-Tov '21. For more information, please e-mail nersarah@nersarah-project.com or visit www.nersarah-project.com.

Cedarhurst - The JCC of the Greater Five Towns has scheduled free financial counseling sessions, (ie. credit card debt) through NYLAG (New York Legal Assistance Group) on Wednesdays by appointment only. For further information and/or to schedule an appointment one may call 569-6733, and ask for Chana Pfeifer or Judy Goldberg.

Cedarhurst - The JCC of the Greater Five Towns offers a variety of Hebrew classes. The Conversational Hebrew Intermediate meets Mondays from 10:30 to 11:45 a.m. The Conversational Hebrew Beginner class meets Mondays from 11:50 to 1:05 p.m. The Learn How to Read Hebrew day class meets Mondays from 1:10 to 2:25 p.m. The Conversational Hebrew Beginner night class meets Tuesdays from 7:30 to 8:45 p.m. The Conversational Hebrew Intermediate night class meets Tuesdays from 7:30 to 8:45 p.m. The Learn How to Read Hebrew night class meets Mondays beginning 7:30 to 8:45 p.m. Each class meets 12 times and costs \$200.

Cedarhurst - Every Tuesday, the JCC of the Greater Five Towns offers a social day program called the "Remember When" from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. at Sons of Israel in Woodmere. This program is especially designed for memory enhancement and socialization. The cost includes a full range of therapeutic activities, morning beverage,

dessert, and a kosher lunch. Round-trip door-to-door handicapped accessible transportation is available on a limited basis. Registration is limited to ensure maximum benefits to each participant. For further information call the JCC at (516) 569-6733.

Cedarhurst - Every Tuesday, the JCC of the Greater Five Towns hosts a Parkinson's Support Group. The purpose of this group is to bring together Parkinsonians, spouses and their families in order to help them better understand the nature of the condition, gain confidence and join in community activities. For further information, please contact Cathy Byrne at (516) 569-6733, ext. 220.

Cedarhurst - The JCC of the Greater Five Towns hosts the Come Alive Program at Sons of Israel in Woodmere. This program provides an opportunity for homebound older adults to participate in social, recreational and intellectual activities. Kosher lunch will be provided and door-to-door transportation is available on a limited basis. This program runs on a summer schedule. For further information, please call Linda Balch at (516) 569-6733, ext. 211 or Mary Sheffield, ext. 219.

Long Beach - Long Beach Medical Center's Counseling Center has free weekly Anxiety & Depression walk-in screenings every Wednesday from 2-3 p.m. Screenings will include an interview with a mental health professional. For more information, please call (516) 897-1270.

Hewlett - The 1 in 9 Hewlett House offers support groups at 86 East Rockaway Road. The groups include: yoga and stress reduction,

Mondays from 1-2 p.m.; breast cancer support for those undergoing treatment, Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to 12 noon, and Wednesdays from 12 p.m.; knitting circle meets on Tuesdays from 10-11 a.m.; the writer's roundtable meets Wednesdays from 11 a.m. to 12 noon; Newly Diagnosed Breast Cancer group meets Tuesdays from 12:15-1:15 p.m. for eight sessions facilitated by Jill Alper, MSW, CSW; breast cancer group for the working woman meets Tuesdays at 6 p.m. and is facilitated by Sue Champin, CSW. A new class, held on Tuesdays from 10-11 a.m., is a "Mind Body Spiritual Healing Journey" for cancer patients looking to connect to their inner sanctuary. All classes and support groups are a free service. Please call Christine (516) 314-3190 to register.

West Hempstead - Bereavement Support Group for widows and widowers will be held every Wednesday in the Jewish Community Center of West Hempstead, from 10:30 to 11:45 a.m. There is a \$140 fee. The JCC is located at 711 Dogwood Avenue in West Hempstead. To join, please call Rachel Bruckenstein, LMSW at (516) 766-4341, ext. 131.

Lynbrook - Cong. Beth David's Thrift Shop is open every Tuesday from 1-3 p.m. Bingo every Tuesday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The Rabbi's Learning Group meets every Thursday evening from 7:30-8:30 p.m. Everything is free and open to the public. Beth David is located at 188 Vincent Ave in Lynbrook. For more information, call Galit Dardashtian at (516) 599-9464

Woodmere - Every Wednesday, the JCC of the Greater Five Towns hosts a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) group

at Sons of Israel in Woodmere. The goal is to offer a safe haven where clients and family members feel accepted for who they are. For further information, please contact Chana Pfeifer at (516) 569-6733, ext. 213 or Lisa Barnett at ext. 210.

Long Beach - The Friedberg JCC hosts a free caregivers support group that meets the second Monday of each month at 1 p.m. at Temple Emanuel of Long Beach, 455 Neptune Blvd. For more information, please call Roberta at (516) 742-2050.

Plainview - The Friedberg JCC hosts a free spousal support group which meets the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 10 a.m. at Temple Chaverim, 1050 Washington Ave. For more information, please call Roberta at (516) 742-2050.

Lawrence - The JCC of the Greater Five Towns Rainbow School, an after school Enrichment Program for children from Russian families, meets on Wednesdays, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., at Temple Israel, 140 Central Avenue, Lawrence, NY. For further information, please call (516) 569-6733, ext. 214.

Forest Hills - The Sid Jacobson JCC hosts a Cancer Wellness: Strength to Strength group, featuring physical fitness and discussion geared to the special needs of individuals recovering from cancer treatment or actively engaged in a treatment regimen. Caregivers are welcome. Meets on Monday 12:30-1:30 p.m. and Friday 12:30-1:30 p.m. Located at 300 Forest Dr. East Hills, NY. For more information, please call Partners in Community Care, (516) 484-1545, ext. 196.

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