

# Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Ki Seitzei

“IF YOU CHANCE UPON A NEST OF A BIRD... DO NOT TAKE THE MOTHER AND THE CHILDREN.” (DEVARIM 22:6)

IF A PERSON SEES the nest of a kosher bird and its offspring in public property, and he wishes to take the birds, the Torah commands him not to take both the mother and the children. Rather, Hashem tells him to chase away the mother and only take the babies. In the Midrash Tanchuma (ibid. 2), Rav Chiya bar Abba comments: When someone fulfills the *mitzvah* of sending away the mother bird, the Torah says, “It will be good for you and you shall increase your days.” How much more so, the Tanchuma continues, is it true when someone loses a child (G-d forbid) that it will be an atonement for his sins.

This Midrash is quite difficult to understand. When someone chases the mother bird away, he is sacrificing the monetary benefit that could have enjoyed by taking the mother. This is a minimal loss. The other loss mentioned by the Tanchuma of the devastating loss of a child, is, on the other hand, perhaps the most painful catastrophe, the greatest loss possible. How are they at all comparable? Furthermore, in the first case, a man is choosing to send away the mother bird. In the second case, Hashem is taking the child from the parents against their will! How is the Midrash Tanchuma’s comparison congruent?

The loss of a child is calamity beyond words, and itself cannot be compared to the mere sending away of a bird. However, there is a critical factor that can transform the loss of a child into a entirely different realm of existence – the parent's response. If the parents are able, in the depths of their grief, to realize that it is all from Hashem, Who loves everyone, and the parents can accept Hashem's decree, even though they don't understand it, then the child's death changes from a loss and a tragedy, to a gift, a *korban* to Hashem. It becomes like Avraham Avinu's *akeida* of his beloved son Yitzchak. The parent who reaches such a spiritual level, to whatever degree he can, is humbly surrendering his child to Hashem's will, just as one sends away a mother bird, knowing the Hashem's wisdom has decreed that this is what needs to happen. Hashem will amazingly consider it as if the parents willingly sacrificed their child, just as Avraham Avinu was willing to sacrifice Yitzchak. That sacrifice is a *korban*, an offering to Hashem, and it has the spiritual power to atone for a person's sins.

This does not only apply to a catastrophic loss – it extends to how we deal with life's misfortunes, pain and negative experiences. We have the amazing ability to uplift ourselves from the depth of suffering to the greatest heights. When we suffer through any difficulty, if we accept that challenge as a decree from our loving Father, Hashem will consider it as if we willingly chose to make that sacrifice for Him. Now it is no longer an unfortunate event the befell us, but rather it is a gift, an offering that we have sacrificed to Hashem. A regular *korban* of an animal offering was accompanied by the request that it be considered by Hashem as if the owner had sacrificed his flesh, his blood and his fat. How much more so is it pleasing to Hashem if we actually accept our pain and suffering, and transform it into a gift, to literally give our blood and our flesh to Hashem as a sign of our love and dedication for Him. This approach has the potential to uplift all our life occurrences from unhappy, difficult challenges, to translate them into events of incredible elevation, fulfillment and growth that bring us ever closer to our loving Father in Heaven.

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