



Parashat Ki Tetze

## Every Act Is Significant

**The reward of long life for the seemingly simple commandment of shooing away a mother bird before taking her young teaches us that no act is trivial.**

**By Rabbi Irving Greenberg**

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This parasha has the largest concentration of [mitzvot](#) (commandments) of any portion; 74 out of the traditional 613 commandments are found in it. Of all these commandments, one stands out. "If [walking] along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest . . . and the mother is sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young. Let the mother go and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life" (Deuteronomy 22:6).

The Talmud labels this mitzvah the "lightest" (the most insubstantial) of all the commandments, probably because it takes little effort to perform. Sending away the mother might well involve merely making a loud noise. Indeed, just walking close (or advancing menacingly) might induce the mother to fly away.



Commentators in every generation have wondered why there is so extravagant a reward (a good, long life) for so "trivial" an act! Indeed, one Talmudic commentator points out that the same reward is specified in the Torah for honoring parents. Yet fulfilling that commandment takes a lifetime and often involves money, emotion and effort without limit. He concludes that the equality of reward is the point. The "lightest" of commandments rewarded as much as the "weightiest" to teach us to treasure and observe all commandments equally--for the reward of any mitzvah is incalculable.

Through this commandment, the Torah teaches that every act is of immense significance. Therefore, no act is inherently trivial. When you eat, you can choose food and prepare it to express reverence for life or commitment to being a Jew ([kashrut](#)). When you speak, you can say a word of encouragement, truth or love or you can say a word of malicious gossip, falsehood or degradation.

Maimonides writes in his laws of repentance that every person should consider himself or herself as perfectly balanced between good and bad and the world as perfectly balanced between good and evil. The next action you do--however trivial--can tilt you and the whole world toward the side of good and life or to the side of evil and death. Choose life!

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