

דרכים בפרשה כי תצא

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כי יקרא קן צפור לפניך בדרך

If you happen upon a bird's nest on the road

There is something unusual about the mitzvah of *shiluach haken*. The Torah says, **כי יקרא קן צפור לפניך בדרך**. If a person comes across a bird's nest while he is walking along the road, he has a mitzvah to send away the mother bird before taking the eggs or the young. The Torah could have simply said, "When you find a bird's nest." Why does it emphasize **כי יקרא**, when it happens to come your way?

The Midrash sees something important in these words. On the possuk (Mishlei 1:9) **כי ליות חן הם לראשך וענקים לגרגרתך** - *For they are a graceful wreath upon your head, and a necklace around your neck*, Chazal say, **לכל מקום שתלך** - *Mitzvos accompany a person wherever he goes*. Even when a person is walking along the road, with no specific mitzvah in mind, a mitzvah can suddenly show up out of nowhere. From where do we know this? **כי יקרא קן צפור לפניך בדרך**.

There is a simple but important *limud* over here. We tend to think of our avodah as being made up of the things we consciously choose to do. We decide when to learn, when to daven, when to give tzedakah and what middah we want to work on. These are the things that we would call or identify as our spiritual growth. But much of life does not happen according to plan. We are simply going about our day, and suddenly something comes our way. Someone needs our help; someone calls when we are busy. We might be faced with a difficult situation, or a sudden chance to do a chesed. Even just a drive to work and the guy in the car in front seems to be half asleep.... Is an opportunity to work on *savlanus* (patience). It was not something we planned, but an opportunity that came our way.

The Sfas Emes takes the possuk much deeper. He writes, **אם נצרך לאדם הארה ממצוה זו מזמין לו זאת המצוה**. If a person needs the particular illumination that comes from a certain mitzvah, Hashem brings that mitzvah to him.

This is a remarkable way to look at life. We usually think that we are the ones who find opportunities to do mitzvos. The Sfas Emes tells us that sometimes the opposite is true. Hashem brings a particular mitzvah to us because we need what that mitzvah can give us.

That means that an unexpected moment in our lives may deserve a second look. We often see the things that happen unexpectedly as interruptions. We had our plans, and suddenly someone needed us, or something delayed us,

needing our attention. Our first reaction can be, "This was not part of my plan... stay focused." But maybe it is worth asking, "What if it is part of Hashem's plan?"

This does not mean that we should assume that every inconvenience has some hidden message, or that we need to analyze and over-analyze everything that happens to us. But at the very least, when a genuine opportunity for a mitzvah comes directly into our path, maybe, instead of looking at it as disturbing our avodah, we should be open to the possibility that this is our *avoda*.

The Midrash continues with the words **מצוה גוררת מצוה** - one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah. It describes how the mitzvah of *shiluach haken* leads to the mitzvah of building a house and putting a *maakeh* around the roof, followed by other mitzvos. One mitzvah leads to another. Perhaps the Midrash is teaching us that we cannot always know in advance where a mitzvah will take us. A person may begin with one small opportunity that appeared unexpectedly, and that mitzvah can open the door to something else.

In life, we see it all the time. Not every great business that we see today started out with that specific idea. They went down a road, and one thing led to another and today there is greatness.

There is another layer that the Sfas Emes (5631) adds. **אם נצרך לאדם הארה ממצוה זו מזמין לו זאת המצוה** - *If a person needs the particular illumination that comes from a certain mitzvah, Hashem brings that mitzvah to him*. The mitzvos connect the *guf* (body) to the *neshamah*. The body is the outer expression of the soul, and through mitzvos, the inner potential of the neshamah is brought into actual expression. Hashem may bring a mitzvah to me because I need the illumination of that mitzvah. What happens to me when I respond to that unexpected mitzvah? It brings something that is already inside me into the world, revealing hidden potentials.

This is particularly meaningful during Elul, when we naturally ask ourselves, "What am I going to change this year?" We think about what new *kabolas* we should make and what we need to improve. But there is another question worth asking: What has Hashem already been putting in front of me?

The person who needs our patience, the situation that requires our help, or the mitzvah that feels like an interruption may itself be part of our avodah that Hashem is hinting to us that needs to come out. The Sfas Emes teaches that sometimes Hashem brings a particular mitzvah to a person because that is what his neshamah needs at that moment.

אם נצרך לאדם הארה ממצוה זו מזמין לו זאת המצוה - *כי יקרא קן צפור לפניך בדרך* - We do not always have to look for the next step in our growth. Sometimes it is already there, waiting for us to recognize it.

מרדכי אפפלי, Good Shabbos