

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Tazria

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of

Leona bas Yosef a''h

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Pigeon Propriety

In Summation...

A few weeks ago, we noted the interesting variance the Torah uses in discussing the bird *korbanos* (sacrifices) and the ramifications of the order reversal. For review purposes, we recap the issue here in truncated, summary form. Let us recall that there are only two bird species acceptable to be offered on the altar: the *tor* (turtle dove) and the *yonah* (also a type of dove/pigeon). When presenting the relatively short list of fowl options for sacrificial purpose, the Torah most often mentions the *tor* before the *yonah*. The curious exception takes place in this week's *parshah*, discussing the offering brought after childbirth, when the verse states, "A *yonah* or a *tor* for a sin-offering" (*Vayikra 12:7*), in this case placing the *yonah* in "first place."

The Ba'al Haturim explains that the discrepancy reflects an admirable trait that characterizes the dove pair; in the animal kingdom, they are known as the paragons of fidelity, each mate remaining loyal until the end. In fact, on this point the two types differ slightly. While the *yonah* remains faithful to its spouse during its lifetime, it will select another when its mate dies. The *tor*, on the other hand, remains committed forever; even after losing its mate, it refrains from remarriage.

This phenomenon plays out in the order employed by the Torah in discussing the different *korbanos*. The unique feature of the bird offering of this week's *parshah* is that a *single* bird is taken; thus, a bird will be deprived of its mate. As such, the Torah indicates a preference to select a *yonah* (as the survivor will seek remarriage) rather than a *tor* (the poor widow/widower will remain forever alone). This consideration does not exist for other bird sacrifices, wherein a *pair* is selected. As there will not be a lone surviving spouse, the Torah here reveals no priority on the species; even a *tor* may be taken, reflected by its placement at the beginning of the list of options.

The fierce loyalty characteristic of this avian family is manifest in another most fascinating way, as displayed in the following Talmudic selection.

Talk About Ego...

Yet another member of the pigeon clan is brought to our attention in the context of the mitzvah of *shiluach hakan* (sending away the mother bird). The Torah instructs that when seeking to collect a bird's eggs, one must first send away the attendant mother (*Devarim 22:6-7*).

The details of this mitzvah are treated in the final chapter of Maseches Chullin. Amongst the many *halachos* discussed there, we find that this mitzvah is not generic to all birds, but only to those of somewhat wild tendencies. It does not apply to birds considered wholly domesticated.

It is in the process of discussing which birds are subject to this law that we are introduced to another pigeon species; as the Mishnah states (*Chullin 12:1*):

“Herodian doves are exempt from (the mitzvah of) sending (away the mother bird; due to their domesticated nature [*Rav*]).”

Who or what are these “Herodian doves”? The Gemara (*Chullin 139b*) informs us that this was a breed cultivated by the notorious king Herod, the homicidal megalomaniac of Roman times, who ruled the Jewish nation (despite his tainted lineage). He was noted especially for his cruelty towards (and annihilation of) the great sages of Israel, amongst other things. His development and employ of these unique birds is also quite telling, as the Gemara relates:

“The doves would sit, side by side, in a total of sixteen rows; each row stretched for one *mil* (equal to two-thousand *amos* [cubits], which is in the vicinity of 3,500 feet). The birds had been trained to constantly utter the following call: *Kiri! Kiri!* (Your lordship! Your lordship!).”

So here we have a monarch who, to feed his ego, organized an arrangement of more than ten miles worth of birds tweeting to him non-stop about his majesty. Yet, the uniqueness of this massive aviary of loyal sycophants went even beyond this symphonic feat, as we see from what happened next:

“One of the birds broke ranks, and refused to join in the chant. One of its fellow doves chastised it: ‘Dunderhead – say *Kiri! Kiri!*’ ‘You’re the dunderhead,’ replied the malcontent, ‘you should instead be saying *Kiri! Biri!* (slave; a reference to Herod’s humble origins)’. In the end, they slaughtered the deviator.”

Even though Herod’s deeds made him more than worthy of contempt, he still was the ruling monarch. As the Maharal explains (*Chidushei Aggados*), the sole dissident warranted the death penalty for disgracing the king’s due honor. This notion “dovetails” nicely with our discussion of a previous *parshah* regarding Pharaoh, another monarch of notoriety. Yet we saw that, despite his abject wickedness towards the Jewish people (for which he incurred and eventually received due retribution), and the utter humiliation to which he was subjected (through such features as frogs croaking in his stomach), Moshe and Aharon were still enjoined to accord him respect. As Rashi clarifies, when the verse states that “Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, and He commanded them... concerning Pharaoh, king of Egypt..” (*Shemos 6:13*), the content of this command centered on their interaction with Pharaoh, which was to be conducted with deference.

In any event, the extent of the doves’ natural loyalty is quite noteworthy. It appears quite fitting that of all creatures, they were the ones to be selected for a display of allegiance on such a massive scale. And when even one from this horde refused to comply, there was no room for tolerance.

There are many aspects to this remarkable episode which bear further clarification and discussion (such as the whole notion of “bird-talk”); perhaps we may return to the topic at another opportunity. At least one lesson we can glean is that their level of faithfulness is quite worthy of emulation. As referenced previously, the Gemara states, “Even had the Torah not been given, we would have been able to learn... faithfulness from the dove,” (*Eruvin 100b*). Wouldn’t the world be a much more wholesome place if all people would be at least as loyal as them?