

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Vayikra

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Zissel bas Avrohom a"h

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

Dove Devotion

A well-known Talmudic statement informs us that various creatures possess some admirable traits worthy of emulation:

“Even had the Torah not been given, we would have been able to learn modesty from the cat (which attends its needs in private [*Rashi*]), avoiding theft from the ant (each amasses its own store of food and does not take from its neighbor [*ibid.*]), and fidelity from the dove (which remains loyal to its mate [*ibid.*])” (*Eruvin 100b*).

Everything in Order?

The latter example of the dove's firm allegiance has an interesting manifestation in this week's *parshah*. Parshas Vayikra deals extensively with the institution of *korbanos* (sacrifices), including the list of acceptable items from which they are brought: cattle, sheep, goats, wheat flour, etc. In the “fowl” category, the Torah sanctions the utilization of two types. The only birds that may be brought as an offering are the *tor* (often rendered as the turtle dove), and the *yonah* (also a type of pigeon/dove [which, incidentally, are really the same thing]).

One of the offerings discussed in the *parshah* is the “*korban oleh v' yoreid*” (literally, “offering that goes up and comes down”), whereby the composition of the sacrifice changes based on the subject's financial status. For this sacrifice (one of the guilt offerings), brought to atone for certain specified transgressions (e.g., inadvertent defilement of the sanctuary), one ideally should offer an animal (ewe or goat). However, someone who cannot afford this may settle for a pair of birds – a less expensive option. As the verse states:

וְאִם־לֹא תִגְיַע יָדוֹ דֵּי שֶׁה וְהִבִּיא אֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ ... שְׁתֵּי תֹרִים אוֹ־שְׁנֵי בְנֵי־יוֹנָה.

“And if he cannot afford a sheep, then he shall bring his guilt offering... from **two *torim* or two *yonahs***” (*Vayikra 5:7*).

The twist arises when we compare this passage to one discussing another bird offering in a later *parshah*. Parshas Tazria delineates the offering brought by a woman who has given birth. This sacrifice consists of a sheep in addition to one of the bird species. As the verse states:

תָּבִיא כֶּבֶשׂ בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה לְעֹלָה וּבְנֵי־יוֹנָה אוֹ־תֹר לְחֻטָּאת.

“She shall bring a yearling sheep for a burnt-offering and a ***yonah* or *tor*** for a sin-offering” (*ibid. 12:7*).

Notice the apparent discrepancy; when discussing the bird-sacrifice in this week's *parshah*, the *tor* was placed before the *yonah*. But in presenting the new mother's offering, the order is reversed, granting precedence to the *yonah* before the *tor*. The other inconsistency relates to the number; in the first instance, two birds are taken, while the mother-offering requires only one.

The Ba'al Haturim (*parshas Tazria*) demonstrates that these two factors are complementary; that is, the number determines the order. He clarifies the whole issue based on the Gemara's statement about the doves' loyalty to each other.

Partners for Life... and Beyond

It seems that while both display marital loyalty, there is a difference in this regard between the *tor* and the *yonah*. **The *yonah* remains steadfast to its mate, but only during its lifetime.** Should something happen to it, the surviving spouse will seek a new companion. But the *tor* is wholly dedicated; **even after death, the remaining *tor* remains faithful to the memory of its mate**, refusing to entertain the prospect of remarriage.

This, explains the Ba'al Haturim, accounts for the order reversal; it reflects a sensitivity to the plight of the widowed bird. In the instance of the birth-offering, only a single bird is brought; that means that some avian pair will be reduced to a single member. Now, if a *tor* is selected for this offering, that means the surviving bird, bereft of its mate, will remain forever alone. In this case, then, the Torah favors taking a *yonah*, who will seek a new companion upon the loss of its mate. The verse thus states its preference: “a *yonah* or *tor*.”

But this is only a factor when a single bird is taken; in the offering in our *parshah*, two birds are mandated. Since the pair remains together until the end, without one surviving on its own, it makes no difference which type is selected; either *tor* or *yonah* will do. As opposed to the previous example, here the Torah shows no preference for *yonah* over *tor*, thus sanctioning the taking of even the *tor* first: “**two *torim* or two *yonahs*.**”

However, one matter that the *Ba'al Haturim* may have to contend with (and for which we do not yet have a satisfactory resolution) is that his explanation seems to conflict with an explicit Mishnah. The discrepancy involving the dove order listed in the Torah is actually remarked upon by the Mishnah in Kereisos (6:9), which states:

תורין קודמין לבני יונה בכל מקום. יכול מפני שהן מבחירים מהן, תלמוד לומר "ובן יונה או תור לתאנת", מלמד ששניהן שקולים.

“*Torim* most often precede *yonahs* when listed in the Torah. One may have (erroneously) concluded that the reason (for this particular order) is because they (*torim*) are preferable to *yonahs*; (to correct this misimpression) the verse states (by the birth-offering): “a *yonah* or a *tor* for a sin-offering” (*Vayikra* 12:7). This teaches us that the two types are equally desirable.”

The simple understanding of the Mishnah is that the differing bird order reflects that neither has preferred status. The Ba'al Haturim, on the other hand, seemed to suggest that the Torah was indicating a preference that the *yonah* takes priority over the *tor* (at least where a single bird is being offered).

To reconcile the Ba'al Haturim with the Mishnah, perhaps we may suggest the following: According to the Ba'al Haturim's explanation, the *yonah* takes precedence for the birth-offering for a *technical* reason. Since only one bird is taken, taking a *yonah* would avoid the problematic situation that would arise had a *tor* been selected. The *tor*, bereft of its mate, would remain forever alone, while the *yonah* would go on with life. The Mishnah, perhaps, would concur; it was merely stating that neither bird is inherently superior to the other species.

The extent of the doves' loyalty is quite breathtaking, and has much from which we may learn – a subject we hope to return to in a later *parshah*, *B'ezras Hashem*.

