

Parshas Tazria Metzora

This week's Parsheos are Tazria and Metzora, the Parsheos that discuss human afflictions (versus animal ones of previous Parsheos) and the method of purification for men and women. As the first Rashi in Tazria explains, the chronology here matches creation; just as animals at Maiseh Bereishis were created before humans (and culminated with the creation of humans), so too, with regards to Tumos and Taharos, first, we begin with the animals then move to humans.

One of the recurring sacrifices brought is a dove or turtledove for the sacrifice, whether it is the Korban Chatas, Asham or Olah (depending on the context in the Torah).

In the instance of a woman who gave birth and brought the doves or turtledoves, Rashi explains, based on the Gemara in Niddah 31b, that she swore during childbirth to abstain from relations with her husband. Perhaps, in the heat of that moment, where she inadvertently said something, she must bring the sin offering to rectify this. The power of speech is a crucial lesson here. Even inadvertent speech can have damaging effects and must be remedied. The choice that a dove can be brought seems appropriate, based on the Gemara in Sotah 10b, where the Gemara tells us that Tamar (in the case of Yehuda and Tamar) was compared to a silenced dove because the Jews are compared to a dove (based on the Gemara in Berachos 53b). Just as a dove protects itself with its wings, the Jews are

saved through their "wings," which are the Mitzvos¹.

The Alter Rebbe in Tanya Chapter 40 explains Kavanah in Torah and Mitzvos and the levels of spirituality that are achieved by performing a mitzvah with the right intent versus not (the Alter Rebbe establishes that the right intentions with Torah and Mitzvos connect the soul of the person to the highest levels of spiritual achievement, by contrast to the incorrect, or lacking intent, which still has value, just different.) In the Perek, the Alter Rebbe explains that a person must live by Torah and Mitzvos, Ahavah and Yirah represented by wings (of all birds), two combined forces for proper outcomes. To perform Mitzvos, one needs both Ahavah and Yirah when serving Hashem. The Alter Rebbe has a radical approach to understanding the wings of a bird. He states that the wings are not essential to the bird, meaning a bird whose wings are removed while alive can still be Kosher² because the head and the body are what remain, i.e., the intellectual and emotional faculties that can perform Mitzvos and learn Torah. But the wings are the vehicle through which a bird can easily fly. So too, a person uses the wings to fly; the wings not being there doesn't remove the core person or negate the ability for a person to still connect to Hashem. Whether according to the Gemara or the Alter Rebbe's interpretation, wings represent protection from vulnerability because it is through them (whether through service of Love and Fear or as the Mitzvos themselves) they protect us. For the cases where a dove is used, wings (are not only represented by

¹ This can explain why we read the book of Yonah on Mincha Yom Kippur. In addition to the direct story of repentance in the book, his name symbolizes the importance of doing Mitzvos as a form of continuous salvation.

² The Gemara in Chullin 140a states that for the Korbanos, the birds must be whole. Meaning the wings must be included.

Ahavah and Yirah; they are also the mitzvos which are used) to protect itself.

How fitting is it that the dove is the sacrifice for an inadvertent sin of speech? Two representations are covered with that sacrifice. The first is like a dove that is a quiet bird (such as explained to represent the silence of Tamar) which means it replaces the inadvertent speech by silencing it. The second is to convey that through performing Mitzvos and learning Torah, we will protect ourselves from other sins, or rectify sinful behaviour, by acting as our protection (like a dove which uses its wings to stave off enemies).

But the sacrifice for a person who is affected by Tzara'as, the skin affliction as a punishment for Lashon Hara, is just a "bird," as the posuk says (14:4). As Rashi explains, "the bird must be from a kosher species, but because the plague of Tzara'as is a punishment for slander, which is done by chattering, therefore birds are compulsory for the leper's purification because these chatter (i.e., birds) continuously with a twittering sound³" (From the Gemara in Arachin 16b). Meaning that this person actively spoke slanderous speech; this wasn't inadvertent because the power of speech has extensive damage (as Rashi explains, three people are affected, the speaker, the listener and the person spoken about). But this bird is like any other species that uses its beak to protect itself, much like a person uses their 'beak' to damage another person, even if the slanderous speech seems entirely justified.

Furthermore, there are additional items in the sacrifice of a leper, namely, cedar wood, Tola'as, and Eizov (hyssop and crimson) so as not to be haughty like wood but lowly

like Tola'as. The arrogant person uses words to damage others instead of controlled speech (or chooses to remain silent-which he didn't in the case of slanderous speech). To summarize, there are two offerings of birds. There is the dove (for inadvertent harmful speech), which is different from all species of birds by using its wings (i.e., Mitzvos) to protect itself, versus any other bird which uses its beak. Both doves and birds also have wings; these are the tools of Ahavah and Yirah, i.e., critical tools for serving Hashem. The Alter Rebbe explains that the wings of any bird species are secondary to the bird's body because even without Ahavah and Yirah, a person can (albeit with great difficulty) still connect to Hashem. But in the case of the sacrifice for a leper, the bird must be complete, i.e., with its wings, because a sacrifice bereft of Ahavah and Yirah won't accomplish what a whole bird with wings (i.e., Ahavah and Yirah) will. The Gemara in Chullin 140a explains that for the Korbanos, the bird's wings must be attached (an added stringency when compared to a bird still being Kosher without its wings). When the Korban is brought, one cannot negate the power of the wings of a bird, that is, to serve Hashem with both Ahavah and Yirah. In Vayikra 13:2, the posuk talks about a "man" who develops a skin affliction. The Alter Rebbe in a Ma'amer from Lekutei Torah on the Parsha Metzora explains that the level of Adam, according to Chassidus, is the highest level of control a human can develop. Meaning a "man"⁴ who lacks the self-control to control his speech is afflicted by skin discoloration. Adam- "man" represents the highest level of spiritual attainment because the most prominent

³ English quotation taken from the translation on www.sefaria.com for the Rashi to Vayikra 14:4

⁴ Not in the gendered sense of man, rather the human sense.

contrast between humans and all other animals is our ability to exercise self-control. Even if a person generally learns self-control, they are marked on the surface, i.e., through a skin lesion, that is, a miraculous mark on the outside (the person temporarily made a mistake rather than having committed a cardinal sin). Because the moment slanderous speech exits a person's mouth, it reflects a gap in self-control, but on a spiritual level, a gap in bittul (humility) and a lapse in Chochma. Chochma and Bittul are two elements concomitant with what the Alter Rebbe says in Perek 40 of Tanya regarding Torah and Mitzvos in the service of Hashem, and that without Ahavah and Yirah one may lapse and sin (with speech, an effortless act to slip up, because it requires the most amount of self-control.) Tzara'as only affects someone who is on a high level, but only until the Kohen diagnoses the ailment, and through the Kohen heals the patient because the Kohen can redraw down the light of Chochma that the person forgot. The Kohen's actions and the subsequent sacrifice of a bird remind us to get back on track to serve Hashem with Ahavah and Yirah and perform Torah and Mitzvos correctly⁵.

There is a final lesson here about personal responsibility. Because for both the dove offerings and the bird offerings, the Torah explains that even if a person is poor (or lacking other resources), they must find a way to bring the bird or dove offering. This is because if a person were excused of bringing a sacrifice for their lack of

resources, there would be no incentive to remain on the righteous path⁶. Because one may excuse their behavior (as Esav did about his Bechoros and the lentil soup transaction, see Rashi) and say I am poor, so I don't have to bring a sacrifice even if I sin or excuse their behavior, saying the speech is entirely justified. But the Torah doesn't let you get off easy because you are the common denominator in all circumstances (i.e., like a bird without its wings is still a bird). The common element to all a person's experiences *is* themselves. The motivation and work required to serve Hashem (with Ahavah, Yirah and Mitzvos like wings to protect ourselves) apply to every Jew, regardless of their circumstance. Therefore, even on its basic level, a person must bring the bird offering (dove or other) and be reminded that to serve Hashem, one ought to use the wings of Ahavah and Yirah, and when a person performs Mitzvos and learns Torah, those wings can be used to protect them and fly them to Hashem.

Good Shabbos.

⁵ The Alter Rebbe points out that it says Zos Toras Hametzora as opposed to Zos Taharas Hametzora because the process of cleansing a person afflicted with Tzara'as is through Torah.

⁶ With the removal of bail in some US states (due to racial and financial inequalities), there was a spike in

crime. Circumstance says that since a person is poor and can't afford bail, they should not be responsible to pay it even if they commit a crime. The direct correlation in reality is that there was dramatic increase in crime.