

One Bird Dies; the Other Bird Flies

Vayikra 14

וְאֶת-הַצֹּפֶר הַחַיָּה יִקַּח אֹתָהּ, וְאֶת-עֵץ
הָאֶרֶז וְאֶת-שָׁנִי הַתּוֹלַעַת וְאֶת-הָאֵזוֹב;
וְטָבַל אֹתָם וְאֶת הַצֹּפֶר הַחַיָּה בְּדַם הַצֹּפֶר
הַשָּׁחֹטָה, עַל הַמַּיִם הַחַיִּים.

6 As for the living bird, he (the Kohen) shall take it, along with the cedar-wood, the scarlet, and the hyssop, and he shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water.

זְ וְהִזָּה עַל הַמַּטְהָר מִן-הַצָּרַעַת--שֶׁבַע
פְּעָמִים; וְטָהָר, וְשַׁלַּח אֶת-הַצֹּפֶר הַחַיָּה
עַל-פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה.

7 And he shall sprinkle it upon him (that is to be purified from the *tzara-at*) seven times, and shall pronounce him *tahor*, and shall let go the living bird into the open field.

This week's parsha gives us the ritual for purifying the sufferer of *tzara-at*. Two birds are taken. One is slaughtered and the living bird is dipped in the blood of the dead bird. It is then set free. Ibn Ezra's commentary sees signs of mourning in the various earlier rituals of the *Metzora*, the sufferer – the tearing of clothing, the isolation from the community, letting the hair grow, and more. These *psukim* now speak of the later stage, where the *Metzora* is reintegrated into the community. Rav Soloveitchik speaks of it as the difference between *Aninut* and *Aveilut*.

What a powerful metaphor this is for the Jewish people in modern times! This Parsha always falls out during the Omer period. Beyond the counting, the Omer period always includes the modern observances of Yom Hashoah, reminding us of the Holocaust, Yom Hazikaron (Israel's Memorial Day for soldiers who gave up their lives), Yom Ha-atzama-ut, and Yom Yerushalayim. The Jewish people until modern times was always seen as the world's *Metzoraim*, "lepers" if you will. We were seen as *tamei*, impure, unclean, and separate. Some people still see us this way. But having a Jewish State has brought us back into world history and the world stage. While it has not solved the problem of Anti-Judaism, it has given our people a chance to fly freely, to grow as a free people in our own land. All this has happened in the shadow of the Holocaust and the high price of loss among the best and brightest young Israelis. The free bird is dipped in the blood of the slaughtered bird before it can fly. We must mourn before we celebrate. Perhaps we could say it is the mourning that allows us to celebrate. Within the shadows of sadness, we should be grateful to the Holy One for the gift of Israel. It is a Chag, and we should recognize as such.

I cannot leave this short Dvar Torah without noting another sad occasion. This week, we lost one of the finest Talmidei Chachamim and spokesmen for Modern Orthodoxy – Rav Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein. Son in law of Rav Joseph Soloveitchik, Rosh Yeshiva at YU and Har Etzion ("Gush"), Harvard PhD in English Literature, and humble scholar, he was an eloquent

spokesman for what has been termed religious humanism. He sought to bring Torah wisdom to a modern State of Israel. Many in our shul have ties to him, his institutions, and his other family members. I am proud to count myself in that group. Our joy on Yom Ha-atzama-ut will be tempered by his loss. Again, the living bird in flight is touched by the blood of the death.

May be we able to find joy in the sadness, and gratitude to Hashem for the gifts that we have been granted in our times!

Shabbat Shalom,

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