

Parsha Ponders

Metzora / Shabbos HaGadol | April 7, 2022 | 6 Nissan 5782

Correctional bird manipulation¹

וצוה הכהן ולקח למטהר שתי-צפרים חיות טהרות וגו'

The Kohen shall instruct, and two pure, live birds shall be taken for the one seeking purification...²

A large segment of the *parsha* deals with the spiritual contamination of one who spoke wrongly about his fellow, known as a *Metzora*, and his process of purification. One of the requirements the Torah prescribes is to take two birds, one to be slaughtered, and one to be released into the wild. Why does he need to bring birds? Rashi explains³ because birds are known to “tweet” all day long, which symbolizes this guy’s constant “tweeting” gossip about his fellow. According to this reasoning then, why is there a need for two birds? Seemingly one should be sufficient. Furthermore, now that there are two birds that are required, why is one slaughtered, and one sent away? Finally, there’s a law that this bird must be sent out specifically in an open field⁴. Why is that?

Our Sages interpret⁵ a verse⁶ to teach us that a person’s job in this world is to become mute. One might think that this includes mute from words of Torah, but that is an exception. On the contrary, we are adjured to speak many words of Torah. If so, maybe I would think someone who toils in words of Torah may become haughty. To this, we are taught that we should remain humble. In addition to this teaching, we are taught⁷ that the Jewish people would rather be compared to those who work the fields, and not those who live in the city. City dwellers are often involved with theft and lewd activities. Those who work the fields are often Torah scholars who study despite their financial strain⁸.

Many commentaries understood the concept of Temple offerings to be that a person should imagine that whatever happens to the animal is what they themselves deserve. Hashem, due to His infinite kindness, had us bestow our fate onto animals. According to this, if a *Metzora* was simply required to have a bird slaughtered, he would get the wrong impression. He might think that if a bird who chirps all day has this fate, and in reality this should have been done to him⁹, perhaps he shouldn’t talk at all. All forms of speech are evil. This is a gross mistake, as we know he should constantly speak words of Torah. In fact, our Sages tell us¹⁰ that a way to rectify evil speech is through learning Torah.

Therefore, to avoid this mistake, the Torah commanded the *Metzora* to bring not one bird, but two. This second bird is to be left alive. This is to show that speech can also be a source of life, as life and death are in the hands of the tongue¹¹. Meaning, the Torah is a Tree of Life, and it is a cure of the tongue¹².

¹ Based on Sefer Apiryon to Leviticus 14:4, by Rav Shlomo Gantzfried, the author of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch

² Leviticus *loc. cit.*

³ *Ad. loc.*

⁴ V. 7 with Toras Kohanim

⁵ Chullin 89a

⁶ Psalms 58:2

⁷ Eruvin 21b

⁸ See Rashi *ad. loc.*

⁹ It’s interesting that the Sefer Apiryon equates the bird that is slaughtered to a Temple offering. Although it is done by a Kohen (see Toras Kohanim *ad. loc.* that it’s a dispute if it is valid if slaughtered by a non-Kohen; the Rambam in Mishneh Torah *Hilchos Tumas Tzara’as* 11:5 rules that only a Kohen can do it), the Torah doesn’t seem to give it the status of an offering. It doesn’t seem to be offered on the Temple altar

¹⁰ Arachin 15b

¹¹ Proverbs 18:21

¹² Ibid 15:4. This is the source for note 10

However, someone who learns a lot of Torah might become haughty. In fact, the spiritual impurity of a *Metzora* often comes from an inflated ego¹³. To account for this, the *Metzora* is commanded to release the live bird specifically in an open field. This is an allusion to the humble field workers who are known to study Torah despite their financial strain. The hope is that with this purification process, the *Metzora* will mend their ways, and know how to properly use their tongue from now on.

Good Shabbos

¹³ See [Rashi to Leviticus 14:4](#)