

TURTLE DOVES DO NOT HAVE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Tazria

Turtle Doves Do Not Have "Second Marriages" - Appreciation for Loyalty

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape# 633 - Lashon Harah and Lashon HaTov. Good Shabbos!

The beginning of Parshas Tazria deals with the laws of purity and impurity associated with childbirth. At the end of the 40 day period of impurity and purity following the birth of a male and at the end of the 80 day period of impurity and purity following the birth of a female, the mother is required to bring "a sheep within its first year for an olah-offering and a young dove or a turtle dove for a sin-offering" to complete her purification process [Vayikra 12:6].

Even though there are many kinds of kosher birds, the only kinds of birds that may be brought as sacrifices on the Altar are the young dove [ben-yonah] and the turtle dove [tor]. The Baal HaTurim makes the interesting observation that whenever the Torah provides the option of bringing a tor [turtle dove] or a ben-yonah [young dove] as a bird offering, the mention of the tor precedes the mention of the ben-yonah. The only exception is here in the case of the sin-offering following childbirth, where the Torah first mentions the ben-yonah and only afterward mentions the tor.

The Baal HaTurim explains that normally the tor or ben-yonah are brought in pairs. However, in this case, we only bring one. The tor [turtle dove] has a unique quality in that they mate for life. If its partner is taken away from it or killed, it will not seek out another mate, but will seemingly mourn - as it were - for the first mate for the rest of its life. Consequently, rather than cause the break-up of a pair of turtle doves by taking one of a pair for a bird offering, the Torah advises us to that it is preferable to seek out a ben-yonah (whose mate will presumably be able to find another mate if its first mate is offered as a sacrifice).

Rav Simcha Zissel Broide derives two insights from this Baal HaTurim. First, when we see how sensitive the Torah is to the feelings of pigeons and doves, we can imagine how sensitive we must be to the feelings of our fellow human beings. Second, we see that the Torah appreciates loyalty.

The Torah in effect is rewarding the tor - urging us to seek the ben-yonah instead for our sacrifice - because it has that wonderful trait of loyalty to its mate.

The Ramban has a similar teaching in Parshas Vayikra. The Ramban writes that the Torah singled out torim as an appropriate species for karbanos, precisely because of their loyalty each other. This unique quality makes them the optimum choice for spiritual elevation sought by the one bringing a bird sacrifice. The Ramban adds that even though bnei-yonah do not share this quality, they have an alternate characteristic which makes them appropriate. The young dove (the only kind of "ben yonah" which may be brought) has the trait that they always return to their nest. Most birds will never return to their nest once a human being touches it. The bnei yonah are an exception. They have such loyalty to their nests that they will return despite the fact that human hands may have tampered with the nest. The Ramban writes "So too Israel will not switch from loyalty to their Creator and His Torah forever." Therefore, according to the Ramban, torim and bnei Yonah are the bird species used in the Bais HaMikdash because they share the quality of loyalty with the Jewish people.

Now, we may wonder, where does it ever say in the Torah that being loyal is a good thing? Where do any of the 613 mitzvos instruct us to "Be Loyal"? We are used to thinking about qualities that the Torah appreciates: Chessed [kindness]; Emes [truthfulness]; Shalom [peacefulness]. Where is loyalty in that list?

There are many values, character traits, and attitudes that the Torah does explicitly mention. However, the Torah has one catchall commandment: "V'asisa haYashar v'haTov..." [And you shall do that which is correct and good in the Eyes of Hashem.] [Devorim 6:18].

How do you know you are not supposed to cut someone off in traffic? Where is that written? We understand that if a person is easily recognizable as a religious Jew then such behavior is forbidden under the category of "Chilul Hashem" [desecration of the Name of G-d]. But what if someone is not easily recognizable as a religious Jew? Why is it still forbidden according to Torah law for him to cut someone off in traffic?

There are so many things like this. Where is it written that one must mow his lawn? Where does the Torah forbid us from having our property become an eye sore? The Ramban says it is all forbidden because of the pasuk "V'asisa haYashar v'haTov b'Einei Hashem..." which, liberally translated, means "be a mentsch".

The Ramban writes, "Even those things that are not explicit, pay attention and try to deduce from the Torah that which is correct and good in His Eyes for He likes that which is correct and good. This is a great matter because it is impossible to record in the Torah all the proper interactions of man with his friends and neighbors." The Torah listed many specific actions (do not take revenge, do not bear grudges, do not speak slander, etc.) and then the Torah gave one catchall mitzvah to include all the other things that were too numerous to list: V'asisa haYashar v'haTov.

It is our mission to discern the qualities that the Almighty likes. This Baal HaTurim and this Ramban

are saying that the Torah appreciates loyalty. The message may be very subtle. We may have to delve into the reasons behind the commandments and figure out why specifically doves and turtledoves are required for the Divine Service (or why turtledoves are usually mentioned first and why by childbirth the ben-yonah is mentioned first). Our job is to read between the lines, pick up all the qualities that the Master of the World appreciates, and emulate those qualities in our lives.

There is one other example that the Ramban provides of reading between the lines to determine appropriate human behavior based on explicit Biblical law: Virtually all forbidden sexual relationships are relationships which are forbidden forever. For example, one's mother-in-law is an ervah [forbidden relation] to him. She remains an ervah even if his wife dies and her mother is no longer his mother-in-law. The prohibition of marrying a woman and her sister however is unique in that it only applies during the lifetime of the sister that he married first.

The Ramban explains that the reason for this prohibition is to promote harmony among the sisters. Normal sibling rivalry being what it is, if two sisters were married to the same person, it would create intolerable family strife. The two sisters would wind up hating each other. The Torah does not want sisters to hate each other. The Torah wants sisters to love each other. Therefore, says the Ramban, that commandment does not apply if one of the sisters has died. So where do we find in the Torah that siblings should love each other? It may be subtle, but we find it right here in the prohibition of marrying two sisters.

Reading between the lines of Torah law gives us greater insight into Torah and greater insight into what the Almighty considers "Correct and good" [yashar v'tov].

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