



GEULAS YISRAEL

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Addressing the War Today

When Doves Turn Into Lions

After experiencing an apocalyptic nightmare and witnessing the devastation of an entire planet, Noach was antsy and wanted information about the receding water levels. For months, even though the rains had long abated, he was too frightened to crack open a window. Finally, summoning his courage, he dispatched birds to seek out dry land.

However, dispatching the birds wasn't just logistical to discover dry land, it was also symbolic. In particular, the journeys of the dove were highly iconic. Just as the new world was about to launch, a dove flew over the retreating waters. After its third mission the dove disappeared from view. Doves hovering above the new world provides an iconic image for the future of the new reality.

Jews are like doves. Throughout Tanach, but especially in Shir Hashirim, we are compared to doves. A dove being the first organism to settle the new order foreshadows the historical role of the Jewish people in preventing the moral collapse which led to the world's destruction in the first place. A few hundred years after the flight of the dove a nation of doves would be selected to serve as the moral and religious conscience of the world.

LOYALTY

The midrash (Shir Hashirim Rabbah

perek 4) highlights the loyalty of doves as the reason we are likened to them. While other birds rotate through different mates, doves maintain their loyalty to their original partners. Like doves we have maintained steadfast loyalty to our original husband, HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

It wasn't always this way. At the onset of our relationship with Hashem our loyalty often faltered. We flirted with fictitious gods while relying upon local superpowers such as Egypt and Assyria, in place of depending solely upon Hashem. Repeatedly our prophets warned us against this unfaithful behavior. Sadly, we learned this lesson the hard way and were evicted from our shared home with Hashem.

However, as history unfolded our loyalty grew. During our long exile we consistently rebuffed seductive invitations to join other nations or to assimilate into other cultures. From 4th century BCE Greek Hellenism to 19th century European, we held tightly to our ancient Covenant with Hashem. We were loyal, even when it was hard to be. For two thousand years it appeared that Judaism was in decline while other religions and cultures were ascendant. Loyalty, though, is blind to historical patterns and to cultural winds, and our loyalty to

Hashem is a marvel of human history. We are loyal doves.

A related Midrash compares us to doves since these birds do not struggle when put to death, but willingly submit. During this period of our great loyalty to Hashem we also offered our lives in defense of His name. Unlike suicide murderers we don't have a death wish. Unlike our despicable enemies who are infatuated with blood and death, we celebrate life. However, we are placed on this Earth to defend the presence of Hashem with every breath we take and, if necessary, with our final breath. My rebbe, Rav Yehuda Amital, would often cite a strident pasuk in Iyov to describe loyalty and faith in the post Holocaust era:

הן יקטלני לו אייחל

which loosely translates into “though you may kill me I will still wait for you”. We love Hashem for no ulterior motive and not because we expect anything from Him. We are loyal to Him regardless of the fate he delivers us. No suffering can be worse than being severed from Him. We are doves in dark times as well.

TAKING FLIGHT

We are also modern doves, in ways that our ancestors were not. For centuries we were landlocked in foreign countries without a homeland, without a state and without much choice. We could not escape the torrent of rabid antisemitism. We were more similar to sheep than to doves, as Dovid Hamelech portrays נחשבת כצאן טבחה, defenseless and without any options. The midrash describes one of the Roman emperors at our lowest moment in history, mocking us as a “lone sheep surrounded by 70 wild and rabid wolves”.

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Today we are no longer sheep, herded involuntarily. We have other options to living in Israel. There are numerous quiet and calm places to live meaningful Jewish lives. Like doves we can fly elsewhere, but we choose to stay here. We are tired of running. We aren't going anywhere.

Slowly but surely, the doves are flying home. Doves possess innate homing capacity allowing them to return home from far distances. During its first two missions, Noach's dove could not find a resting place רגליה מנוח לכך רגליה, so it returned to the ark.

However, after the third mission it never returned. It had discovered its new home. We don't know for certain where that first dove nested but it is highly likely that it was in the only land unaffected by the flood- the land of Israel. Chazal inform

us that the olive branch recovered by the dove on its second mission came from a tree in the undisturbed land of Israel. It is likely then, that the first dove made aliyah to Israel, never to be seen again by Noach. Those who live in Israel inhabit a pristine Land, untouched and unmarred by the apocalyptic flood. God's original creation.

Slowly but surely all the doves are flying home. Many are now hurrying to Israel to defend our home against the forces of darkness and death. Others are just beginning their flight, connecting through this war more deeply with our Land and our people. They are just starting to grow their wings for their final flight home. The doves will all return. The doves will triumph over hate.

BECOMING LIONS

Though we are compared to doves we are also compared to lions. This is the first time in history that a pogrom against our people will be followed by a war. After previous pogroms we had little choice but to "lick our wounds" and move on. Not this time. We will respond to depravity and barbarism and, with Hashem's help, our lions will protect our people and our Land.

Repeatedly, the Torah portrays a lion as crouching and sleeping, but quickly awakening. This highlights the lightning-fast reaction and recovery time of a lion. Over the past two weeks our people have quickly recovered from the horrible surprise assault. It is, by now, horrifyingly clear that Hamas "yimach shemam" planned a protracted invasion of our country which was only thwarted by selfless heroism of the initial soldiers and citizens who battled these monsters, knowing full well that they would likely face death. Our lions saved us from a harsher fate.

A HERD OF LIONS

Just weeks ago, we were badly fractured by civil strife and social discord. We didn't watch our words and we squandered our love for one another. We shattered our common narrative and spewed hatred rather than affection. We paid a terrible price. However, we are now united. Religious and secular, Left and Right. Protest organizations have now speedily morphed into groups providing support to our soldiers. We finally have one common purpose. We are not just lions, we are a herd of lions and Hashem is watching over us.

We have demonstrated that, despite our vitriol, we beat with one heart. Sadly, it took a horrific tragedy and an existential threat to amplify that common heartbeat, but it is finally awake. It beats loud. May Hashem hear it and save us.

(Written Monday Oct. 16) ■

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