

The Song of the Dove



יוֹנָה אוֹמֶרֶת: כְּסוֹס עֶגוּר כֵּן אֶצְפָּצֵף אֶהְגֶּה כִּיּוֹנָה דָלוּ עֵינַי לְמָרוֹם אֲדַנִּי עֲשֵׂקָה לִי עֲרַבְנִי. (ישעיה לז, יד)

The dove says: **Like the crane and the swallow I shall chirp, I coo like a dove, my eyes raised to the heights, Hashem, take me! Relieve me!**

The dove's gentle nature and tranquil disposition suggest serenity. Its soft coo bespeaks comfort and peace. Yet this inoffensive bird is often victimized by the aggression of other beings. Some indeed suggest that it's Hebrew name "יונה", is related to the word "אונאה", meaning oppressed. Lacking strength and cunning, it is hunted by predators, and its sole means of survival is to use its wings to fly away.¹

And yet, this very vulnerability is its song of greatness. It lifts its eyes on high and sings, "Hashem! Take me! Relieve me!" The dove thus symbolizes that we must not rely arrogantly on our own might, but rather constantly turn our eyes trustfully Heavenward in sincere prayer. The survival of the dove, indeed its status as one of the most common birds, worldwide, is living testimony to the power of its gentle coo.²

¹ Based on commentaries.

² For detailed sources, see Wikipedia.

The dove's song continues:

אוֹמֶרֶת יוֹנָה לַפָּנִי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם יְהוּי מְזוֹנוֹתֵי מְרוּרִים כְּזַיִת בְּיַדְךָ וְאֵל יְהוּי
מְתוֹקִים כְּדָבָשׁ עַל יְדֵי בָּשָׂר וְדָם.

The dove says to Hashem, **“Master of the world, let my sustenance be as bitter as an olive from Your hand, rather than sweet as honey from the hands of flesh and blood.”**

The point in history at which the dove's song was most poignantly expressed was at the conclusion of the Flood in the times of Noah. The dove brought to Noah a leaf from the bitter tasting olive-tree, as if to say that it would rather be fed the bitterest meal by Hashem's hand, and not be forced any longer to be sustained with sickly sweet dependency from the hands of man.³

Living with Song

We, the Jewish people have survived and flourished by singing the song of the dove. Indeed, the Midrash compares us to the dove. We are the smallest and the most victimized of all nations. Our only strength is through our Mitzvos which the Sages compare to wings. With them, we soar above our enemies. Our spiritual focus lifts us up above all of life's hurdles and pitfalls.

Whenever our people accepts even the bitter aspects of life as coming from the hand of Hashem, we are singing the Song of the Dove. Hashem alone is our ultimate hope, the destination of our prayers, and the source of our successes. Time and time again throughout world history, our very dependency upon Him has rendered us undefeatable.

The sages compare us to the dove in numerous ways⁴. In the same way that once doves bond with their mates, they are loyal to each other for life, so, too, once our people knew Hashem at Har Sinai, we have never abandoned Him and we are assured that He will never abandon us.

Just as the dove will not forsake its nest even if its young are taken from it, so, too, the Jewish nation has not abandoned its nest, the holy Beis Hamikdash, even in its destruction, and continues to visit its ruins thrice yearly on the festivals.

And just as the dove was the bearer of good tidings of hope for new life after the flood, bringing light to the world, so, too, the Jewish people will ultimately be a harbinger to the world, saying, “Come, let us walk by Hashem's light.”

³ The Jewish nation is compared to olives inasmuch as the oil of olives can only be removed through crushing them and so too the goodness of the Jewish people is extracted through suffering (Talmud). All Hashem does is for the good and anything that is bitter will end up sweet. However, if the dove is fed unnaturally by man, the very sweetness will prove to be to its detriment. If the dove stayed longer by Noah and was fed by his hand, it would eventually have become domesticated and unable to live in the wild. This is based upon the Siach Yitzchak who writes that although the olive is originally bitter, in the end, it is sweet, and although honey is initially sweet, if one eats a large quantity of it, the result is bitterness.

⁴ מדרש שיר השירים, ד, ב.