

These shall you abominate from among the birds, they may not be eaten – they are an abomination; the nesher. (11:13)

The *nesher*, commonly translated as the eagle, is unique among the non-kosher fowl in that its image is on the *Kisei HaKavod*, Hashem's Throne. *Chazal* teach that the image of four creatures are on the throne: man, lion, ox and eagle. In contrast is the *yonah*, pigeon, which is a fowl that has its share of troubles, preyed on by other fowl, was slaughtered on the *Mizbayach*, Altar, and used as a *korban*, offering. How do we reconcile the fact that a non-kosher bird achieves such a lofty status, while the kosher bird, which is “pushed around,” does not?

Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, zl, offers an insightful explanation. The *Kisei HaKavod* is the place for “royalty” with the monarchs of each species being represented. Man is the king of Creation, since everything was created for his purpose. The lion rules over wild beasts, the ox over the animal kingdom, and the eagle over the fowl. Above all of them is Hashem, the *Melech Malchei HaMelachim*, King of Kings. The pigeon receives nothing. Is this fair? Is this the way it should be?

Rav Zalmen explains that to serve as a *korban*, offering for Hashem, is of greater import than to have its image on the *Kisei HaKavod*. Why is this? I would assume that having a constant presence on the *Kisei HaKavod* would have greater significance than a one-time sacrifice, but this is not the case. Our first error is viewing sacrifice as a one-time experience. *Yitzchak Avinu's* “almost” one time sacrifice has served as atonement and inspiration for *Klal Yisrael* throughout the millennia. That dispels the notion of “one-time.” A sacrifice serves as a constant remembrance, a continuous merit on behalf of the one who is sacrificed. This brings us to the issues of martyrdom, self-sacrifice, and even suffering as a form of sacrifice.

The Jew is intrinsically imbued with a covert spark of holiness deeply imbedded within him, which – regardless of his distance from Hashem – somehow, in some way will rise and begin to burn once again. In a small European town lived a Jewish butcher who had sadly assimilated himself into the prevailing Christian culture. He sold only non-kosher meat and had no compunction about his store being open on *Shabbos*. Indeed, the townspeople had no idea that this man was Jewish. He had really succeeded in concealing the identity of his birth religion.

In the outskirts of the city, the Nazis began rounding up the Jewish citizens. They commanded the Jewish prisoners to dig their graves and line up in front of them. Suddenly, the gunshots coming from the Nazis rifles were heard, and the Jews let out their last cry of *Shema Yisrael*. Some fell over thinking they had been shot; others stood there in shock, realizing that they were still alive.

A few seconds went by, and laughter was heard coming from the Nazis. It was all a sham. The rifles did not have bullets. The Nazis were having fun at the expense of the Jews. They did it again; once again, shots rang out – no bullets – no bodies, just Nazis laughing at the tormented Jews. While the Nazis were playing their diabolical game with the Jews, the butcher hearing the shots,

asked his customer what was happening. "Oh nothing," the customer answered. "They are just shooting Jews." Hearing this, the butcher tore off his apron and ran to the door, yelling, "They are shooting Jews? I am also a Jew! Shoot me too!"

What took place here? A man lived his entire life in denial of his Jewish heritage, lived his entire life as a *goy*. All of a sudden, he is prepared to relinquish his life for Judaism? Does this make sense?

Yes. Every Jew, regardless of his or her religious leanings, has a spark of *kedushah*, holiness, within him. At any time, based upon the right stimulus, that spark will ignite and burn brightly. Thus, a Jew who for decades denied his heritage, was ashamed of his birth religion, is now prepared to die for it. It may seem illogical, but it is not. The only illogical aspect of his life was his denial of *Yiddishkeit*! His spark was ignited, and it began to burn brightly.

In his *Eish Kodesh*, the **Piaszecner Rebbe, zl**, presents a profound understanding of the meaning of self-sacrifice to the Jew. Unlike secular martyrdom, in which an individual who gives up his life for an ideal, a belief, has performed an honorable, saintly act of devotion which begins and ends with his death, a Jew's sacrifice has a loftier connection to the past. The Rebbe refers to the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, Binding of Yitzchak, which was not completely consummated. The test of Avraham and Yitzchak involved their will and intention to martyrdom, but ended just short of the final act. Therefore, writes the *Rebbe*, every occurrence of Jews being killed by gentiles with circumstances reversed – that is, with the actuality of death taking place, but without the intentional choice of martyrdom – is the fulfillment of *Akeidas Yitzchak*! It began with the *Akeidah*, characterized by intention and desire for martyrdom, the conclusion and actualization occurs today. Thus, the Biblical *Akeidah*, together with all of the subsequent cases of Jews being murdered on account of their Jewishness, all constitute one event.

By viewing the deaths of the Jews of Poland (with whom he was involved) as a fulfillment of the *Akeidah*, the *Piaszecner* was bestowing dignity and meaning upon a circumstance that "some" could (and would) otherwise view as unheroic and unwilling, a meaningless, mechanized death. In one of his homilies, the *Rebbe* issues a plea to people to repent, as well as an entreaty to Hashem for salvation in the merit of the martyred Jews whom he refers to as *korbanos*, sacrificial offerings.

The *Rebbe* then takes sacrifice one step further – one to which we may all relate. He writes, "It is clear that the same holds true for all sufferings which we endure, which diminish our strength." He underscores the idea that one's suffering can be granted dignity and meaning when viewed in a sacrificial context – as a personal offering presented in a posture of surrender to Hashem.

Now that personal suffering can be viewed from the perspective of quasi-sacrifice, it can serve as a vehicle to encourage the sufferer to embrace his/her suffering through a posture of active acceptance and sublimation, rather than the secular position of passivity and resignation. One who experiences suffering should not act defeated, on the verge of collapse, but rather, enraptured with vigorous upward movement of the spirit.

Thus, the *Rebbe* explains, the martyr feels no pain, since the individual who is about to be martyred is inflamed with a powerful yearning to surrender his life for the sake of the sanctity of Hashem. He elevates all of his senses and entire physical being by means of that fervor, connecting himself with the spiritual dimension. He becomes divested of his sense of tangible feeling and corporeality, now experiencing nothing but pleasure.

A powerful statement, which gives us a glimpse into the psyche of one who is able to withstand torture, pain, affliction – and even death. He is offering himself up to Hashem, completing the task that our Patriarch Yitzchak commenced.