

You shall be holy for Me, for I Hashem am holy; and I have separated you from the peoples to be Mine. (20:26)

There has to be a separation between the Jew and the gentile. This does not mean that we should not act properly. On the contrary, by acting with dignity and *mentchlichkeit*, we earn their respect and admiration. This also does not suggest adopting their culture and lifestyle. We are distinct, and our distinctiveness is an inherent part of our essence. *Rabbeinu Bachya* writes that we are separated as a result of the *chochmas haTorah*, wisdom acquired through the Torah, which impels us to distinguish ourselves in what we eat, the manner that we eat, our mode of dress (and our overall demeanor). Since we have been given the 613 *mitzvos* of the Torah, the nations of the world envy us, an envy that unfortunately leads to *sinaah*, hatred. *Chazal* allude to this when they ask why *Har Chorev* was called *Har Sinai*. They explain that Sinai is related to *sinaah* – *she'mi'sham yatzah sinaah l'akum*, “For from there (as a result of us receiving the Torah), hatred went out from the pagans.” They could not tolerate our distinctiveness, which was a direct consequence of our receiving the Torah.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, observes that every species of animal, wild beast and fowl is constantly attached to its member specie. You will not find a dog “hanging out” with an elephant, etc. How does each individual animal know with whom to be attached? After all, the lion has never viewed itself in the mirror. How does any creature identify the members of its individual specie? Indeed, if an animal (or any other creature) would have been raised alone on a deserted island and had never come into contact with any member of its specie, nonetheless, when set free, it will seek out and gravitate to members of its own specie. How does it recognize its own specie?

As a result of this phenomenon, biologists have determined that every individual creature possesses in its subconscious (or whatever an animal has) an image of itself which is a part of its psyche from birth. It is through this innate image that the animal knows how to seek out its own specie.

Rav Zilberstein posits that this phenomenon is no different with regard to the spiritual DNA of each and every *Yehudi*. Every Jew has within him a spiritual component that projects in his brain an image of a *Yid*. He knows what a *Yid* looks like, what he is supposed to do and how he is supposed to act. It is this spiritual image that compels him to repent and return to Hashem.

We see, however, that so many of our brethren have no idea, are totally clueless, about their heritage and noble pedigree. If they are unaware of their past, how could they ever return? Surely, they must have some force, some reason that motivates their return. In order to have a desire to serve Hashem, one must generate within himself a feeling that acknowledges how truly wonderful it is to serve the Almighty. How does someone who does not possess a Jewish identity (does not identify with Judaism) develop this feeling?

Horav Nissan Yagen, zl, employs a powerful parable to explain this. A hunter once passed a farm and noticed a large chicken coop. He looked inside and saw a large eagle alongside the many chickens housed there. This took him by surprise. Eagles are not found in chicken coops, and certainly not with chickens. After inquiring in the nearby village concerning this unusual spectacle, he discovered that the farmer was to be credited – or blamed. Apparently, one day the farmer, whose breadth of knowledge concerning the various species of fowl was very limited, found a small, gray chick lying on the ground. The kindhearted man picked up the “gray chicken” and placed it alongside the other chicks in the coop. As the eagle grew to “maturity,” its knowledge of fowl was limited only to chickens. As a result, it did everything like a chicken. It did not attempt to fly, because chickens do not fly. Thus, it lived its life as if it were a chicken.

The visiting hunter knew his birds, and he saw before him a magnificent eagle, capable of flying high in the sky, its power unsurpassed by other birds. As the king of birds, the eagle was the most powerful of its specie. Yet, this eagle was living a “chicken’s life,” cock-a-doodle-doing all day when it could be flying high and mighty. Taking pity on the eagle, the hunter asked the farmer if he could sell him the “gray chicken.” “Yes,” replied the farmer, “but you must pay me according to its weight (which is the “currency” for selling chickens). The hunter agreed. A mature eagle was well worth its weight. As far as the farmer was concerned, the eagle was nothing more than an overweight chicken.

The hunter left with his newly-found project. Even when allowed out of the coop, the eagle did not soar, did not fly. It flapped its wings like a chicken and walked along with its new master. The next morning at sunrise, the hunter took the eagle to a high mountain peak. He then promptly threw the eagle off the mountain. Shocked to suddenly be in the air with nothing to stand on, the eagle began flapping its wings wildly. It flapped and flapped until it picked up enough thrust to fly. At last, the eagle was back home, in the sky where it belonged.

Many of us have been raised – or have allowed ourselves – to live like chickens (in relationship to our noble, Jewish heritage). Our lives revolve around fun, frivolity, aimless activity which takes us nowhere. We have lost our Jewish identity and sadly do not even care. Each and every Jew must be made aware of his/her noble heritage. We are not chickens. As children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov Avinu and the *Imahos ha’kedoshos*, *holy Matriarchs*, we are different. We have been designated by the Almighty to be distinct, to be set apart, to set an example for the world to emulate. We are to be spiritual eagles, not chickens.