

And for the person being purified there shall be taken two live clean birds... and one bird shall be slaughtered... and he shall set free the live bird upon the open field. (14:4,5,7)

As part of the process of purifying the *metzora*, two birds are brought as an offering to Hashem. Only one of them is killed, however, while the other one is set free. Birds are used for the *korban*, sacrifice, because birds are constantly chirping, and the *metzora* had not stopped spewing his slander when he should have kept his mouth shut. This explains why one bird is killed, but what about the second bird? Why is it released? The explanation as cited by the commentators is that the Torah is hereby circumventing a common error, thus imparting an important lesson. If there was only one bird and it was killed, one might suggest that speaking is a bad thing. Keep your mouth shut. Only evil can result from speech. This is, of course, untrue. There is good speech and bad speech – a time to speak, and a time and place when one should not articulate his feelings and position. Talking Torah – utilizing one’s ability to speak to assist, guide and inspire others – constitutes good speech. Taking a stand for the Torah way – repudiating those who usurp the Torah and its disseminators – constitutes good speech. Just simple, friendly conversation can make someone’s day. The Torah is teaching us that the bird representing evil speech is killed. The other bird is released, because it represents the inherent good one can accomplish with his G-d-given power of speech.

Alternatively, we may suggest that both birds represent the *baal lashon hora*, slanderer. Together they impart a crucial message to him: ultimately, the only one who will be hurt is you. The subject of your slander will eventually be vindicated. True, he might, as a result of your slander, suffer temporarily. After the smoke clears, the only one that will be destroyed is the slanderer. The other fellow, whom he sought to destroy, will “fly away” free and clear, expunged of the dirt that the slanderer attempted to throw at him.

Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl, quotes **Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl**, who explains that while a snake has two reasons/opportunities for biting – neither one delivers him any pleasure. Other animals attack their prey, but they, at least, derive pleasure from devouring it. The snake bites for the sole sake of biting – nothing else. Additionally, even when the snake consumes its enemy, it derives no pleasure. All that it tastes is dirt. The snake was cursed that, while its food would be plentiful, it would only taste like dirt.

Likewise, the *baal lashon hora* speaks vilely of his fellow for the sole purpose of inflicting his “bite” – not for any benefit or personal gain. He wants to make him hurt. This is perhaps his source of pleasure – the other person’s pain. In another instance, the slanderer is bent on doing away with a competitor, attempting to climb the ladder of opportunity upon the shoulders of his fellow. The slanderer does not realize that Hashem decides who wins, who succeeds, and who loses. Thus, the slanderer has no gain from the hurt that he causes, because the final “word” is up to Hashem.