

"And he shall take one bird... and he shall send away the living bird." (14:5,7)

This is one of two instances in the *Torah* in which two animals are selected: Both times, one serves as a *korban*, while the other is sent away to the desert. The first selection, which occurs on *Yom Kippur*, is carried out through the use of lots. The goat whose lot is marked *L'Hashem* is used as a *korban*, while the goat whose lot is marked *L'Azazel* is sent into the desolate desert to die.

Why is there no lottery used in this case to select which bird will live and which bird will die as a *korban*? It seems that the decision regarding the life and death of these individual birds depends solely upon the discretion of the *kohen*. In the instance in which both animals die, the decision regarding which type of death they incur is decided by Hashem through the lottery. In contrast, in regard to the two birds, one of whom lives and the other of whom dies, the *kohen* makes the decision. Is it not reasonable that a life/death decision should be rendered by Hashem?

Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, z.l., suggests that this differentiation implies an important lesson for a Jew's priorities in life. We would assume that the paramount question is one which focuses on matters of life and death. The *Torah* teaches us that this is not necessarily accurate. Life in this world is but a preparation for the eternal world of *Olam Haba*. It is a corridor opening up to a magnificent drawing room. Consequently, the question of life or death is overshadowed by a greater question -- where are we going? Are we preparing ourselves for an eternal life of bliss, or, u"j for an eternal punishment?

Is our lifestyle one which leads to Hashem via the vehicle of *Torah* study and *mitzvah* performance -- or is it guiding us to *Azazel*? The question of *Ikuv v,t itk*, "Where are you going?" is one which should permeate every aspect of our life's endeavor. We should learn from the selection of the birds for the *metzora's* purification, which does not require a *goral*, lot. The question of life and death does not weigh as heavily as the one of the two goats, a decision made only by Hashem. He also determines whether their passing reflects the sanctification of Hashem's Name or whether they quietly disappear into the desolate desert to *Azazel*.