

## The dove came back to him...And behold an olive leaf it had plucked with its beak. (8:11)

The image of the dove returning with an olive branch in its bill has become the symbol of peace. *Chazal* tell us that the dove does not eat the bitter olive leaf. He was sending a message using this gesture. "Better that my food be bitter, but from Hashem's hand, than sweet as honey but dependent upon mortal man." **Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl**, understands this message to mean that freedom overrides bitterness. The sweetest food eaten under duress, beholden to others, is no longer sweet, while the most bitter food eaten in freedom suddenly becomes sweet.

In his commentary to the *Talmud Sanhedrin 108b*, the **Maharal** attributes the dove's choice of food to the origin of its benefactor--Hashem. While Noach was certainly providing the proper nourishing food for the dove, it chose to be dependent upon Hashem for sustenance and not to rely on man. Although provisions for the dove were placed in the domain of man, the dove chose specifically to be sustained directly by Hashem. The dove chose to be independent, not to sublimate itself to anyone other than Hashem.

We may infer from here the significance of self-sufficiency. The Maharal focuses on a number of areas where *Chazal* emphasize the importance of a *Torah* scholar refusing to accept gifts from people. They cite the *pasuk* in *Mishlei 15:22*, "v'hju ,ub,n tbua," "*The hater of gifts shall live*" is the basis for this concept. **Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl**, explains the significance of this *pasuk* in the following manner: A Jew's ability to receive the *Torah* is commensurate with his capacity to emulate Hashem's attributes. We merit receiving the *Torah* by virtue of our status as being "banim la'Makom," Hashem's children. We become Hashem's children by attempting to resemble Him, as a child resembles his parents. The attribute which most closely associates us as Hashem's children is the attribute of self-sufficiency. Hashem is the source of everything. Hashem needs nothing; He gives everything. When we act in a giving manner to those in need and we act in a way that demonstrates self-sufficiency, we are G-d-like. This type of giving is also unique in that we give of ourselves as Hashem gives of Himself, since He is the source of everything. Giving that which we have accepted from others is not an act which resembles Hashem's behavior. Thus, we should shun accepting gifts from others. What we then give originates from a source outside of ourselves -- which is not G-d-like. This close relationship with Hashem demonstrates our readiness to accept the *Torah*.