

He sent out a raven, and it kept going and returning until the drying of the waters from upon the face of the earth. (8:7)

The raven was not happy about being selected to serve as Noach's agent to determine whether it was sufficiently dry to disembark from the Ark. *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 33) relate the dialogue that ensued between the raven and Noach. "From all the beasts and fowl available to you, why did you pick me as (your agent)?" asked the raven. Noach countered, "What purpose do you serve me? You are neither edible nor fit to be used as a *korban*." Why did Hashem instruct Noach to send the raven? *Chazal* continue; Hashem told Noach, "One day, the world will need the raven. There will be a time when the land will be suffering from a drought. A *tzadik* will have caused this drought." Obviously, this *tzadik* will have to escape to protect himself from the victims of the drought. This refers to Eliyahu *HaNavi* who hid in a cave from Achav, the evil king. During his stay, the ravens, who twice daily delivered bread and meat to his door, sustained him.

Chazal's words are fascinating, given the fact that the raven is a bird known for its cruelty. Sustaining Eliyahu was an act of extreme kindness performed by a creature who had earned a reputation for its cruel nature. The *oraiv*, raven, does not win the prize for being nice. It is a creature who neglects its young, leaving its offspring unprotected. [The raven "wrote" the manual for the neglectful and, hence, abusive parent.] Nonetheless, in this moment of Divine compassion, or rather, profound insight, Hashem chose the raven to be the agent of mercy. On the surface, the lesson to be derived is: Any trait, however evil, can be redirected for good. Even cruelty, as evinced by the raven, when harnessed correctly, can serve a holy purpose.

Let us see how this plays itself out and what we can learn from it to alter our perspective on individuals who represent and commit acts of cruelty and manifest other such flawed character traits. The *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists, teach that the same stubbornness that leads a person to sin can be used to resist sin. Obstinacy is as bad as the reason one is obstinate. One who has little to no control over his passion, giving in to his desires, can reawaken and rise up to use this same drive to pursue *mitzvos*. The raven's nature remained the same – it was its mission that changed. Under Hashem's direction, its destructive tendencies were now focused on doing good.

The idea can be expanded upon. *Horav Nissan Alpert, zl*, wonders why Hashem specifically selected the raven for this mission. It is not as if there were a shortage of creatures. *Harbei shluchim laMakom*. Hashem has many agents. The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that Hashem wanted to impart a lesson to mankind: There is no trait so evil, so fixed in its flaw, that it cannot be repaired, reconstructed. Cruelty is a matter of perspective. We can observe a surgeon deftly cutting away what appears to be healthy tissue. Apparently, it is not so healthy, and, if he wants to heal the overall body, the surgeon must cut out and discard the tissue. Sometimes he needs to amputate a limb. Anyone watching the surgeon would not have kind words to describe the surgeon. When the patient survives to live a long life, everyone will understand that amputating the limb was a positive service.

A successful defense attorney in New York, well known for his cutthroat tactics and courtroom demeanor, decided that he could no longer act this way. He was walking away from law: "Too much fighting, too much ego. I am not happy with the person I have become." One year later, that same man could be found volunteering for an organization that provided legal help for immigrants and *agunos* (literally, a chained woman, a Jewish woman who is unable to remarry, either because her husband is missing or he refuses to give her a get, *halachic* divorce). His talents, which had once been used for defendants of all kinds, and which earned him considerable sums of money, were now being used in the battle to help those who were unable to help themselves.

When asked what had changed, he replied, "My personality remained the same. I am still combative and fierce, and, in the courtroom, I continue to be unyielding and zealous. Now, however, I am doing it for the right Person. I wish more skilled people would do the same."

Hashem, indeed, has many agents at His service. In this circumstance, he used the raven to teach we have no concept of irredeemable. When we look at ourselves and see flaws --- instead of becoming despondent -- we should redirect those flaws toward a positive purpose, and suddenly they will no longer be flaws, but opportunities. Rather than break our nature, we should elevate it. When one breaks something, he may not be able to fix it. When he elevates it, he has already fixed it.