

Dovetailing With Raven

A Teaching from Rabbi Gershon...

Listen. This is important.

Let me tell you the difference between Dove and Raven.

Raven is about setting out on an endeavor with a determination to complete it that borders on obsession. In other words, Raven says: "I am not moving on with my life until I've achieved what needs to be done."

When our ancestor Noah sent Raven out of the ark to find out whether the flood had subsided, Raven "flew to and fro, to and fro, until the waters dried-up" (Genesis 8:7). In other words, Raven had no intention of returning to the ark until the flood had completely dried-up; he could not move on with his life until the task he took on had been completed, which was to return with news that the flood was over. At least that is how Raven chose to interpret his quest, that you gotta go and go and go until there's nowhere left to go – before resuming your personal life and moving on. We see this again later on in regard to the ravens who fed our prophet Eliyahu and who are described as continuously bringing him food "until the river dried-up" (First Kings 17:4-7).

So, that's Raven.

Dove, on the other hand, takes its task no less seriously than does Raven, but, unlike Raven, she does not become obsessive about it. She leaves the ark with the same quest in mind, but after a good try and realizing it was taking up too much of her personal life, she **returns** to the ark and moves **on** with her life. When she returns, Noah reaches out to receive her (Genesis 8:9), which does not happen in the Raven account because Raven, again, wasn't coming back – at least not until the earth had completely dried-up.

Again, unlike Raven, Dove returns with nothing to report and moves on with her life until a week or so later when she is asked to try again (Genesis 8:10). So, Dove is about trying really hard, making all the necessary efforts to get done what needs to get done on behalf of the world, but not at the expense of your personal life. **It** matters too. She does what she can, and knows when to suspend the task and move on, which in turn re-energizes her for her next go at it.

Sure enough, on her **second** attempt, inspired by having moved on with her personal life, she returns with good news. There is dry land other than the peaks of Ararat, and the earth is healing. And in her beak, a freshly-plucked leaf from an olive tree. Why an **olive** leaf? Why not a leaf from a mulberry tree or a fig tree? Explain the sages: “The dove prayed, and said ‘Master of the Universe -- Far better that I be dependent upon **you** and what **you** choose to feed me, even if it be bitter like olives, than be dependent upon humans and what **they** choose to feed me even if it be sweet as honey” (*Talmud Bav’li, Eruvin 18b*).

Thus, Dove is symbolic of hope in the restoration of that which has crumbled, and trust in the unfolding of the Infinite-**All** rather than in the promises of the finite **some**. And it is this faith which enables it to take time out from saving the world to nourish its own, and conversely to trust in the process rather than presume to control it.

Both Raven and Dove are essential teachers. The wisdom of each is crucial, especially during these times. It would behoove us to let the inspiration of both rub off on us – of Raven, to empower us with tenacious determination, and of Dove, to remind us to step off the pedal now and then and coast; not to forget to return to the ark now and then, and move on with our lives. Like the badly-maligned Pharisees taught us: “The Sabbath was given into your hands, and you were not given into the hands of the Sabbath” (*Talmud Bav’li, Yoma 85b*). Likewise, with your noble endeavors. While the fixing of the world belongs to you, you do not belong to it. Or, to paraphrase the second-century Rabbi Tar’fon: “The day is short, the task is huge, and the workers are idle, and the reward is great, and the Master of the House is urging. And yet, the task is not laid upon you with the intent or expectation that it is within your capability or responsibility to complete it; and neither are you free of the innate passion to do so, that you can in any way disengage yourself from it” (*Mishnah, Avot 2:15-16*).

We’ve got a lot to deal with today; much to be concerned about; a slew of issues to remedy. But while we are engaged in our quest, we must not forget to move on. We must remember to every now and then return to the ark.

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