

# FUCHSBERG JERUSALEM CENTER CONSERVATIVE YESHIVA

## TORAH SPARKS

Parshat Metzora—Shabbat HaGadol

April 20, 2024 | 12 Nissan 5784

Torah: Leviticus 14:1–15:33 Triennial: Leviticus 14:1–32

Haftorah: Malachi 3:4–24

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**We believe that in times of great strife, words of Torah can provide stability and comfort in our lives.**

We know that you join us in praying for the safety of our soldiers and citizens, and that together we mourn the terrible losses already suffered.

**We stand together for a strong and secure Israel.**

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### Freedom

Bex Stern-Rosenblatt

*Parashah*

The ritual by which a person with skin disease is permitted to return home involves wild birds. One is slaughtered outside of the camp and the other is dipped in its blood before being sent away, flying far far away. The text does not specify what type of birds these were. In a description overflowing with detail, the lack of naming for these birds is noteworthy. Usually, when we talk about sacrifices in Leviticus, the birds being sacrificed are doves or pigeons. But these birds are not being sacrificed. This ritual happens outside of camp, far from the realms of holiness and purity.

Scholar Jacob Milgrom argues that these birds are sparrows. They are wild and undomesticated. They come from outside of camp and have no desire to get into the camp. In being sent away, they are being sent home, because their home is the wild, the face of the field, the horizon. The word for sparrow is דורר, a word that also means freedom. In the Talmud, b. Beitzah 24a and b. Shabbat 106b, we find an explanation of this double meaning: “We are dealing with a free bird, a sparrow, because it does not accept authority... Why is it called a free bird [tzippor doror]? Because it dwells [dara] in a house as it does in a field.” The sparrow is free because it is wild, because it is not bound by home, by community, by tradition.

Meanwhile, the person with skin disease just had a taste of this sort of freedom. They too were sent out of the camp. They were removed from home, from community, from tradition. Their very bodies became foreign to them, something from which they needed to be liberated. It was as if their souls were trying to escape the forms that held them, to burst out.

Until the skin disease subsides, that person remains in this sort of freedom, outside of the community. They could choose to fly away, to leave, to refuse to accept authority and find their home in the wild, open field. But they don't. Rather than looking out at the horizon, the person with skin disease looks back at the camp from which they have been removed. They submit gratefully to the authority of the *kohen*

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who comes to check if they are ready to return to camp. Living in freedom, the person with skin disease wants to return to order.

Milgrom writes: "The entire purification process is nothing but a ritual, a rite of passage, marking the transition from death to life. As the celebrant moves from the realm of impurity outside the camp, restored first to his community, then to his home, and finally to his sanctuary, he has passed from impurity to holiness, from death to life, is reinstated with his family, and is reconciled with his God."

There is in each of us the potential to have skin disease. There is something that wants wild freedom. To wander, restless, over the next horizon while drenched in the blood of our fellow. But, push comes to shove, we do not want wild freedom. It terrifies us.

On the holiday we call *hag haHeirut*, the holiday of freedom, we impose on ourselves order. We turn to the rules and the rules about the rules so that we do not lose ourselves. We step into freedom just as the person with skin disease steps outside of camp - bringing the roadmap with us to a return to community, counting the days to Shavuot.