The Secrets of the Dove

As we read Shir HaShirim on Shabbos and say the familiar pasuk:

**שיר השירים פרק ו**

**(ג) אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי לִי** הָרֹעֶה בַּשּׁוֹשַׁנִּים:

**Shir HaShirim 6:3**

**I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine,** who grazes among the roses.

Yet during these difficult and tragic times, we might e forgiven for thinking it appropriate to be reading a different megillah:

**איכה פרק א**

**(א) אֵיכָה יָשְׁבָה בָדָד הָעִיר רַבָּתִי עָם** הָיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה רַבָּתִי בַגּוֹיִם שָׂרָתִי בַּמְּדִינוֹת הָיְתָה לָמַס:

**Eicha 1:1**

**O how has the city that was once so populous remained lonely!** She has become like a widow! She that was great among the nations, a princess among the provinces, has become tributary.

There is one creature however, who connects both megillos, and teaches something profound and relevant to the current situation, and that is the dove. The metaphor of the dove is used no less than six times in Shir HaShirim:

Hashem tells us עֵינַיִךְ יוֹנִים your eyes are like doves, He calls us יוֹנָתִי My dove and אַחַת הִיא יוֹנָתִי תַמָּתִי - My dove, my perfect one.

The Midrash in Shir HaShirim Rabbah lists a number of things that are similar about the Dove and the Jewish people. I want to focus on just two of those things:

**Firstly, the dove displays tremendous fidelity to its mate.**

שיר השירים רבה (וילנא) פרשה א

מַה יּוֹנָה זוֹ מִשָּׁעָה שֶׁמַּכֶּרֶת בֶּן זוּגָהּ, עוֹד אֵינָהּ מְמִירָה אוֹתוֹ בְּאַחֵר, כָּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִשָּׁעָה שֶׁהִכִּירוּ לְהַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, לֹא הֱמִירוּהוּ בְּאַחֵר.

Just as this dove, from the time that it recognises its mate, it will never exchange him for another, so too Yisrael from the time they recognised God, they will not exchange Him for another.

*The ibn Ezra explains this in relation to the nature of the dove:*

אבן עזרא שיר השירים פרק א פסוק טו

(טו) עיניך יונים - כעיני יונים כי מנהג בני יונה שלא להתחבר אלא עם הזוג שלה:

Your eyes are like those of the dove: for the way of the dove is that it will not mate with any other, except its own mate.

**Secondly, the dove never abandons its nest.**

שיר השירים רבה (וילנא) פרשה א

מַה יּוֹנָה זוֹ אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁאַתְּ נוֹטֵל גּוֹזָלֶיהָ מִתַּחְתֶּיהָ, אֵין מַנַּחַת שׂוֹבָכָהּ לְעוֹלָם, כָּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁחָרַב בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא בִּטְּלוּ שָׁלשׁ רְגָלִים בַּשָּׁנָה

Just as the dove – even though you can take its chicks from under it, never abandons its nest, so too Yisrael – even though their Temple has been destroyed have not ceased to celebrate their festivals three times a year.

**A Tzaddik in our Time page 448 onwards**

Towards the end of the first Perek in Shir HaShirim, the Pasuk says, "Behold you are beautiful, my beloved, behold you are beautiful; your eyes are like doves.”

Rabbi Aryeh Levin zt”l, the famous Tzadik of Jerusalem, related that when he would see the Gaon, Rabbi Chaim Berlin zt”l, reciting Shir Hashirim, he noticed that he would cry when reciting this Pasuk. When Reb Aryeh asked him to explain why he would cry, he told Reb Aryeh the following story:

When Rabbi Berlin was a Rav in Moscow, a Jew came to him in the middle of the night and told him that his wife had given birth to a boy and he requested that the Rav come to circumcise his son. He told him, however, that he would have to come in the middle of the night, otherwise the man's life would be in danger. The Rav asked him why he is willing to put his life in danger to have a Bris for his son, considering the fact that he is not even religious.

His answer was that his son will probably also not be religious, but if he would ever want to return to a life of Torah and Mitzvos, it should be easier for him if he already had a Bris and for that he was willing to put his life in danger.

Rabbi Berlin explained that the text compares the Jewish people to a dove.

The Medrash Rabah (Shir HaShirim 1:15) explains Klal Yisroel’s comparison to a dove based on the dove’s nature to never abandon its coop entirely. The Gemara in Bava Basra states that due to this, a dove, even when having to part from its coop, will always remain within eyesight of it. Similarly, Klal Yisrael, R’ Chaim explains, although some of them will distance themselves from Hashem greatly, they will not cut themselves off from Him entirely. For in the depths of their hearts, they constantly hope to return.

**What about Eicha?**

Although the dove is not mentioned explicitly in Eicha, the Midrash references a pasuk in Tzephania in relation to the city of Yerushalayim. Tzephania was a contemporary of Yirmiyahu.

צפניה פרק ג פסוק א

הוֹי מֹרְאָה וְנִגְאָלָה הָעִיר הַיּוֹנָה:

Tzephaniah 3:1

Woe to her who is filthy and polluted-the dove-like city.

איכה רבה (וילנא) פתיחתות

הָעִיר הַיּוֹנָה, לֹא הָיָה לָהּ לִלְמֹד מֵעִירוֹ שֶׁל יוֹנָה, מִנִּינְוֵה, נָבִיא אֶחָד שָׁלַחְתִּי לְנִינְוֵה וְהֶחֱזִירָהּ בִּתְשׁוּבָה, וְאִלּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם כַּמָּה נְבִיאִים שָׁלַחְתִּי אֲלֵיהֶם.

Eicha Rabbah

The ‘oppressing city’ Ought Yerushalayim not have learnt from the City of Yonah (Nineveh)? I sent one prophet to Nineveh and she repented. But to Israel in Yerushalayim I sent many prophets!

The Midrash Gadol lists עיר היונה as one of the names of Yerushalayim. This was the city that should have inspired connection – with HaShem and with one another. Due to our aveiros, it has caused division, and therefore destruction.

**Our current Galus**

This is not just Galus as we have known it. This is a Galus from our own shuls and kehillos. Later in Shir HaShirim, Shlomo HaMelech uses the metaphor of the dove in a different way.

שיר השירים פרק ה

(ב) אֲנִי יְשֵׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֵר קוֹל דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק פִּתְחִי לִי אֲחֹתִי רַעְיָתִי **יוֹנָתִי** תַמָּתִי שֶׁרֹּאשִׁי נִמְלָא טָל קְוֻצּוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי לָיְלָה:

Shir HaShirim 5:2

"I sleep, but my heart is awake. Hark! My beloved is knocking: Open for me, my sister, my beloved, **my dove**, my perfect one, for my head is full of dew, my locks with the drops of the night."

Hashem is comparable to the dove, which upon identifying her mate does not let him consort with any other bird, so too, He will never let me leave Him. However far we think we have become distant from Hashem, He has complete fidelity to us. This reminds me of another Gemara.

**Tefillin of Hashem**

**אָמַר רַבִּי אָבִין בַּר רַב אַדָּא, אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק: מִנַּיִן שֶׁהַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא מַנִּיחַ תְּפִילִּין שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״נִשְׁבַּע ה׳ בִּימִינוֹ וּבִזְרוֹעַ עֻזּוֹ״.**

**The Gemara cites another aggadic statement: Rabbi Avin bar Rav Adda said that Rabbi Yitzḥak said: From where is it derived that the Holy One, Blessed be He, wears tefilin? As it is stated: “The Lord has sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength”** (Isaiah 62:8). Since it is customary to swear upon holy objects, it is understood that His right hand and the arm of His strength are the holy objects upon which God swore.

״בִּימִינוֹ״ — זוֹ תּוֹרָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״מִימִינוֹ אֵשׁ דָּת לָמוֹ״, ״וּבִזְרוֹעַ עֻזּוֹ״ — אֵלּוּ תְּפִילִּין, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״ה׳ עֹז לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן״.

Specifically, “His right hand” refers to the Torah, as it is stated in describing the giving of the Torah: “From His right hand, a fiery law for His people” (Deuteronomy 33:2). “The arm of His strength,” His left hand, refers to tefilin, as it is stated: “The Lord gave strength to His nation” (Psalms 29:11), in the form of the mitzva of tefilin.

וּמִנַּיִן שֶׁהַתְּפִילִּין עוֹז הֵם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל — דִּכְתִיב: ״וְרָאוּ כׇּל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ כִּי שֵׁם ה׳ נִקְרָא עָלֶיךָ וְיָרְאוּ מִמֶּךָּ״. וְתַנְיָא, רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר הַגָּדוֹל אוֹמֵר: אֵלּוּ תְּפִילִּין שֶׁבָּרֹאשׁ.

The Gemara asks: And from where is it derived that tefilin provide strength for Israel? As it is written: “And all the nations of the land shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon you, and they will fear you” (Deuteronomy 28:10). It was taught in a baraita that Rabbi Eliezer the Great says: This is a reference to the tefilin of the head, upon which the name of God is written in fulfillment of the verse: “That the name of the Lord is called upon you.”

**אֲמַר לֵיהּ רַב נַחְמָן בַּר יִצְחָק לְרַב חִיָּיא בַּר אָבִין: הָנֵי תְּפִילִּין דְּמָרֵי עָלְמָא מָה כְּתִיב בְּהוּ? אֲמַר לֵיהּ ״וּמִי כְּעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד בָּאָרֶץ״.**

**Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak said to Rav Ḥiyya bar Avin: What is written in the tefilin of the Master of the world? Rav Ḥiyya bar Avin replied: It is written: “Who is like Your people, Israel, one nation in the land?” (I Chronicles 17:21).** God’s tefilin serve to connect Him, in a sense, to the world, the essence of which is Israel.

וּמִי מִשְׁתַּבַּח קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא בְּשִׁבְחַיְיהוּ דְּיִשְׂרָאֵל? אִין, דִּכְתִיב: ״אֶת ה׳ הֶאֱמַרְתָּ הַיּוֹם״. וּכְתִיב: ״וַה׳ הֶאֱמִירְךָ הַיּוֹם״, אָמַר לָהֶם הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: אַתֶּם עֲשִׂיתוּנִי חֲטִיבָה אַחַת בָּעוֹלָם, וַאֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה אֶתְכֶם חֲטִיבָה אַחַת בָּעוֹלָם.

Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak continues: Is the Holy One, Blessed be He, glorified through the glory of Israel? Rav Ḥiyya bar Avin answered: Yes, as indicated by the juxtaposition of two verses; as it is stated: “You have affirmed, this day, that the Lord is your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His laws and commandments, and listen to His voice.” And the subsequent verse states: “And the Lord has affirmed, this day, that you are His treasure, as He spoke to you, to keep His commandments” (Deuteronomy 26:17–18). From these two verses it is derived that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel: You have made Me a single entity [ḥativa] in the world, as you singled Me out as separate and unique. And because of this, I will make you a single entity in the world, and you will be a treasured nation, chosen by God.

**Our relationships**

The relationships we have with one another, help to form a paradigm for our relationship with Hashem, especially it is parent-child relationships or husband-wife relationships. Children need to know that whatever they have done wrong, there is a way back – a parent will never forsake a child. Spouses need to nurture their relationship in such a way, that means that when there is tension, when there are issues, there can be a way back – a roadmap to reconcile.

One of the most remarkable stories I heard from the former Chief Rabbi of the UK, Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, was that of Lena Rustin. Lena was an internationally known speech-language therapist who specialized in treating stuttering. She recognised that to help children who stutter, you must look at the family dynamic as a whole. She discovered that young children are actually afraid to lose their stammers, and so to create a more positive atmosphere she got each family member to praise everyone else in their family for something that they had done once a day.

The daily praise we exhibit towards Hashem – either through our tefilah, or through wearing our tefillin, is reflected back to us through His praise of Klal Yisrael.

During these times of distance, pressure and challenge, we would do well to offer praise to those close to us – view our relationships like those of the Dove and b’ezras Hashem, bring redemption for us, our families and the whole of klal Yisrael.