



## How Can We Learn Emuna from a Chicken?

### Being a Small Poultry Farmer

It seems that we have been chicken owners as long as we've lived in Bat Ayin – for about 27 years. None of us had any prior experience raising birds, but chickens are easy to take care of. I do remember as a child visiting the farm of our au-pair girl. I saw how they would pluck the feathers of a newly slaughtered chicken and remove the gizzard, peeling off its outer peel, within which there were remains from her last meal, including undigested grass and grain. I've just learned that a gizzard (*Kurkevan*) with an inner membrane that can be peeled off is one of the four signs of a kosher bird listed in the Talmud. The main criteria distinguishing a kosher bird is that it must not be a predator. It must have a muscular pouch, or crop, near the throat to store food and an extra toe. Additionally, when they stand on a wire, they have three toes in front and one in back. These distinctive features of kosher birds are not mentioned in the Torah but only in the Talmud (*Chulin* 59-63). The *Shulchan Aruch* furthermore specifies that the eggs of kosher birds must be pointed at one end and round at the other (*Yore De'ah* 86:1). *Parashat Shemini* lists the kosher requirements for various animal: Fish require fins and scales. Mammals require split hooves and they must chew their cud. However, the written Torah doesn't provide any definitive signs for birds or fowl. Instead, the Torah lists twenty species of non-kosher fowl (*Vayikra* 11:13-19), plus sub-species (for a total of 24 – see *Talmud Chulin* 63a). Non-kosher birds include owls, pelicans, eagles, ostriches, vultures and more. I connect with the notion that we may not eat scavengers, carnivores or birds of prey. These are not characteristics that we want to absorb at all. Only pure animals are fit for a Jew to eat. We can easier elevate their more refined character through mindful eating especially on Shabbat and holidays.

### Birds and Purity

Perhaps the reason why there are no identifying markers for kosher birds in the written Torah is because birds, in general, are purer than other animals. Therefore, the Torah only lists the exceptions – the limited amount of impure birds. All other birds, not singled out by the Torah as impure are kosher by default.

**סַפֵּר וַיִּקְרָא פֶּרֶק יֵא פֶסוּק יג וְאֵת אֵלֶּה תִשְׁקֹצוּ מִן הָעוֹף לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ שִׁקְצָהֶם...**

“Among birds, you shall consider these an abomination; they shall not be eaten; they are abominable...” (*Vayikra* 11:13).

However, due to the many uncertainties as to the precise identities of the non-kosher birds listed in the Torah, we cannot be sure which birds are identified by the Torah. Therefore, in practice, Torah law rules that only birds with a tradition of being kosher may be eaten. These include chicken, duck and geese. Maharal explains why kosher birds are used in the purification ritual from *tza'ra'at* (a spiritual illness that is considered as death). This is because these birds are associated with life due to the swiftness of their movements. This is contrary to death which is stagnant and devoid of movement. Moreover, the refined substance of the bird allows it to soar high in the sky. This explains why, according to my neighbor, looking at chickens engenders purity. She told me that she heard that somewhere, (I haven't found her source). Therefore, she visits with me in our chicken coop to soak up some purity vibrations.

## The Dedicated Motherhood of Our Feathered Friends

Most birds are very good mothers, and it is a joy to watch the way a mother bird untirely teaches her chicks how to eat and fly up onto the perch. They also cover their chicks with their wings at night, providing a snug, warming shelter. From the birds, Ruth learned her expression to Boaz at the pivotal moment, "Spread your wings over your handmaid for you are a redeemer" (*Ruth* 3:9). Among all the special features of birds, I find the way they hatch their chicks by patiently sitting on eggs most inspiring. For a chicken, it takes exactly 21 days of sitting on the eggs before the cute, little egg-sized chicks hatch. During this period, she hardly moves- not even to eat, or drink, let alone to ruffle her feathers. Below is a poem I wrote many years ago when my chicken strengthened my emunah, while I was struggling with secondary infertility.

### Emuna from a Bird

My little brown hen  
was sitting on eggs.  
I do not know  
exactly since when.  
She was sitting and sitting and sitting,  
just sitting and doing her bidding.

Her entire being she would invest  
to shelter and never leave her nest.  
I would impatiently try to keep track,  
when would those eggs ever crack?  
She was sitting and sitting and sitting,  
just sitting and doing her bidding.

Too much time seemed to have gone by,  
I tried anxiously to figure out why,  
why did I interfere  
with her natural way to rear?  
No one else had so much care.

She would hardly get up to eat  
or peck around in the sun.  
In order not to leave her seat,  
she would give up all the fun.  
She was sitting and sitting and sitting,  
just sitting and doing her bidding.

She sacrificed her entire being,  
even her own health,  
to give life to those inanimate  
pitiful rounded shells.  
From where did she get her faith  
that her labor would bear fruit?  
perhaps she just stuck to her task  
even if nature would not follow suit?  
She was sitting and sitting and sitting,  
just sitting and doing her bidding.

I feel like a bird as well  
yearning to reach the sky,  
waiting for the future tell  
that my time has come to fly.  
Must I really be sitting and sitting  
just sitting and doing my bidding?  
My wings ache to be used,  
my heart to be directed well.  
I feel ready and all enthused  
but how can I penetrate the shell?  
How long must I be sitting?  
just sitting and doing my bidding?