



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

B'HAR-B'CHUKOTAI

## Swallows and Freedom

"Proclaim liberty in the land to all its inhabitants" (Vayikra 25:10).

These words from the sidra are part of American history. They figure on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

They are noble words. But if one looks at them in detail, they raise a number of questions.

The P'nei Yehoshua asks why the Torah says YOSH'VEHA, "its inhabitants" and not AVADEHA, "its servants".

The answer is that it is not only servants who need freedom - everyone does. Even if you have freedom, you have to learn how to value your freedom.

If you do not appreciate freedom, or peace, or health, or family, or any other blessing you may have, it is as if you have lost them.

Many commentators focus on the word used for freedom in this verse, D'ROR.

Rashi quotes Rabbi Yehuda who links

it with DIRA, a dwelling. "Why the expression D'ROR? To show that freedom is when you may choose where to dwell without others compelling you".

According to the dictionaries the root of the word is DARAR, to stream or flow abundantly; hence D'ROR is the free run that comes with freedom.

D'ROR also means a swallow (see Psalm 84:4). The Talmud explains (Shabbat 106b) that the swallow is a bird that does not yield to capture or taming and "it lives in a house as in the field".

## Not So Bad; Not So Good

The Reader lowers his voice for the TOCHACHA. No-one should get the idea that he enjoys enunciating the threats of punishment that come from disobedience.

Even though the congregation realise that they are not his words but God's, there is still the risk that someone will say, "I noticed that at a particular point he looked straight at me and raised his voice. He was obviously telling everyone that that particular verse was written with me in mind!"

The fact is that we do sometimes quote a nasty passage from somewhere and apply it to someone we want to criticise. It is not a nice habit, but it happens.

**There actually is an antidote to this attitude hinted at in the TOCHACHA. There are blessings as well as curses.**

**The lesson is that no-one is entirely bad. Nor for that matter are they entirely good. They are not as bad as you think they are. Nor are they as good as they themselves think they are.**

**This applies to ourselves - not only to others. How are you or I to judge ourselves? We are not as bad as we fear or as good as we imagine.**

**This may also be a good way to judge events and situations, to say things are both better, and worse, than they appear to be. -OZ**

**Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH**