



Parshas Chukas

June 30, 2017

A Taste of Torah

Red Heifers and Jelly Beans

by Rabbi Eli Mozes

The parsha opens with the laws of the enigmatic Red Heifer. A true Red Heifer which conforms to all of the halachic limitations was so rare that in all of history to date, there have only been nine of them. A unique form of a sacrifice was performed with it. It was not offered in the Temple as all other sacrifices, but, rather, to the east of the Temple on the Mount of Olives. After the heifer was incinerated, its ashes were used to make the special Heifer Water. The sprinkling of this water was the only way that one who had contracted *tumah* (ritual impurity) due to contact with a corpse could become *tahor* (ritually pure). Conversely, the *kohen* (priest) who sprinkled the water on the *tamei* person became impure from this action, thus introducing to the ultimate Jewish paradox: How can the very same action which makes the *tamei* pure also make the pure *tamei*?

While this is all nice and interesting, there doesn't seem to be much relevance here for us. We haven't had a Temple for almost 2,000 years and we are no longer particular about being pure. Even if we would want to ascend to the Temple Mount and advance to the area where the Temple once stood, we couldn't because we don't have that Heifer Water to bestow the necessary purity to allow such an approach; what relevance can this have for us?

The *sefer* Yosher Divrei Emes relates that the students of the Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem; c. 1700-1760) asked him the above question with a twist: "We know that the Torah is eternal and is relevant to each and every generation, but what relevance could there possibly be in the laws of the Red Heifer?" The Baal Shem Tov replied that within these laws lies an important and very practical lesson.

When it comes to the various obligations and prohibitions in Judaism, there is equality before the law. The greatest

tzaddik and the simplest Jew both have the same obligation to perform each and every mitzvah. As it states in the beginning of Parshas Nitzavim (Devarim 29:9), "You are standing today... the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers - all the men of Israel... from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water, for you to pass into the covenant of Hashem." However, this is only true as far as actions go. When it comes to the intentions behind the actions, the demands upon the *tzaddik* are completely different - in fact, opposite, as we will learn - from that of the simple Jew.

The Zohar relates that when Rebbi Abba came to Israel, he announced, "Whoever wants wealth in this world and everlasting life in the World-to-Come, come and learn Torah." Along came a man by the name of Yosi and said, "I am looking to get rich quick, I will take you up on the offer." Rebbi Abba accepted him into the yeshiva and instructed his students to refer to him by the title Rabbi Yosi the Eminent Tycoon. A few days later, Yosi came to Rebbi Abba and complained that his instant wealth hadn't materialized yet. Rebbi Abba suppressed his anger at this young man's *chutzpah* and said, "Don't worry, my son, you just learn and I will arrange your wealth." As they were talking, a gentlemen strode in with a large satchel. He proceeded to remove from the satchel a number of exquisite gold artifacts. He turned to the rabbi and said, "I recently received a large inheritance, but I never had the opportunity to study Torah. I am looking for a scholar to financially support so that I may have a share in the Torah. These gold artifacts are a down payment of my future commitment to extravagantly support the scholar of your choosing." Rebbi Abba called over Yosi and said, "Here is your man!" The gentleman handed over the satchel and arranged for a system of future payments. Now that Yosi's financial ambitions were

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Stories For The Soul

Anger Management

A couple once came to their rebbe in the midst of an argument, each one angrily exclaiming that the other was at fault. As the couple stood there fighting, the rebbe interrupted them.

"I have the perfect way to resolve all your problems!" he proclaimed. "My solution will ensure you will not argue or fight. I have in my possession special holy water. When you place it in your mouth for ten minutes, it ensures you will calm down and not allow your anger to flare up."

The couple eagerly accepted a large flask of the holy water. They returned home, happy that an end to their marital issues was at hand.

The next time the husband got angry at his wife, he quickly took out the bottle and placed some of its contents in his mouth. He held it there for about ten minutes, whereupon he spit it out. Lo and behold, he was no longer upset at his beloved wife! The wife had the same experience when she began to grow exasperated. Soon enough, marital harmony was restored in their home.

One of the rebbe's followers, hearing about the miraculous, calming waters, asked the rebbe what their secret was.

The rebbe laughed. "There is no secret at all! I am simply causing the angry party to wait for ten minutes. During that time, the anger dissipates, and harmony is restored!"

Our Sages tell us that Moshe got angry three times, including in this week's parsha at the Waters of Strife. As great as he was, our Sages tell us that when Moshe came into contact with the trait of anger, he erred. While a show of anger may be in place upon certain occasions, one must think long and hard before displaying such an emotion.

Kollel Happenings

LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING THIS JULY 4TH

Start your day off on the right foot with Torah study! Join the Kollel for learning at three locations around Denver: At the Kollel West Denver Bais Medrash, shacharis at 8 am followed by breakfast and learning. At the Kollel Southeast Torah Center, shacharis at 8 followed by breakfast and learning, and at EDOS, shacharis at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning. Topic being studied is *Minding Everyone's Business: Dina Dimlachusa in the Business World*.

SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention bachurim in Denver over the summer! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Side Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursdays. Night seder begins at 8 pm, with ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the sederim. For further details, info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact rmf@denverkollel.org.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: What custom, practiced today by Sephardic communities regarding Rosh Chodesh coinciding with Shabbos, would be halachically prohibited under certain circumstances?

A: When Shabbos precedes Rosh Chodesh, the regular *haftara* is substituted with a special *haftara* called *Machar Chodesh* (Shmuel I Ch. 20). When Shabbos coincides with Rosh Chodesh, a special *haftara* called *Hashamayim Kis'i* (Yeshayahu Ch. 66) is read. This holds true even if Rosh Chodesh is on Shabbos and Sunday. The Sephardic custom is to append the opening and closing verses of *Machar Chodesh* to the end of *Hashamayim Kis'i* in this scenario. This seems to be in violation of the halacha that a *haftara* may not consist of passages from more than one

book of Nach. One of the justifications for this custom was given by the Terumas Hadeshen (Rabbi Yisroel Isserlin), one of the leading Ashkenazic authorities in the 15th century. (It appears this custom was practiced in some Ashkenazic communities of his time.) He explains that it is only an issue if traditional scrolls are used for the *haftara* reading, and rolling from one place to another causes unnecessary delay for the listeners. We, however, who read the *haftara* from a book, may read from multiple books of Nach.

(Sources: Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 425:2 and Bais Yosef, Orach Chaim 144)

This week's question: What great tragic event in Jewish history took place on the 9th day of Tammuz?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Shlomo Luria, the Maharshel Part VI

The Maharshel wrote a number of Torah works. He wrote a major work on the Talmud and halacha titled *Yam Shel Shlomo*.

Though it was written on seventeen Talmudic tractates, only seven are extant today.

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met, he started focusing more on his studies and, in a short while, started to truly taste the sweetness of Torah. One day, Rabbi Abba found Yosi crying. "What's wrong?" he asked. Yosi replied, "I can't believe I was so foolish to value gold more than Torah! What was wrong with me?" "Congratulations!" replied Rabbi Abba. "You have now reached the level of learning Torah for its own sake, without any ulterior motives." He then took the gold artifacts and the rest of the wealth which he had received and divided it up among all of the students, so that the gentleman would have a merit in all of their Torah study. The Zohar concludes that because of this story Yosi came to be known as Rabbi Yosi ben Pazi (*paz* is Hebrew for fine gold) who is mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud.

The Talmud (Pesachim 50b) teaches us, "A person should always engage in Torah study and mitzvos even not for its own sake (i.e., even with an ulterior motive),

because performance not for its own sake will eventually lead to [performance] for its own sake." With this, the Baal Shem Tov explained to his students, one who isn't ready to serve Hashem altruistically must find ulterior motivation. However, one who already has the ability to serve Hashem with pure intentions, yet sets his sights on some other reward, is sullyng his good actions. This, he concluded, is the practical lesson of the Red Heifer, where what purifies the *tamei* is the very same catalyst to defile the *tahor*.

This is a very practical lesson for us, for we need to conduct a sincere audit of our spiritual standing and figure out what we could be doing and accomplishing spiritually, if only we had the right motivation. At the same time, we need to see if there are things which we do regularly where we have reached the level that we can ditch the jelly beans (or some other more advanced form of incentive) and continue with purer intentions.

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