

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Tzav/Parah

Leviticus 6:1-8:36, Numbers 19

Torah Reading for Week of March 16-22, 2003

The Parshah of Tzav ("command"), continues G-d's instruction to Moses of the laws of the *korbanot*, the animal and meal offerings that were the central feature of the service in the Sanctuary. "**Command** Aaron and his sons," says G-d to Moses:

This is the law of the Ascending Offering: It is offering that ascends upon the pyre of the Altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the Altar shall be kept burning in it.

*The priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put on his flesh, and take up the ashes which the fire has consumed with the Ascending Offering on the Altar, and he shall put them beside the Altar. And he shall put off his garments, and put on **other** garments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place.*

And the fire upon the Altar shall be kept burning in it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the Ascending Offering in order upon it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the Peace

Offerings.

A constant fire shall burn upon the Altar; it shall never go out.

As in the previous **Parshah of Vayikra**, here, too, are recounted the laws of the "ascending offering" (*olah*), meal offering (*minchah*), sin offering (*chatat*), guilt offering (*asham*), and peace offering (*shelamim*). In the repetition, many new details are added. A general difference is that Vayikra addresses itself to the one bringing the *korban*, while the laws of Tzav are addressed to the Kohen ("priest") who offers it up upon the Altar, outlining his duties and specifying the portions of the *korban* that are **given to him**.

Thus we read of the **Kohen's duty** to keep the fires of the Altar constantly burning, and to remove the accumulated ashes each morning (an action called *terumat hadeshen*, which was the first activity of the daily service in the Sanctuary). We also learn that each Kohen was obligated to bring a **meal offering** on the day that he was initiated into the service of the Sanctuary; the *Kohen Gadol* ("High Priest") brought a meal offering **each day**, half of which was offered in the morning, and the other half in the afternoon. These offerings, as well as any other type of meal offering brought by a Kohen, are burned entirely on the Altar. Meal offerings brought by everyone else are eaten by the Kohanim, after a "handful" has been removed for burning on the Altar.

Commentary

AND G-D SPOKE TO MOSES, SAYING: COMMAND AARON AND HIS SON... THIS IS THE LAW OF THE ASCENDING OFFERING... (LEVITICUS 6:1-2)

The expression *tzav* ("command") implies an urging for now and for future generations.

(Torat Kohanim; Rashi)

The king Moshiach will arise and restore the kingdom of David to its glory of old, to its original sovereignty. He will build the Holy Temple and gather the dispersed of Israel. In his times, all the laws of the Torah will be reinstated as before; the sacrifices will be offered, the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee year instituted as outlined in the Torah.

(Maimonides)

IT IS OFFERING THAT ASCENDS UPON THE PYRE OF THE ALTAR (6:2)

The location of the Altar is very exactly defined, and is never to be changed... It is a commonly-held tradition that the place where David and Solomon built the Altar on the threshing floor of Arona, is the very place where Abraham built an altar and bound Isaac upon it; this is where Noah built [an altar] when he came out from the ark; this is where Cain and Abel brought their offerings; this is where Adam the First Man offered a *korban*

when he was created—and it is from [the earth of] this place that he was created. Thus the Sages have said: Man was formed from the place of his atonement..

(Maimonides)

Ten miracles were performed for our forefathers in the Holy Temple: No woman ever miscarried because of the smell of the holy meat. The holy meat never spoiled. Never was a fly seen in the slaughterhouse. Never did the High Priest have an accidental seminal discharge on Yom Kippur. The rains did not extinguish the wood-fire burning upon the altar. The wind did not prevail over the column of smoke [rising from the altar]. No disqualifying problem was ever discovered in the *Omer* offering, the Two Loaves or the Showbread. They stood crowded but had ample space in which to prostrate themselves. Never did a snake or scorpion cause injury in Jerusalem. And no man ever said to his fellow "My lodging in Jerusalem is too cramped for me."

(Ethics of the Fathers 5:5)

IT IS OFFERING THAT ASCENDS UPON THE PYRE OF THE ALTAR (6:2)

Why is the word *mokdah* ("pyre") written in the Torah with a miniature *hei*? To teach us that the fire in one's soul should be understated; it should burn within, but show nothing on the outside.

(The Rebbe of Kotz)

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The sin offering and the guilt offering are both **eaten by the Kohen**, after the prescribed *chalabim* (veins of fat) are removed and burned on the Altar. It is strictly forbidden to leave over any part of the *korban* past the prescribed time (one day and one night for the *chatat* and *asham*, two days and the intervening night for the *shelamim*). Even the residue absorbed by the pot in which the meat was cooked becomes forbidden for consumption; thus:

An earthen vessel in which it is cooked shall be broken; and if it be cooked in a copper pot, it shall be scoured and rinsed in water

The Torah also sets down the rules as to which Kohen should receive these portions of the offerings:

The priest that offers any man's ascending offering, the priest shall have for himself the hide of the ascending offering which he has offered.

Meal offerings that are baked in the oven, and those that are prepared in the pot and in the pan, shall be the priest's

that offers them.

And every meal offering mingled with oil, and dry, shall all the sons of Aaron have, one as the other.

Meat and Bread

As for the *shelamim* (peace offering), after the prescribed *chalabim* are burned on the Altar, the Kohen who did the offering receives two portions of the animal: the *chazeh* (chest) and the *shok* (right hind leg). The rest of the meat is eaten by the owner (the one who brought the offering).

One who brings a *shelamim* also brings an accompanying meal offering, which includes three types of cakes, all prepared with olive oil: unleavened loaves, flat matzot, and loaves made of boiled flour (also unleavened). In a certain type of *shelamim*—the *todah* or “thanksgiving offering,” brought by a person who has **survived** a life-endangering occurrence—a fourth type of cake was added: leavened loaves (leaven was permitted in this case, since no part of the said loaves were offered on the Altar itself). The Kohen received one of each type of cake, while the remainder were eaten by the owner.

The portions of the *korbanot* that were eaten—whether by the Kohen or by the owner—had to be eaten “in holiness”—within the parameters of their prescribed time, their prescribed place (depending on the type of *korban*, either within the Sanctuary Courtyard or within the city walls of Jerusalem), and the person eating them had to be in a state of ritual purity (*taharah*).

Commentary

AND THE PRIEST SHALL PUT ON HIS LINEN GARMENT, AND HIS LINEN BREECHES SHALL HE PUT ON HIS FLESH (6:3)

“His linen garment”—this teaches us that the priestly garments must fit the priest's measure, and must not drag on the floor or be raised above. (The word used here for “his garment,” *mido*, literally means “his measure”).

“And his linen breeches shall he put on his flesh”—this teaches us that there must be nothing intervening between his flesh and the priestly garments..

(Talmud, Yoma 23b; Rashi)

AND HE SHALL PUT OFF HIS GARMENTS, AND PUT ON OTHER GARMENTS (6:4)

Clothes in which he cooked for his master, should not be worn when serving a goblet to his master.

(Talmud, Yoma 23b)

AND THE FIRE UPON THE ALTAR SHALL BE KEPT BURNING IN IT... AND THE PRIEST SHALL BURN WOOD ON IT EVERY MORN-

ING (6:5)

Although a fire descended from heaven upon the Altar, it is a mitzvah to add to it a humanly produced fire.

(Talmud, Eravin 63a)

This is a rule that applies to all areas of life: the gifts of life are bestowed upon us from Above, yet it is G-d's desire that we add to them the product of our own initiative.

(The Chassidic Masters)

**AND THE FIRE UPON THE ALTAR SHALL BE KEPT BURNING IN IT... AND THE PRIEST SHALL BURN WOOD ON IT EVERY MORN-
ING (6:5)**

There is a fire of love for G-d that burns within every soul. It is the task of the “Kohen”—the spiritual leaders of the generation—to feed and preserve this fire.e.

(Alshich)

A CONSTANT FIRE SHALL BURN UPON THE ALTAR; IT SHALL NEVER GO OUT (6:6)

“Constantly”—even on Shabbat; “constantly”—even under

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Again the Torah repeats its warning that those portions of the *korban* offered on the Altar—the specified veins of **fat and the blood**—must not be eaten in any animal eligible for sacrifice (i.e., cattle, sheep or goats; in birds, whose fat was not specifically offered, only blood is forbidden).

Our Parshah concludes its section on the *korbanot*:

This is the law for the ascending offering, for the meal offering, for the sin offering, for the guilt offering, for the inauguration offering, and for the sacrifice of the peace offering; which G-d commanded Moses in Mount Sinai, on the day that he commanded the children of Israel to present their offerings to G-d, in the wilderness of Sinai.

Inauguration

The Torah now relates how Moses initiated Aaron and his sons into priesthood during the "Seven days of Inauguration" (Adar 23 to Adar 29), as Moses had been instructed in the Parshah of Tetzaveh.

Commentary

conditions of ritual impurity; "it shall never go out"—also not during the journeys [through the desert, when the Altar was covered with a cloth of purple wool]. What did they do with the fire during the journeys? They placed over it a copper bowl.

(Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma 4:6)

Shabbat is when we disengage ourselves from all things material; "ritual impurity" (*tum'ah*) represents an opposite state—one of excessive enmeshment in the mundane. Yet the Torah instructs that the fire upon the Altar must be kept burning "even on Shabbat" and "even under conditions of ritual impurity."

There are times when we believe ourselves to be "above it all" as the spirituality of the moment transports beyond the so-called trivialities of physical life. Conversely, there are times when we feel overwhelmed by those very "trivialities." Says the Torah: the fire on your internal Altar must—and can—be kept burning at all times. No moment in your life is too exalted or too debased to sustain your passion and enthusiasm in the fulfillment of the purpose to which you were created, which is to raise up to G-d the materials of your everyday existence.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

On each of these seven days, Moses erected the Sanctuary, anointed it with the Anointing Oil, dressed Aaron and his sons in the priestly garments, and anointed them. On each of these days Aaron and his sons brought a series of offerings, while Moses officiated as the priest and offered them on the Altar. These were: a bullock brought as a *chatat*, and two rams—one as an *olah* and the second as a specially ordained "ram of inauguration" (the procedure followed was similar to that of the *shelamim*).

And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons:

Cook the meat at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and there eat it with the bread that is in the basket of the bread of consecration... And that which remains of the flesh and of the bread shall you burn with fire.

And you shall not go out of the doorway of the Tent of Meeting for seven days, until the days of your consecration be at an end: for seven days shall he consecrate you...

And Aaron and his sons did all the things which G-d had commanded by the hand of Moses.

The Red Heifer

In addition to the Torah reading of Tzav, this week's reading is supplemented with the section of "Parah" (Numbers 19), in which G-d commands to Moses the law of the Red Heifer.

(Parah is read in preparation for the upcoming festival of Passover. Three times a year, on Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot,

"It shall never go out—also not during the journeys." Special care must be taken during the "journeys" of life—the times that a person ventures away from the home environment that fosters his character and integrity—so that the fire in his soul should not succumb to alien influences.

(Maayanah Shel Torah)

AND THE REMAINDER SHALL BE EATEN BY AARON AND HIS SON... IT IS THEIR PORTION, WHICH I HAVE GIVEN TO THEM FROM MY FIRE (6:9-10)

The Kohanim receive from the Supernal Table.

(Talmud, Chulin 120a)

G-d said to the Kohen: You eat at My table, and you drink at My table. This is comparable to a king of flesh and blood who gave gifts to his sons, and to one son he gave no gift. Said the king to this son: "Though I have given you no gift, you shall eat at My table, and you shall drink at My table." (The Kohanim received no land when the Holy Land was apportioned to the tribes of Israel).

(Sifri)

THIS IS THE OFFERING OF AARON AND OF HIS SONS... A MEAL

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all Jews were obligated to come to the Holy Temple and offer korbanot; on Passover, the korban pesach ("pascal lamb") was also brought. To enter the Holy Temple and to eat the meat of the offerings, one had to be in a state of taharah, ritual purity. Parah instructs how a person rendered ritually impure by contact with a dead body is purified.)

And G-d spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying: This is the decree ("chok") of the Torah which G-d has commanded.

Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring to you a red heifer without defect, in which there is no blemish, and upon which never came a yoke.

And you shall give her to Elazar the priest, that he may bring her outside the camp, and she shall be slaughtered before him. And Elazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood towards the front of the Tent of Meeting seven times.

And the heifer shall be burnt in his sight: her skin, her flesh, her blood, even her dung, shall be burnt. And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer.

Then the priest... and he that burns [the heifer]... and he that gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the evening...

This is the law: when a man dies in a tent, all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel, which has no covering bound upon it, is unclean. And whoever touches one that is slain with a sword in the open field, or a dead body, or a bone of a man or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.

And they shall take for the unclean person of the ashes of the burnt purification offering, and living water shall be put upon it

Commentary

OFFERING PERPETUAL, HALF OF IT IN THE MORNING, AND HALF OF IT AT NIGHT (6:13)

The High Priest's daily offering was a meal offering, the offering of a poor man. This, for two reasons: that a poor man bringing his pauper's offering to the Sanctuary should not be ashamed; and to awaken humility in the High Priest's heart, with the appreciation that before G-d he is the equal of the most impoverished of his brethren.

(Abarbanel)

The priest brought a meal offering on the day that he began serving in the Sanctuary, while the High Priest brought one every day. It is a mark of greatness that a person regards his every day as a new beginning in which he strives to transcend all his previous achievements.

(Maayanah Shel Torah)

THIS IS THE LAW OF THE SIN OFFERING... THE KOHEN THAT ATONES SHALL EAT IT (6:18-19)

The Kohanim eat, and the owner of the *korban* achieves atonement.

(Talmud, Pesachim 59b)

AND EVERY MEAL OFFERING MINGLED WITH OIL, AND DRY (7:10)

The "meal offering mingled with oil" is the donated Meal Offering (whose "handful" is removed before baking); the "dry"

Meal Offering is the one brought as a sin offering or by the *sotah* (woman accused of adultery), which did not contain any oil.

(Rashi)

IF HE OFFERS IT IN THANKSGIVING... (7:12)

There are four who are required to bring a thanksgiving offering: one who traverses the sea, one who crosses a desert, one who was ill and recovered, and one who was imprisoned and was released.

(Talmud, Berachot 54b)

THIS IS THE LAW FOR THE ASCENDING OFFERING... (7:37)

What is the significance of the verse, "This is the law for the ascent-offering, for the meal-offering, for the sin-offering, and for the guilt-offering?" It teaches that whoever occupies himself with the study of the Torah is as though he were offering an ascent-offering, a meal-offering a sin-offering, and a guilt-offering... Whoever occupies himself with the study of the laws of the sin-offering, it is as though he were offering a sin-offering; and whoever occupies himself with the study of the laws of the guilt-offering, it is as though he were offering a guilt-offering.

(Talmud, Menachot 110a)

SPEAK TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THAT THEY BRING TO YOU A RED HEIFER (19:2)

Nine Red Heifers were prepared from the time that the Jewish people were commanded this mitzvah until the Second Temple was

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in a vessel. And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon [him].

The clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean person on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day [the unclean person] shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at evening... [But] he

that sprinkles the water of sprinkling... and he that touches the water of sprinkling shall be unclean until the evening...

Commentary

destroyed. The first was prepared by Moses, the second by Ezra, and another seven were prepared from Ezra until the Temple's destruction. The tenth Heifer will be prepared by Moshiach, may he speedily be revealed, Amen, may it so be the will of G-d.

(Mishneh Torah)

The Mishneh Torah is a purely legal work. As he explains in his introduction, Maimonides included only the final rulings of Torah law, leaving out the reasoning and deliberations behind them, in order to make it a readily accessible guide to daily life for all. Also in those rare cases in which Maimonides appears to "digress" and interject a philosophical insight or some background information, upon closer examination these always prove to be a statement of law and a practical instruction on daily living.

The same is true of the above quoted passage. At first glance, it appears to be a brief piece of history concerning the Red Heifer, followed by a prayerful appeal to the Almighty to send Moshiach. But Maimonides is demonstrating to us the true definition of "belief in Moshiach." To believe in Moshiach is not just to believe that he will someday come, but to expect his coming on a daily, hourly, and momentary basis. It means that no matter what you are discussing, the subject turns to Moshiach at the slightest provocation. It means that in the midst of arranging the laws of the Red Heifer, a spontaneous plea erupts from the depths of your heart: "May he speedily be revealed, Amen, may it so be the will of G-d!"

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

A RED HEIFER (19:2)

A maid's child once dirtied the royal palace. Said the king: "Let his mother come and clean up her child's filth." By the same token, G-d says: "Let the Heifer atone for the deed of the Calf."

(Midrash Tanchuma)

THIS IS THE LAW (TORAH): WHEN A MAN WHO DIES IN A TENT... (19:14)

Resh Lakish said: From where do we learn that words of Torah endure only in he who kills himself for it? Because it says, "This is the Torah: when a man dies in the tent..."

(Talmud, Berachot 63b)

THE CLEAN PERSON SHALL SPRINKLE UPON THE UNCLEAN PERSON... AND HE SHALL BE CLEAN AT EVENING... [BUT] HE THAT SPRINKLES THE WATER OF SPRINKLING... SHALL BE UNCLEAN (19:19-21)

All who are involved in the preparation of the Heifer from beginning to the end, become impure, but the Heifer itself purifies the impure! But G-d says: I have made a chok, decreed a decree, and you may not transgress My decrees.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

The fact that the ashes of the Heifer "purify the contaminated and contaminate the pure" carries an important lesson to us in our daily lives: If your fellow has been infected by impurity and corruption, do not hesitate to get involved and do everything within your power to rehabilitate him. If you are concerned that you may become tainted by your contact with him, remember that the Torah commands the Kohen to purify his fellow Jew, even though his own level of purity will be diminished in the process.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

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FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

THE CALF'S MOTHER

Certainly the most esoteric chapter in the Torah are the laws of the “Red Heifer” (*Parah Adumah*), commanded by G-d to Moses (Numbers 19) as an antidote to the state of ritual impurity engendered by contact with death. The Midrash describes how King Solomon, “the wisest of men,” was baffled by it; and how Moses, the very vehicle of G-d’s communication of His Torah to man, turned pale upon encountering the prospect of contamination by death, and found utterly incomprehensible the process of its rectification, crying out to G-d: “Master of the universe! This is a purification?!”

It’s not just that the law of the Red Heifer cannot be logically explained; indeed, there exists an entire category of mitzvot, called *chukim* (“decrees”), whose defining criteria is that they transcend human understanding. What’s unique about the Red Heifer is that while the other *chukim* at least follow an internal logic of their own, the laws of the Red Heifer are fraught with paradox and inconsistency. To cite but several of numerous examples:

a) The ashes of the Red Heifer remove the most severe of all impurities; yet those involved in its preparation become ritually impure themselves.

b) The Red Heifer must be completely red (as few as two hairs of a different color disqualify it)—a color which has connotations of sin and deficiency in Torah and Torah law; yet it must also be “perfect, without blemish.”

c) The Torah commands that it be slaughtered outside the holy city of Jerusalem (in contrast with other *korbanot*, which must be slaughtered in the courtyard of the Holy Temple). On the other hand, it must be slaughtered within the sight of the Holy Temple and its blood is sprinkled “toward the Holy of Holies”; according to one opinion, it must be slaughtered by the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) himself, wearing the “white garments” reserved for the Yom Kippur service in the Holy of Holies.

d) The two components of the purifying mixture—ashes and spring water—represent two contradictory forces: fire, which represents the power of ascent, and water, which embodies the quality of “settling down” and saturation.

Thus the laws of the Red Heifer are introduced by the Torah with the word “This is the *chok* of the Torah”, as if to say: this is the Torah’s ultimate *chok*, the mitzvah that most vividly demonstrates the supra-rationality of its divine commandments.

The Mystery of Death

Indeed, explains the Lubavitcher Rebbe (in a talk delivered upon the conclusion of the *sheloshim* (30-day mourning period) after his wife), the most incomprehensible of human experiences—the phenomenon of death—can be sublimated only with the most incomprehensible of divine mitzvot, the ashes and water of the Red Heifer.

Physically and biologically, death makes perfect sense (indeed, it is the phenomenon of life that defies explanation). Yet we all—even a man such as Moses—find death utterly incomprehensible, utterly devastating to our sense of reality. Despite all the “evidence” to the contrary, something deep inside us insists that life is the natural, axiomatic state of the human being, and that its cessation is a violation of the most basic law of existence.

For such, in truth, is the fundamental nature of man. True, the human body is physical flesh, and as such, shares the dissolutive nature of all things physical. But it is animated by a soul that is a “spark of the Divine” and fortified with the eternity and indestructibility of its Source. In essence, human life is eternal.

Indeed, the first man was created to live forever. But then he violated the Divine will, thereby distancing himself from his Source and introducing the phenomenon of death into the human experience.

Our Sages tell us that when the Children of Israel stood at Sinai to receive the Torah from G-d, they were restored to the original perfection in which man was first created. The Torah reinstated the original, unadulterated bond between G-d and man, so that man was once more granted “freedom from the Angel of Death.”

But this time, too, the state of perfect connection to G-d was short-lived. Forty days after the people of Israel stood at Sinai, they transgressed the divine decree “You shall have no other gods before Me” by worshipping a calf of gold. The pestilence of death, introduced into the world by Adam’s sin and banished at Sinai, was reintroduced by the sin of the Golden Calf.

This explains the connection between the Red Heifer and the Golden Calf expressed in the Midrashic

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parable:

A maid's child once dirtied the royal palace. Said the king: "Let his mother come and clean up her child's filth." By the same token, G-d says: "Let the Heifer atone for the deed of the Calf" (Midrash Tanchuma, Chukat 8).

In our post-Calf world, the imperfection in our relationship with G-d finds its most noxious expression in the phenomenon of death. Contact with death thus spawns the most severe form of spiritual impurity, which can be mitigated only by the mother of the Golden Calf, the most supra-rational of the divine decrees—the Red Heifer.

This was G-d's reply to Moses' cry, *Master of the universe! This is a purification?! "Moses,"* G-d said, "it is a *chok*, a decree that I have decreed." Certain things are so overwhelming to My creations that they can only be overcome by submitting to an absolute command from an absolute authority. I have therefore commanded laws to instruct you what to do when your lives are touched by death. These are supra-rational, even irrational laws, for only such laws can facilitate your recovery. It is only by force of an utterly incomprehensible divine decree that you can recover from such utter devastation to a living being's self-definition.

Ultimately, however, there will come the day when the original bond between man and G-d will once more be restored. This time, our prophets promise, it will be immune to disruption by sin, since G-d will "slaughter the inclination for evil" in the heart of man and "remove the spirit of impurity from the earth," with the result that "death shall cease forever."

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,
adapted by Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com*
