

23 Adar, 5772 (17/03/02) *Shabbat Parah: Counting Down to Passover* J. M. Terrett

Vayakhel-Pekudei Assembled-Accountings of The Permanent Presence
Torah: Ex. 35:1-38:20/38:21-40:38

(1) **35:21.** And they came, everyone whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing and brought the L-rd's offering to be used for the tent of meeting and for all its service, and for the sacred clothing.

(2) **39:43.** Moses examined all the work and behold, they had done as the L-rd had ordained, they had done it in this manner and he blessed them.

(3) **40:16.** The first day of the first month of the second year, the tabernacle was set up.

(4) **40:38.** During the day, the cloud of the L-rd was upon the Tabernacle and at night there was a fire in the eyes of all the House of Israel during all of their journeys.

Haftarah: I Kings 7:13-26, 40-50 / I Ki. 7:51-8:21

(5) 7:21 He set up the (bronze) columns at the vestibule of the temple; he set up a pillar on the south (right) and called in Jakin (He shall affirm), and he set up the pillar on the north (left) and called it Boaz (in him the strength).

(6) 8:2. All the men of Israel gathered together unto King Solomon in the month of Ethanim, which is the seventh month, during the festival (of Sukkoth)

Brit Chadashah: Heb. 9:1-11/8:1-12

(7) **8:6.** Now Yeshua has obtained a more **superior ministry**, to the degree that He is the mediator of a more **excellent covenant** which was enacted through **better promises**.

Shabbat Parah: Num. 19:1-22/ Ezek. 36:16-38 (26, 27 – I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove from your body a heart of stone and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and I will make it so that you follow my ordinances and that you observe and practice my laws).

Ps. 61, 45 Jewish Hero: People of Southern Israel enduring Rocket Attacks
Chazak, Chazak, V'Nitchazek

I Corin. 5:6-8. Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little bit of leavening, leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old leavening so that you may be a new batch of dough, for Messiah, who is our Passover has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the festival, not with the old leavening, the leavening of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of purity and truth.

Today is the Sabbath of the **Red Heifer** which always follows the story of the **golden calf**. It is a sad tale about the first time the **idolatrous core** among the people rose up and tried to take over the camp during the absence of Moses. Just before the covenant was sealed and the rituals of the presence were established, the people were almost snatched away from the promises into criminal disobedience. We are not given much detail, but you should know that all that was taught in the Book of Leviticus and much of the early part of the Book of Numbers occurs during the year the children of Israel camped around the mountain.

There were at least two things which had to occur before they were ready to leave. First of all, they had to receive all the **instructions** which were necessary for them to walk with the L-rd, not just during their journeying to the Promised Land, but also in their generations as a permanent beacon to the nations, to shine the way back to the L-rd until Messiah came.

The next thing that had to be completed was the **sacrificial, celebratory system** which would allow the L-rd to dwell in their midst permanently and to be available to the people ritually and sacrificially, again until messiah came.

The tragedy of the golden calf needs to be a warning to us that just because we were delivered from the Egypt of this world, there is always ***the potential in all of us to wander away from obedience and to construct disobedience which is equivalent to the golden calf.***

Let me speak first about the red heifer. There is some speculation about what this ritual means and there are even rumours of a special breed of red cattle being developed in order to allow this provision to become a reality again. Such nonsense! Our L-rd, the Messiah came to us bearing **two images**. He is first the **Lamb of G-d**, who offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. He is also the **red heifer** (yes ladies, a female reference), the One who came in the image of Adam's flesh to destroy the defiling power of sin in our lives.

Today, I just want to do two things in my sermon. First, I want to talk to you about the meaning of the Red Heifer and then I want to talk to you about what it means to remove the old leavening of sin from our lives, so that we do not allow golden calves to be built in our hearts and lives as we begin our final preparations to celebrate this year's Passover Seder.

Our L-rd came into our midst with Adam's flesh (**parah adamah** – Adam's cow) in order to battle with the sinfulness which is constantly trying to wrest control of our hearts and lives from G-d and rebel in ways similar to what happened when the golden calf was built, ***right at the foot of the mountain which trembled and blazed with the glory of G-d.***

Our L-rd battled the same categories of tendencies which all of us face as human beings and just as the first red heifer was spotless (**the sinless likeness of sinfulness**), so that His spotless life not only guarantees us **eternal salvation** because of the cross, it also guarantees us **victory over sinfulness** in our own hearts and lives, because of His own victory over sin in His life.

This Sabbath speaks of the two functions which our Messiah fulfills. As the **Lamb** He is the perfect sacrifice to atone (pay) for the sins of the world, ***past, present and future***. As the red heifer, He is the **expiation**, or **cleansing agent** whose blood removes even **the stain of forgiven sin**. He paid the penalty and He also removes the shame and the stain of that which is forgiven so that no further trace of it lingers in our lives.

The **glory of the lamb** and the **shame of the red heifer** meet in the person of our Messiah and He sets us free from our **shame** and brings the **glory** of forgiveness and victory to our Hearst and lives again and again, which leads us to the passage in I Corinthians.

When the children of Israel left Egypt, they did not wait for their bread to be leavened with the **infected leavening** of Egypt. They were not to bring any of the **evil influences** of Egypt with them and they were not to allow any of the subsequent evil influences of Canaan to take root in their midst. They were to confront the evil which came from the **outside** and that which came from the **inside** and they were to live their lives as **Matzah**, as unleavened bread free of any of the evil or malice that tried to grow up from the inside or enter from the inside.

There is so much rich symbolism when we consider the relationship of the **red heifer** to the **Passover Lamb** and compare it to the symbolism of the **leavening of sin** with the **unleavened bread of righteousness and purity**.

It is as if we have two potential spiritual realities which are constantly trying to take over our lives, both from the inside and from the outside: **glory** or **shame**, the **lamb** or the **calf** – both of which are dealt with by the life and sacrifice of our blessed Messiah, who is both the Lamb of G-d and the Red Heifer.

The **shame of the golden calf** is removed by the **cleansing of the red heifer**. The penalty of sin was paid for by the spotless lamb of G-d so that we can obtain both forgiveness and also cleansing (I John 1:9) when we come to Him, who is both the lamb and the heifer.

Right after Paul had to deal with a shameful episode in the life of the Corinthian congregation, he warns them that we live in a world **infected with the leavening of sin** and we have to be constantly on guard against its influence in our lives. We have to be both delivered from Egypt and also have to be delivered from any subsequent sinful influences which would want to take root and fester in our midst.

When we come to the L-rd, we are set **free** and **purified** and we receive our salvation forever as **a onetime act with eternal consequences**. However, as we travel through this life in all of our generations, and in all of the situations we can encounter, we need to maintain our lives free of the leavening of sin – the leavening which had infected the Corinthian congregation and which stands at doors of each of our hearts and which needs to be confronted at least two ways

We need to renew our **forgiveness** whenever we wander from the commands or our L-rd and we need to renew our **cleanliness**, so that what caused us to wander does not remain in our hearts to continue to pollute us, even after we have been forgiven. **We need to be forgiven and to be cleansed.**

Forgiveness does not take long and involves re-establishing our standing with the L-rd. Cleansing sometimes takes longer and just as the defiled people in Numbers 19 had to be sequestered for seven days and receive two treatments of the water of cleansing before they were declared cleansed, **sometimes it takes a while for the effects and for the influences of sinfulness to be removed from our lives.**

Just as we are instructed to go through our houses before Passover and remove the leavening (in memory of the time it took our people to remove themselves from Egyptian territory), we are also reminded to go through our heart and lives and both **prevent** sinfulness taking root and also to root it out once it takes root in our lives, **before our entire life becomes infected.**

Let me conclude with a severe, comforting illustration.

Every time we come back to the spotless lamb, who is also the spotless heifer, we are cleansed and we are also transformed back into unleavened bread, no matter how much leavening we were infected with and we move next towards dealing with contents of our hearts and lives which allowed the leavening to take root.

We take the power of both forgiveness and of cleansing and we remove all the influences which would like to infect us all over again and **transform the loaf of our livers into an infected, leavened disaster.**

Here is the **comfort**- no matter how often this occurs, He will forgive us when we return to Him and He will scrub us clean, showing us the evil influences which infected us (the sources of leavening we allowed into our lives).

Here is the **severity** – no matter how often we are forgiven and cleansed, unless we deal with the sources of leavening, they will take root again and again and we will be separated from Him and need to repeat the process until we get it right.

Will you get it right this year?

Will you get it right with the sources of **leavening** He shows to you?

Will you let His cleansing power remove the leavening or will you allow some of it to **linger** and **lurk** in your heart, to re-infect you once the cleansing is complete?

Do you realize that you live in an **infected world** and do you do **regular spiritual housecleaning** so that no more leaven comes in from the word in which we live?

Do you realize that leavening can come from the **inside** as well as from the **outside**?

Are you letting the L-rd be your **Lamb** as well as your **heifer**?

May we allow both His **forgiveness** and His **victory** to be the places we live and the realities we experience, time and time again as we journey through this life to our final destination!

May we live **unleavened lives**, not because of what we avoid as much as how we cleanse and remove the influences which we encounter!

Shabbat Parah shalom!

May the Lamb and the Heifer bless you as we prepare both to celebrate the festival and as we prepare to live for the L-rd of the festival!

Let's pray.