

Weekly Words of Torah

If the Parah Adumah Can Have a Happy Ending, So Can Our People: Parshat Tzav / Shabbat Parah

Framing

This year, alongside Parshat Tzav, we read Parshat Parah - the extra section chanted for Maftir on a Shabbat after Purim, during the second half of the month of Adar. The additional portion, which comes from Numbers chapter 19, describes the ritual of the Red Heifer, in which a wholly red-colored female cow is burnt and its ashes are made into a mixture that is used as a purification remedy for those who have become ritually impure by coming into contact with human corpses. Post-October 7, this one sentence description alone can put us into a negative space, with its trigger words of burning, death, and corpses. But what if the deep meaning of Parshat Parah is actually a happy one, meant to help us heal, rather than push us spiraling downwards?

Access Points

■ **The original story of the Red Heifer is a very sad one.** Indeed, when we read Bamidbar chapter 19 in situ, as the first part of Parshat Chukat, we must understand that this purification ritual described in just 22 verses actually represents 38 long years of the Israelites' lives in the desert. Right before this chapter, we find ourselves reading about the Israelites' second year in the desert, at which time we learn of the awful sin of the spies, wherein the Israelites make a huge fuss about not wanting to enter into the Land of Israel because they are afraid. The result of this sin is a devastating consequence: anyone over the age of 20 will not enter into the land, and indeed, the entire nation will wait as long as it takes for that generation to die out before they will cross over into the Promised Land. So they wait, and wait, and wait, for 38 years, while people die, and die, and die. The literary representation of that entire time is this one chapter about the Parah Adumah as the antidote, so to speak, to the constant ritual impurity of death. (After this chapter, we re-enter the story of the Israelites in the desert in their 40th year.) When you think about it for just a moment, the constant refrain of death manifested by the Red Heifer rite can feel downright crushing.

■ **However, the story of the Red Heifer as part of the four special Shabbatot of the month of Adar is not sad at all.** The reason the rabbis instituted the custom of reading this section of text during the second half of the month of Adar, after Purim has come and gone, is because in order to be ready to make the traditional pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem for Pesach, Jews needed to be ritually pure. In other words, this is the time of year, both in ancient times and today, when people need to be reminded to get themselves in ritual order, whatever that consists of for each person. And as such, it is (simply and deeply) a call to get ourselves ready for the exciting and meaningful upcoming festival of Passover!

■ If we look at the Red Heifer text that is scary and triggering in one context, but affirmative and life-giving in another, can we also get ourselves to a place where we believe, with all our hearts, that with all of us taking action, we can turn the story of the 134 hostages still in Gaza upside down as well? That in just a short time, the entire enterprise of this website can become moot, and we can move on to healing our beloved returnees, our people, and our world, and preparing ourselves ritually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually for a reenactment of the Exodus from Egypt that will mean so much more this year than ever before?

Call to Action

This week, go broad: urge Netflix to stream the documentary *Supernova: The Music Festival Massacre*, so that **the entire television-watching world** can get the message about Hersh and the other 133 hostages still imprisoned in the hell of Hamas captivity.

[Click here. It will bring up some option boxes in which you can request movies for Netflix to air.](#)

Simply copy this:

Supernova. The Music Festival Massacre

and paste it into the box.

The whole world has to know, and this is one way to make that happen.

Closing Intention

Yetziat Mitzrayim was too miraculous to be believed before it happened. But it did happen. Now is the time for our people to make our own miracle. If every single one of us speaks up - if every single one of us puts our strength toward bringing the hostages home - we can make the unbelievable happen today.

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