

Shiur L'Yom Sheni¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Chukat:*** Numbers 19:1-22
 Haftarah: Judges 11:1-7
 B'rit Chadasha: John 3:10-15

Tell B'nei Yisrael to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish.
[Numbers 19:2]

Today's *Chukat* Meditation is Proverbs 7:1-4;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 12, *Sh'ma Koleinu* [Hear Our Cry!]

Vayedaber Adonai el-Moshe v'el-Aharon l'emor – And the Holy One spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying . . . ***Zot chukat ha-torah asher-tzivah Adonai*** – these are the trustworthy ordinances of Torah that the Holy One enjoins . . . Numbers 19:1-2a.

As *Chukat* opens we find the Covenant Nation wandering around the 'Desert of Paran'. Having listened to and trusted in the slander of the spies concerning the land that the Divine Bridegroom had prepared for us as a bridal chamber², we have rejected and refused to enter into, much less attempt to possess, the promised land of the Holy One. And we are now *reaping the consequences* of that rejection and refusal. An entire generation – the very generation the Holy One brought out of Egypt 'with a mighty hand and with an uplifted arm, and with great miracles' is in the process of 38 1/2 years of dying in the desert. Not one of us who is over 20 years old – save Kalev [Caleb] and Y'hoshua [Joshua] – will ever make it out of this desert.

We are not wandering aimlessly. We are being Divinely directed in all our travels. We are just not going anywhere in particular. When the Holy One's pillar of fire and cloud lifts off the desert floor, and moves, we get up off the desert floor, pick up stakes, and move. When the pillar of fire and cloud stops, *we stop* and set up camp.

We walk, and walk, and walk, and walk, then sit, and sit, and sit, and sit. Then we walk, and walk, and walk some more. Everywhere we go, water flows from a rock to quench our thirst. Manna appears for us every morning during each period of 'shesh yamim' [six days]. On every seventh day we immerse ourselves in holiness,

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² To listen as someone else speaks *l'shon ha-ra* is as much a violation of Torah as to speak it oneself. Hence the Holy One instructs us in Torah "***Do not accept a false report***". Exodus 23:1.

blessing, delighting in a time of ‘just us’ and ‘just trust’, and enter into a supernatural, other-worldly level of intimacy with our Bridegroom-King.

No matter how much we walk, our sandals do not wear out. But *our sandals are certainly handling this wilderness experience a whole lot better than we are*. Unlike our sandals, *we* wore out a long time ago. We who once declared to the Holy One with fervent passion under the Chuppah at Sinai “*Na’aseh v’nish’mā*” - i.e. *we will do (whatever You say), and we will sh’mā (Your Voice)*] – well, we *talked the talk* alright, but we just couldn’t – or maybe just wouldn’t - *walk the walk*. First we built and worshipped a golden calf. Then we grumbled and complained at every stop in the desert. Worst of all, when we got to K’desh Barnea, we flat out refused the Holy One’s gift of the promised land. In short, we have rebelled against Moshe, Aharon and the Holy One *too many times to count*. And now, *worn out* is perhaps the best description of what we are. Oh, we don’t grumble as much any more. We don’t gripe at Moshe near as often over the lack of leeks, onions, or meat. Neither idealistic revolutionaries like Korach nor opportunistic demagogues like Datan and Aviram can be found among us much these days. We who were over 20 at the time of the *chet ha-meraglim* [sin of the spies] have finally accepted our well-deserved fate. And those of us who are under 20 years of age, are growing up ‘desert tough’- and resigned not to repeat our mistake. Our new motto is ‘*Never again*’.

Oh, do not misunderstand. The new generation is no *better* than the previous one. The new generation has its own ‘issues’. This new generation will face its own set of insurmountable challenges, its own array of irresistible temptations. It will, in time, experience its own series of colossal failures. This new generation will at times behave even more disgustingly than their forefathers did. It will not by any means be because of any superior *merit* in this new generation that it will be the one that enters into and possesses *Eretz Yisrael*. But enter into and possess that land it will. The Holy One will, *for the sake of His own glory* – not the glory of this new generation or of any of its members – soon pick the whole nation up on eagle’s wings and take it into the very land that we refused to possess.

What Does This Have to Do With A Red Heifer?

Heretofore we have heard nothing of a *red heifer*. Heretofore, all animals we were to bring to the *Mish’kan* [Tabernacle] for any reason were males – bulls, rams, he-goats. Now, however, at the point we who were delivered from bondage in Egypt are entering into the final stages of judgment, when people the Holy One once redeemed from bondage are ‘dying in the desert’ like flies, the divine writer of Torah sees fit to record the following instruction:

Zot chukat ha-torah asher-tzivah Adonai l’emor

This is the ordinance of the torah which the Holy One spoke,

daber el-b'nei Yisra'el

saying "Speak unto the children of Israel

veyikchu eleycha farah adumah

and have them bring to you a completely red cow

tmimah asher eyn-bah mum asher lo-alah aleyha ol.

which has no blemish, and which has never had a yoke on it.

Unetatem otah el-El'azar ha-kohen

Give it to Elazar the priest,

v'hotzi otah el-michutz l'machaneh

and he shall have it brought outside the camp.

v'shachat otah l'fanav.

It shall then be slaughtered in his presence.

V'lakach El'azar ha-kohen midamah b'etzba'o

Eleazar the priest shall take the blood with his finger

V'hizah el-nochach penei ohel-mo'ed midamah sheva pe'amim.

and sprinkle it toward the Communion tent seven times.

V'saraf et ha-parah l'eynav

The cow is then to be burned in [Elazar's] presence.

et-orah v'et-bsarah v'et-damah al-pirshah yisrof.

Its skin, flesh, blood and entrails are to be burned.

V'lakach ha-kohen etz erez v'ezov ush'ni tola'at

The priest is to take a piece of cedar wood, some hyssop, and crimson [wool],

V'hishlich el-toch s'refat ha-parah.

and throw it upon the burning cow.

V'chibes begadav ha-kohen v'rachatz b'saro ba'mayim

The priest is then to immerse his vestments and his body in a mikvah,

v'achar yavo el ha-machaneh v'tamei ha-kohen ad ha-arev.

and remain tamei until evening, after which he may come into the camp.

Hmmmmn. What is *this* all about, you ask? You are not alone, Beloved. An ancient Midrash quotes King Shlomo [Solomon] - about whom it is written: "***Shlomo was wiser than every man on the face of the earth***") -- as saying about this passage:

*"I was able to comprehend all the [other difficult passages in the Torah],
but with regard to the passage of the Red Heifer,
I asked and I sought; "I said, 'I will become wise,'*

*but I [saw that it was far from me]."*³

If Shlomo – the wisest man that ever lived – couldn't figure this one out, **HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO MAKE SENSE OF IT?**

Learning the Script One Page At a Time

The Holy One knows we learn best through *doing*. He knows we are primarily *visual* and *kinetic* learners. If we see something done, and do it ourselves a few times, it becomes *real* to us. So, many things (like the *moed'im* [feasts], the *mikveh* [immersion in water with every change in status], and the *korbanot* [what we call "sacrifices" or "offerings"]) are scripted for us by the Holy One, created as Divine Dramas designed to teach and transform our "head knowledge" into ***practical wisdom and trustworthiness***.

We have all seen plays and/or movies in which an actor or actress we know has taken on a role very different from their personality. It is also well known that most actors and actresses *actually assume* (during the play's run or the filming of the movie, at least) *the different personality they are portraying*. It is called "getting into the part". They become who the playwright wants them to be, to fulfill his purposes. They trust that every line, every page, every prop, and every scripted movement, however insignificant or unconnected it may seem at the time, is a necessary part of the whole. They will understand it when it is over. And that is okay. Meanwhile, they just do it because it is in the script.

It does not take a spiritual genius to understand that the Holy One is the Playwright of our lives. It does not take much wisdom to understand that we are the actors and actresses in His play. It is painfully clear that we have to step *outside our personalities* when we step forward to play a role in His Divine Drama. It is in *the script* of the Holy One – scripted meditations, scripted words, and scripted conduct -- that we find the vehicle for being transformed from self-consumed blobs of humanity into what the Holy One creates us to be, to fulfill His purposes. The leading man in the drama is Messiah. All our roles find meaning in His. But the Holy One desired for the world to come to understand His Character by the way in which we, His people, act out their roles in relation to Messiah.

Let us not only study the script, Beloved. Let us not only go through the scripted motions and say the scripted words. It is time to *get into the part*, and be transformed into the image the Playwright desires to create – the image of sons of God. The world is waiting. All creation is groaning in eager expectation. The show must go on.

³ This is one midrashic interpretation of Ecclesiastes 7:23.

Today's aliyah confronts us with a "*chukah la olam*" - a script that will endure as long as the world endures - for the Holy One's People. The script relates to the passage from death to life. It uses a prop – the ashes of a red heifer, mixed with "living" water⁴. It teaches us that being in the presence of death (the ultimate curse of the sin in the garden of Eden) has an adverse effect upon the Holy One's people, that requires an *act of separation*.

The Importance of the Red Heifer to Us Today

Our aliyah for today describes the important *ceremony of the red heifer*. Rabbinical law forbids Jews from setting foot on the Temple Mount, thus violating the site where the Holy of Holies dwelled, until and unless they are ritually purified. Stay with me on this. Since water containing the ashes of a perfect red heifer is required for 'ritual purification', according to Rabbinic law, those who most wished to build a Third Temple could not do so. According to Torah, you see, the ashes of a Red Heifer are necessary in order to carry out religious rituals in a rebuilt Temple. The ashes of the Red Heifer mixed with water from the Pool of Siloam become the *waters of separation*. The Temple Mount, the Temple itself, and everything connected with it, including the Priests, have to be sprinkled with the *waters of separation*. This mysterious liquid, the Bible records, takes away the defilement of death from everything on which it is sprinkled; it separates the holy from the profane. If there are no Red Heifer ashes, there can be no *waters of separation*, no Temple worship, and no qualified priesthood.

In fact, without being sprinkled with the waters of separation, devout Jews will not even scale Temple Mount. Israeli government officials and military leaders, therefore, have long regarded the requirement for the 'perfect' heifer as a stroke of good fortune preventing any serious armed conflict with the Muslims over Temple Mount. Then came March, 2002. In that month, what some have called the first "red heifer" meeting rabbinical standards of purity since at least the time of the destruction of the Temple⁵ was born in Israel. The fuse to a political – if not

⁴ The Talmud claims that the ceremony involving the Red Heifer was the only one of the Holy One's instructions that Sh'lomo [Solomon], who the Bible calls the wisest man who ever lived, did not understand. Although the priest obediently offered the sacrifice as instructed by the Holy One, even Solomon did not, say the sages, understand why the obedience of the priest would make him *tamei* – since no other act of slaughter instructed by the Holy One rendered the priest *tamei*.

⁵ If you are interested in reading further details, please see one or more of the following:

<http://www.templeinstitute.org/current-events/RedHeifer/>

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~adamgosp/heifer.html>

<http://www.nationalreview.com/dreher/dreher041102.asp>

Also, to see the common secularists viewpoint on this event and its implications, you might want to read – though you will almost certainly be offended by and disagree with – the article on line at <http://www.antiwar.com/justin/j041502.html>.

spiritual -- powder keg was suddenly lit. One Jewish activist put it this way:

*"We have been waiting 2,000 years for a sign from God,
and now He has provided us with a red heifer."*

The *Mishnah* states that there have been a total of nine red cows burned in the history of Judaism. It was taught that the tenth heifer would be burned in the time of the Messiah. Thus, the Red Heifer is seen as *a harbinger of the imminent coming of the Messiah and reestablishment of the Temple*.

The existence of the red heifer means, theoretically, that orthodox Jewish groups can now begin a concerted push for the building of the Third Temple. Some Christian groups, on the other hand, insist that the birth of the calf is a sign proving the imminence of the Second Coming of Yeshua of Natzret to establish the kingdom and millennial reign.

Distinctive Features of the Red Heifer Ceremony

There are several distinctive features of the red heifer ceremony.

1. The Necessity That the Priest Take the Heifer Outside the Camp

The red heifer ceremony is the only sacrifice associated with the Sinaitic system that was to be offered anywhere but on the *mizbeach* [altar] in the *Mish'kan* [or, later, the Temple]. Torah specifically required that the red heifer, unlike any other animal presented as a *korban*, be slaughtered completely *outside the camp*.

2. The Only Female 'Sacrifice'

In contrast to the normal male animals sacrificed, the Red Heifer was *the only female animal* the Law commanded to be sacrificed. All the offerings in the Bible are bullocks and rams, but here there is an exception - a heifer, a female cow. Through Moshe, the Holy One commanded the people to bring a red heifer to Him. Notice that it was NOT a *bullock* but a *heifer*.

From a prophetic standpoint, the Holy One is represented in maleness, and Israel – the Holy One's Betrothed Bride – is represented by femininity. Is the red heifer a symbolic representation of Israel? Is her redness symbolic of her 'earthiness' – her failure to distinguish herself from the rest of mankind despite having the Torah? Is her being taken outside the camp the current exile? Is her slaughter the Holocaust? Are the ashes of those burned in the Nazi ovens the 'ashes' that are to be carefully collected and added to living water to make waters of purification?

3. The Participant Becomes Tamei

In addition, it is interesting that the one who offered the sacrifice became *tamei* in the course of the same procedure through which the one for whose benefit it was applied became *tahor*. It is this aspect of the *chukah* which has most troubled the sages.

The Antidote for the Waters Moshe Made Israel Drink After the Sin of the Golden Calf

Some sages link the Red Heifer with the sin of the golden calf. In Exodus 32:34, Aharon said that the golden calf *came out of* the fire. Moshe pulverized the golden calf and threw its ashes into the water. Moshe forced the entire Redeemed Community to drink the water -- which caused a plague of *death* in the camp. See Exodus 32:35. With the Red Heifer, on the other hand, the process was pretty much the exact opposite. Instead of the heifer coming out of the fire, it was to be thrust *into* the fire. And, when *its* ashes were mixed with water, instead of bringing a plague, it brought people touched by death back to the realm of *life*⁶.

The Holy One indicates that we who are confronted by death, yet remain alive, should have a way to sanctify ourselves from our contact with sin's harvest. "*It is for us the living . . .*" Abraham Lincoln said. Or, as Torah puts it:

*He who touches the dead body of any man shall be tamei seven days:
the same shall purify himself therewith on the third day,
and on the seventh day he shall be tahor:
but if he doesn't purify himself the third day,
then the seventh day he shall not be tahor.*

*Whoever touches a dead person, the body of a man who has died,
and doesn't purifies himself, defiles the tent of the Holy One;
and that soul shall be cut off from Yisra'el:
because the water of separation was not sprinkled on him,
he shall be tamei; his tamei status is yet on him.*

[Numbers 19:11-13]

The way of sanctification – that through which we “pass over” from the realm of death to the realm of life - is the atoning death of a pure, spotless animal. In Hebrew, the “*red heifer*” is a *parah adamah*. Note the connection with Adam

⁶ The Red Heifer sacrifice had a practical medical effect as well as its more obvious spiritual element. The water of purification described in Number 19 actually had the ability to destroy germs and infection. The resulting water of purification solution contained ashes from the Red Heifer sacrifice combined with cedar, hyssop and scarlet thread. This water of purification contained "cedar" oil that came from a kind of juniper tree that grew in both Israel and in the Sinai. This cedar oil would irritate the skin, encouraging the person to vigorously rub the solution into their hands. Most importantly, the hyssop tree/bush would produce hyssop oil. Hyssop oil, which contains 50 percent carvacrol [an antifungal and antibacterial agent] has antiseptic and antibacterial qualities.

(*adamah*, the word we translate “red”, is the feminine form of Adam). It is as if the Holy One says, “*I will raise up from the same source as man, who sinned in the garden, one who will atone for the sin which there began.*”

The procedure for preparing “*water of cleansing*” – which the Holy One’s “script” says is to be sprinkled on all who desire to transition from the realm of death to the realm of life -- is set forth in today’s aliyah.

*. . . bring for yourself a red heifer without spot, in which is no blemish,
[and] on which never came yoke.
You shall give her to El`azar the Kohen,
and he shall bring her forth outside of the camp,
and one shall kill her before his face:
and El`azar the Kohen shall take of her blood with his finger,
and sprinkle her blood toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times.

One shall burn the heifer in his sight;
her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn:
and the Kohen shall take cedar-wood, and hyssop, and scarlet,
and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer.*

[Numbers 19:2-6]

Today’s aliyah will also discuss two specific situations where a person becomes *tamei* by being in close contact with death. [Remember, *tamei* is a Hebrew word usually incorrectly translated as “unclean”, but actually meaning *assigned a time alone for meditation and communion with the Holy One concerning an event which has occurred in his or her life*].

Consider the Stranger Known As ‘Death’

Death. The stoppage of brain function which leads to the *cessation of breath*, or vice versa. One or both leading to the *cessation of blood circulation*. Silence. Stillness. Absence. No more sleepy-eyed *Modeh Ani*’s⁷ heard from the bedroom down the hall.

Each culture has its own brand of “burial rites”. Generally, these rites serve one or more of the following three purposes: [a] to *honor the dead*; [b] to *win favor with ‘the gods’*; and [c] to *supply the dead person* with articles considered necessary by the culture for life in ‘the world beyond’. The Egyptian culture *glorified* death. It mummified the dead, and built pyramids as burial vaults. In ancient India, the bodies of those who died were burned, and their ashes cast adrift on their “holy

⁷ *Modeh Ani* is the common name of the prayer with which devout Jews begin each day. The entire prayer is as follows: “*Modeh ani l’f’neicha, melech chai v’kayam shehechezarta bi nishmati b’chemlah rabah emunateicha*”. This translates roughly into English as: “*I give you thanks to/before You, living and eternal King, for restoring my soul in your great compassion and faithfulness.*”

river”, the Ganges. Many Native Americans built funeral pyres. African tribes slaughtered the wife [or wives] of any man who died. The Irish are famous for singing dirges and holding “wakes”. Hispanic women swoon at funerals. Arab women wail.

How any particular society deals with death, you see, speaks volumes about that society’s values, core beliefs, and perspective on life.

Transcending and Ascending – Crossing Over From Death to Life

So, we come to the crux issue - how are *the Holy One’s people* supposed to deal with death? How are the Holy One’s people to be “different” from the rest of the world in regard to death -- which seems to recognize no distinctions between people at all? Knowing the Holy One – even knowing the Holy One intimately -- does not guarantee one will not die. In this week’s parsha, for instance, Miryam and Aharon will both die -- even Moshe will be informed that even his death is imminent. Avraham, Sarah, Yitzchak, Ya’akov, David, Yosiah, Hezekiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel and other tzadikim all the way down to Kefa [Peter], Yochanan the Immerser, Yochanan the Beloved, and Shaul of Tarsus succumbed to death. Our beloved Yeshua of Natzret tasted its sting as well.

While we have the hope – indeed the assurance – of ultimate resurrection and life eternal in the World to Come⁸, and it is possible that we will be among “those who remain” at Messiah’s Return⁹, the *odds are* (for all you gamblers out there) we, too, will experience that which even the strongest fears – the ceasing of the precious breath, the stoppage of the heart, the stillness of the brain, and the departure of the spirit from the body in order that decay may overtake our flesh and return it to the soil from which it came. And if it does not happen to us, it will almost certainly happen to someone we love. How are we – the Holy One’s Betrothed people - to deal with this unwelcome guest?

Death and the Torah Community

Parsha *Chukat* is all about dealing with death. A generation which chose to die in the desert is doing just that. Day by day, week by week, the men and women who lived through the plagues of Egypt, who sang and danced alongside the Sea of Reeds, and who, at Sinai, heard the Voice of the Holy One and cut covenant with Him on behalf of us all, are leaving us. Over a period of 38 years, approximately 1 and a half million men and women – everyone who was 20 years old or more at the time of the Exodus [except Kalev and Yehoshua] – at some point dies. And the

⁸ This is, of course, the hope behind the *Modeh Ani* prayer.

⁹ I Thessalonians 4:15-17; see also I Corinthians 15:51-52.

younger generation is left to “deal with it”. Death they will know. And learning how to deal with death well is, perhaps, the best way to learn the value of life.

Today’s aliyah contains the Holy One’s instructions about how to deal with death. He does not discuss funerals. He does not tell us what to do with the body of the deceased. He does not prescribe any ritual, or suggest any ceremony. He has earlier told us we are not to “cut our bodies” or shave our heads for the dead¹⁰. He has told us that *kohanim* [priests] are not to “defile themselves” by contact with the dead¹¹, unless the deceased was a very close relative – this means, as a practical matter, that whatever we do when a person dies, a religious service led by a priest who is not a family-member is out of the question.

Part of the Holy One’s instructions deal with what we are NOT to do when we confront death. But then He goes further and tells us something which is intended to, and contains the creative power to, enable us who live on to transcend the stark reality of our loved one’s death, ascend into His Sheltering and Re-creative Presence, and *cross over* from death to life. For the Holy One teaches us:

*He who touches the dead body of any man shall be **tamei** seven days:
the same shall purify himself on the third day
[with water containing the ashes of the red heifer],
and on the seventh day he shall be **tahor**.*

[Numbers 19:11-12]

And He further makes it clear that it is not just those who physically touch a dead body, but *all who reside in -- or enter - the household touched by death*, who enter a *tamei* state. He says:

*This is the **torah** [instruction, teaching] **when a man dies in a tent**¹²:
everyone who comes into the tent,
and everyone who is in the tent, shall be **tamei** seven days.*

[Numbers 19:14]

Seven days, Beloved. Seven days of “time-out” from ordinary life activities. *Sitting sheva* [seven], the Jewish people have come to call it. In Numbers 5:1-5, He told us to let certain classes of people in a state of *tamei* go “*outside the camp*” – including those who were *tamei* ‘because of a dead body’. Let them go. **Sh’lach ami!** For seven full days, the Holy One intends for us to allow the death of a loved one to completely interrupt the lives of the surviving family members [and any friends who were present at the moment of death]. During those seven days, all members of the deceased’s household are *tamei*.

¹⁰ Leviticus 19:27-28.

¹¹ Leviticus 21.

¹² The word our English Bibles translate as “tent” is *ohel*, *alef*, *hey*, *lamed*, Strong’s Hebrew word #168, pronounced *o’-hel*. It means any structure or dwelling in which people live – a tent, a house, an inn or hotel, etc.

As we discussed in regard to parsha *Tazria*, however, the term *tamei* does not mean “unclean”. It means, instead, a state of *spiritual transition*, which makes getting out of our routine, and paying extremely close attention to, and following, the Holy One’s instructions, very, very important to our spiritual well-being. It is a state of high spiritual alert. It is a state requiring enhanced security. It is a state calling for the exercise of extreme vigilance. It is not “business as usual”. It is a time when major issues hang in the balance, making ordinary life activities, and social interactions, inappropriate and dangerous – for us and for others¹³.

What Do We Do For Seven Days?

The Holy One does not tell us specifically what to do for the seven days we are *tamei*. He leaves that largely to our discretion, although by definition, we will not engage in any community activity, or even any other “ordinary” life activity beyond that necessary to survive.

It would seem that, by specifying *seven days* as the time period for separation, the Holy One wanted to turn our focus to CREATION, and to see Him as the Creator, calling us, blessing us, and preparing a world for us over which we are to take dominion – instead of allowing ourselves to think morbid thoughts, to wallow in our grief, or to nurse anger against God or man.

I hope, when I die, my sons and daughters will spend each of the first seven days after my death focusing upon, and studying with each other the corresponding day of Creation as described in Genesis 1 –

Day 1, light shines in the primeval darkness, at the Holy One’s word,

Day 2, sky and atmosphere conducive to life appear,

Day 3, dry ground, the platform for human activity, begins to form, and bring forth life-sustaining plants and seeds;

Day 4, the galaxies, solar systems, and other components of the heavens are strategically arranged and their orbits and revolutions established, all pursuant to The Holy One’s Divine plan;

Day 5, the waters and the skies begin to teem with life;

Day 6, the Holy One brings forth from the dust of the earth living creatures over which man is to have dominion, and, finally, brings forth, and breathes life into, man himself;

Day 7, the Holy One declares “*it is finished*”, and blesses His Creation and the day, making it pregnant with not only hope for new, restored, Divinely-empowered life on earth – but with *shalom* peace and eternal rest.

¹³ For a more thorough explanation and discussion of this concept, see *Monday’s Shiur* for Parsha *Tazria* -- the Rabbi’s Son’s studies on Leviticus chapter 12.

By the eighth day, I believe, they will be ready for *a new beginning* – a crossing over from death to a new life, a life with no father but the Holy One.

The sages of Israel took another approach. To assist us in the process, the sages developed not a *haggadah* for meditation, but a *protocol* for “*sitting sheva*” – sit, do not stand, do not bathe, shave or change clothes, receive food and consolation from friends and other members of the community, etc.

The ‘*sitting sheva*’ protocol is *a fence built around the Torah by the sages*, not the Torah itself. There is nothing wrong with this protocol, and it may likely aid in the transitioning process – but the prophetic and creative words of the Holy One are the only thing which can “finish” the crossing over. *Sitting sheva*, by itself, will not do it. The power is in the words of the Holy One – not the act of sitting. And the only thing the Holy One specifically told us with regard to the grieving process, other than that we are *tamei*, relates to events which are beyond our control – events of the *third day* and the *seventh day*.

Two Days Unlike the Others

On *yom ha-sh’lishi* [the third day] after our loved one dies, the Holy One tells us, something is to “interrupt the interruption”. Despite our *tamei* status, a *tahor* person [someone who is not *tamei*] is to voluntarily make himself or herself *tamei* by coming to our dwelling bearing hyssop, and sprinkling on us – and all around our dwelling -- “living water” containing the ashes of the red heifer.

*For the tamei they shall take of the ashes
of the burning of the korban chata’t¹⁴;
and running water shall be put with those ashes in a vessel:
and a tahor person is to take hyssop, and dip it in the water,
and sprinkle it on the tent, and on all the vessels,
and on the persons who were there,
and on him who touched the bone, or the slain,
or the dead, or the grave . . .*

[Numbers 19:17-18]

Then, on the seventh day, the *tahor* person who selflessly sprinkled us with living water on the third day is to return, and repeat the process a second time.

. . . and b’yom ha-shivi’i [on the seventh day] he is to purify him

Then after the “*seventh day*” sprinkling, each of us who is bereaved is to arise and take two specified actions, as follows:

*and he is [they are] to wash his [their] clothes,
and bathe himself [themselves] in water,*

¹⁴ In this case, the *chata’t* is the *parah adamah* [red heifer] – see Numbers 19:9.

and at evening he [they] shall be tahor.
[Numbers 19:19]

Then we are to step forth from the *mikveh*, put on clean, spotless garments, and re-enter the realm of ordinary life and community responsibility. No grief counselors needed. The Wonderful Counselor does it all.

What Does It All Mean?

The Holy One wanted His people to recognize that contact with the realm of death was something which necessitated some “time out” from religious duties and everyday life. A 7-day period of *tamei* – separation for meditation and privately seeking the Holy One – was prescribed for all those who came in contact with death. This is not just an advisory – it is a ***dire warning***. For Torah tells us:

V'ish asher-yitma v'lo yitchata

If a person is tamei and does not purify himself,

v'nichretah ha-nefesh hahi mitoch ha-kahal

that person shall be cut off from the community.

ki et-mik'dash Adonai

if he then defiles the Holy One's sanctuary

time mey nidah lo-zorak alav tamei hu.

He remains tamei until the purification water has been sprinkled on him.

[Numbers 19:20]

The realm of death, you see, requires one to *process* some things. Contact with that realm requires one to focus on the purpose of life, and the ways in which one's life has strayed from the Divine Plan and purpose.

The ashes of the *korban chata't* [special sin offering known as the ‘red heifer’] were to remind one that sin – which led to the introduction of death into human experience in the first place -- had to be dealt with in accordance with The Holy One's instructions. The *mikveh* in living water at the end of the 7-day period was to mark the transition from death to life, and prepare one to re-enter the normal activities of life.

Questions For Today's Shiur

1. Let us begin our study of parsha *Chukat* by searching out meaning from the name itself.

[A] What is the Hebrew name for this week's first Torah parsha?

[B] What is the English meaning of that Hebrew name?

[C] Look up the Hebrew word (and its verb root) in Strong's and Gesenius, and describe the Hebraic word picture you see there.

[D] List the other instructions of Torah which are specifically referred to as

chukat, as opposed to *mitzvot* or *mishpatim*. [Hint: see Exodus 12:17, Exodus 13:10, Leviticus 23:14, Leviticus 23:21-31, Leviticus 23:41, Exodus 27:20-21, Leviticus 24:3, Exodus 28:43; 29:9, Leviticus 3:17, Leviticus 16:29,31, and 34, Leviticus 17:7, Numbers 10:8, and Numbers 19:10.]

[E] The Holy One considers the *chukat* just as important as the *mitzvot* and the *mishpatim*. List the blessings He says flow from the *chukat*, using the following passages as your sources: Leviticus 25:18-19, Deuteronomy 6:1-3 and 30:16.

2. Today we will be confronted with a “*chukah l’olam*” [a script that will endure as long as the world endures] for the Holy One’s People. The script relates to the passage from death to life. It uses *a prop* – the ashes of a red heifer, mixed with “living” water.

[A] List the 5 requirements concerning the animal which is utilized in preparing the water which is the subject of today’s aliyah.

[B] Who was to oversee the slaughter of this animal?

[C] Where was the slaughtering to take place?

[D] What was to be done with the first blood taken from the animal?

[E] What was to be done with the rest of the animal’s blood, hide, and carcass?

[F] What three things were to be put on the animal as it was being burned?

[G] What was to be done with the ashes of the animal?

[H] Where were the ashes to be kept?

[I] How and when were these ashes ever to be used?

[J] What effect did participation in this ritual have on those who participated?

[K] For what period of time did touching a dead body make one “*tamei*” [our English Bibles mistakenly translate this as “unclean” or “ritually impure”]?

[L] What was the scripted procedure for terminating this *tamei* status?

[M] What happened if this procedure was not followed?

[N] Verse 13 refers to the water containing the ashes of the parah adamah [red heifer] as the “water of separation”. In Strong’s and Gesenius, look up the word our English Bibles translate as “separation”, and write it and the Hebrew verb root in Hebrew letters, with appropriate vowel markings¹⁵. Then, after reviewing Gesenius’ notes on these words, and the usage of the verb root in Genesis 31:40 and Esther 6:1 (in both cases, what sleep did), and Proverbs 27:8, Isaiah 16:2, and Jeremiah 4:25 (to describe what a bird did from its nest). Now, *describe the Hebraic word picture you see developing* around the Hebrew word.

¹⁵ The Hebrew word is *nun, dalet, hey*, Strong’s Hebrew word # 5079, from the verb root *nadad* [*nun, dalet, dalet*, Strong’s Hebrew word # 05074, pronounced *naw-dawd’*].

3. The closing section of today's aliyah discusses two specific situations where a person becomes *tamei* by being in close contact with death.

[A] What two situations are discussed?

[B] According to verses 18-19, list the things someone who is not *tamei* is to do to assist in [a] ridding a home and its contents of the *tamei* status resulting from death, and in [b] assisting a person made *tamei* by a death to re-enter social and communal religious activity.

4. Let us look more closely at the 'torah' [i.e., the instruction or teaching] the Holy One prescribes for those who come into contact with the realm of death:

[A] Why do you think everything in the tent of one who dies (all his/her possessions) is said to be "*tamei*"?

[B] Do a deceased person's clothes and personal effects (jewelry, etc.) ever lose the status of being *tamei*?

[C] Do a deceased person's clothes and personal effects only become *tamei* if the person dies in his "tent" (or house)? What about death in a plane crash or car wreck, in the field of battle, or in a hospital?

[D] Do you believe that the Holy One is merely setting forth health regulations designed to prevent the spread of infection? Or is there spiritual significance to what He instructs in these verses. Explain.

[E] There is to be some interaction between the *tamei* person (the one who has come in direct contact with death) and a *tahor* person (one who has not had such contact within 7 days). Describe the interaction the Holy One prescribes.

[F] Who, in your opinion, is supposed to perform the function of the *tahor* person – a priest? A rabbi? A pastor? A friend? A paid stranger? A volunteer from the community? A child? Explain your answer.

[G] What is the effect of this interaction on the *tahor* person? Why do you think the Holy One so instructed us?

[H] If no one volunteers to sprinkle the "water of cleansing" containing the ashes of the *korban chata't* on the person who has come in contact with death, can that person ever re-enter normal life?

[I] Even after the *tahor* person twice sprinkles the *tamei* person with the 'water of cleansing' containing the ashes of the *korban chata't*, the *tamei* person must personally take two final steps to "purify" himself or herself. What are those two final steps?

[J] If the *tamei* person refuses to take this final step, what does the Holy One say is to happen to him or her, and why?

[K] Step now with me into the context of the Messiah's earthly ministry. Let us look at some events through "Torah" eyes. Read Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 8:49-56, John 11:11-44. Then, write an essay briefly describing how the Holy One's instructions concerning dealing with death were, or were not [seemingly at least]

applied in each of these situations.

[L] How do you think modern American/Christian funeral services and practices relate to Torah? Where are they consistent, in your view, and where are they inconsistent?

5. In Judges 11 we meet a man named *Yiftach* [transliterated in most Bibles as *Jephthah*]. Here is how the sordid history of an unlikely hero begins:

*Now Yiftach the Gil`adite was a mighty man of valor,
and he was the son of a prostitute:
and Gil`ad became the father of Yiftach. Gil`ad's wife bore him sons;
and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove out Yiftach,
and said to him, You shall not inherit in our father's house;
for you are the son of another woman.
Then Yiftach fled from his brothers, and lived in the land of Tov:
and there were gathered vain fellows to Yiftach, and they went out with him.*

[Judges 11:1-3]

[A] Who is the focus of the story?

[B] Look up this person in Smith's Bible Dictionary, the encyclopedia, or any other source book you can find. Write an essay discussing this person, his name, his background, and his destiny.

6. Also in today's haftarah reading, B'nei Yisrael is attacked by another nation, and suddenly Yiftach, the outcast son of a prostitute, becomes the man on everybody's mind.

[A] What nation attacks B'nei Yisrael in today's reading?

[B] Look this attacking nation up in Smith's and/or in the Encyclopedia. Who was the ancestor of these people, and where did they live?

[C] Where was *Yiftach* [Jephthah] when these people attacked? Can you find that place in your Bible atlas?

[D] Who came to find *Yiftach* [Jephthah] to get him to fight against the attacking nation?

7. In John 3:10-12, Yeshua our Messiah speaks with a member of the ruling council - the Sanhedrin¹⁶ – who had come to inquire of Him secretly, by night¹⁷.

¹⁶ During the time of Yeshua the Great Sanhedrin met daily in Jerusalem to consider the violations of Jewish law that took place in all the Jewish communities in the known world at that time. The council was made up of 71 men, all of whom were the fathers of families, whether they were priests, elders, scribes, Pharisees, or Sadducees. To belong to the Great Sanhedrin, they all must have served in lower Jewish courts before their terms of office in the Great Sanhedrin.

¹⁷ Nicodemus is identified by Yochanan as a "leader of the Jews"(3:1), and "a teacher of Israel" (3:10). He was of the Pharisaic sect.

This same very influential man would later speak to the Sanhedrin on Yeshua's behalf [John 7:50-51], and would, along with Yosef of Arimethea, participate in Yeshua's burial [John 19:38-40].

*Yeshua answered him, **Are you the teacher of Yisra'el, and don't understand these things?***

Most assuredly I tell you, we speak that which we know, and testify of that which we have seen, and you don't receive our witness.

***If I told you earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?**¹⁸*

[A] Who is speaking in the passage in question?

[B] Who is being spoken to in this passage?

[C] According to the speaker, what things should we speak of?

[D] Look up in Strong's the Greek words translated "know" and "seen".

Write the words and definitions.

[E] What Hebrew words meaning "know" and "seen"? do you think Yeshua actually used when He spoke with this son of Israel?

[F] Look up those Hebrew words in Gesenius, and describe the Hebraic word pictures Yeshua was drawing for Nicodemus.

8. Yeshua speaks to Nicodemus about a Hebrew prophetic figure – the 'Son of Man'. Note that Yeshua did not, at this point at least, say 'I am the Son of Man'. Yeshua did not mention the 'Son of Man' by name, nor did He say anything that would lead Nicodemus to believe He was talking about Himself. The term 'Son of Man' is first introduced in the Psalms. David said, in Psalm 8:

*... what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him?
Yet You have made him little less than God,
and have crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet*

[Psalm 8:4-6]

Then, in Psalm 80, we read:

*let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,
the son of man whom You have made strong for Yourself!
Then we will never turn back from You;*

¹⁸ This passage is rendered as follows in the Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadasha: "In reply, Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach said to him, You hold the teaching office of rabbi, of moreh b'Yisroel and of these things you do not have da'as? Omein, omein, I say to you, that of which we have da'as we speak, and of that which we have seen, we give solemn edut (testimony), and the solemn edut of us you [pl.] do not receive. If I told you [pl.] about things of the Olam Hazeh and you have no emunah, how will you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"

give us life, and we will call on Your name!
[Psalm 80:17-18]

A passage in the book of Daniel introduces the Son of Man to all Hebrews. There, after Daniel the prophet saw a vision of four beasts arising from the sea, he described a wonderful Divine intervention in life on earth as follows:

"I beheld therefore in the vision of the night, and lo, one like a son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and he came even to the Ancient of days: and they presented Him before Him. And he gave him power, and glory, and a kingdom: and all peoples, tribes, and tongues shall serve him: his power is an everlasting power that shall not be taken away: and his kingdom shall not be destroyed"
[Daniel 7:13 ff].

Also in the Book of Daniel, when the angel Gabriel spoke, he used the term, saying [apparently to Daniel]: "*Understand, O son of man, for in the time of the end the vision shall be fulfilled.*" Daniel 8:17. The Holy One also addressed Ezekiel by the title "son of man" more than ninety times, e.g. "*Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak to you*" (Ezekiel 2:1). So, who was Nicodemus supposed to think Yeshua was talking about when He said: *No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven?*

How, Nicodemus might be expected to wonder, could Yeshua be referring to Himself as the 'Son of Man', when He specifically said the Son of Man 'is in heaven'? Yeshua was not 'in heaven' – He couldn't be, because He was standing there in the darkness of night outside Jerusalem talking to Nicodemus. Yeshua couldn't be both 'on earth' and 'in heaven' at the same time.

Yeshua tells Nicodemus that the 'Son of Man' prophesied in Hebrew Scripture, will be "lifted up" after a pattern established by something in Torah -- something that should have been very familiar to Nicodemus. Yeshua put it to Nicodemus this way:

*As Moshe lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.¹⁹*

[A] In verse 13, Yeshua says that "no one has ascended into heaven". What,

¹⁹ This passage is rendered as follows in the Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadasha: "And no one has ascended into *Shomayim* except the one having descended out of *Shomayim*, the Ben HaAdam [DANIEL 7:13-14; MISHLE 30:4; DEVARIM 30:12]. And as Moshe lifted up the *nachash* in the wilderness [BAMIDBAR 21:8,9], so it is necessary for there to be a *hagbah* (lifting up) of the Ben HaAdam [TEHILLIM 22; YESHAYAH 53], that everyone having *emunah* [BERESHIT 15:6; BAMIDBAR 14:11; SHEMOT 14:31] in him may have *Chayyei Olam* [DANIEL 12:2; YESHAYAH 52:13].

then, do you believe happened to Enoch²⁰? To Eliyahu [Elijah]²¹?

[B] Like what object from Torah (in fact, from Parsha **Chukat**) did Yeshua say He would be “lifted up”?

[C] For what purpose did Yeshua say He would be “lifted up”?

[D] What is the “eternal life” of which Yeshua speaks? [Hint: Before you answer, read Yeshua’s own definitions of eternal life, found in John 12:50 and John 17:3; it may be different than you think].

*May we all be cleansed by our great High Priest,
and pass from death into life.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Shiur

Proverbs 7:1-4

My son, keep [guard, treasure, cling to, cherish] my words.

Lay up my mitzvot within you. Keep my mitzvot and live;

Guard my teaching as the apple of your eye.

Bind them on your fingers.

Write them on the tablet of your heart.

Tell wisdom, "You are my sister."

Call understanding your relative

²⁰ See Genesis 5:21-24 [Where did the Holy One “take” Enoch?].

²¹ See II Kings 2:11 [Where did the Holy One “take” Eliyahu in the whirlwind, with a chariot and horses of fire?]