

CHABAD  
  
 RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 16 March 2012 - 22 Adar 5772  
 Sedra Vayakhel-Pekudei - Red Heifer

### COMING IN FROM OUTSIDE

**I**N JEWISH THOUGHT, THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE ARE OFTEN MINGLED together. We relive the slavery in Egypt and the Exodus, at the same time being aware of the process of spiritual redemption as it applies in our own personal lives. We are also conscious that the world as a whole is gradually changing, and that a collective redemption for humanity is just round the corner.

An important step forward in this multiple scenario takes place this week in the synagogue, when an additional Torah Scroll is taken from the Ark. After the Torah reading in the first Scroll, concluding the Book of Exodus, the second Scroll is read<sup>1</sup>, in which we hear about the special method of purification prescribed by the Torah for the Jewish people. This is read now because we are approaching the Pesach Festival, when everyone would travel to Jerusalem and visit the Temple. In order to enter the Temple and also to eat the Pesach Lamb, it was necessary to be pure.

The terms 'pure' and 'impure' are found abundantly in the Torah and in the Talmud. These concepts do not concern physical hygiene, but spiritual states of being. One might have become impure by carrying out an exalted commandment: such as that to care for and bury the dead. Yet the Torah reading reminds us that now the festival

is approaching and we should try to be purified in order to be able to enter the Temple.

The method of purification is the sprinkling of the ashes of the mysterious Red Heifer. This is a kind of offering. But instead of being offered on the altar in the Temple Courtyard it is prepared outside the Temple. Indeed, it is prepared outside the city of Jerusalem, and in the time of the wandering in the desert, outside the camp of the Israelites. In some way, the Red Heifer relates to the state of being 'outside'.

Now let us consider the source of impurity. Where does it originate? The Sages tell us: with the sin of the Golden Calf. At Sinai the Jewish people were purified in a wonderful way. However, through the idolatrous worship of the Calf, impurity returned. At the same time, the Golden Calf is the prime example of transgression: a force separating the individual from G-d.

Although impurity is a part of daily life and is even the by-product of important Mitzvot, as mentioned above, it also symbolizes a subtle sense of separation from G-d. This might not be noticeable in ordinary life. We can feel quite comfortable with ourselves until we think of entering the Temple in Jerusalem, and coming close to the Presence of the Divine. At that moment we suddenly become aware of our human limitations: how can we dare to approach G-d?

This is when we need the Red Heifer, described by the Sages as the 'mother' of the Golden Calf: if a child makes a mess in the palace, the mother is called to clean it up. The Red Heifer cleanses us from the effects of the Golden Calf, whether impurity or sin. The Red Heifer therefore represents both Purification and Repentance.

When we feel that in some sense we are 'outside', the power of Repentance is able to purify us, to bring us back into the camp of the Israelites, into the Temple. This is the force which is able to reach us however far outside we may have strayed. It helps us make a step towards holiness and G-dliness. This is a step towards the Pesach Festival three weeks ahead, and also towards the ultimate Redemption<sup>2</sup>.

1. Numbers 19: 1-22. 2. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 16 pp.420-423.



*SEDRA VAYAKHEL - PEKUDEI*

**NEVER DELAY**

Debby and Chava were engaged in one of their favourite activities - looking out of the big window at the front of the house at the people going by.

“Look, there is Mrs Walder”, said Debby as an elderly lady walked by very slowly, carrying some large and heavy bags. “She always comes by at around this time”.

“Poor lady, the bags look so heavy. Let's go and help her,” suggested Chava.

Debby groaned “It's too cold outside. Let's help her tomorrow when it's warmer. She always needs help. We don't have to do it today.”

“No, let's go now. Don't you remember what we learned today about not delaying doing a good deed?” Chava reminded her sister.

“Remind me,” said Debby.

“Well,” said Chava. “It was in the Sedra lesson”. Both sisters were in the same advanced class for Sedra.

“It was about the building of the Sanctuary” said Debby.  
“I can’t see the connection”.

“Well,” said Chava, “all the Jews had hurried with their contributions of gold, silver, copper and other materials. The women even donated their gold jewellery and copper mirrors. Very soon, Moses had more than enough, and everyone was told to stop bringing things.”

“Oh, and wasn’t there something about the leaders of the Tribes?” asked Debby.

“Yes! The leaders of the Twelve Tribes were very upset. They had decided to wait until everyone else had given their contribution and then they would give theirs. So they were quite dismayed to hear this news. Because they had delayed, they would not be able to participate in building the Sanctuary.”

“Yes,” said Debby, “but happily for them, there were still some jewels needed for the clothes of the High Priest. He wore a breast -plate which had twelve precious stones, one for each tribe. So the leaders of the Tribes were happy to give those missing items. I remember it now.”

“And can you remember Miss Cohen saying: ‘they had learned their lesson....’”

“Yes! ‘don’t delay in the doing of a good deed - it just might run away before you manage to do it!’” The two sisters said the words in chorus.

Debby jumped up.

“You’re right, as always, Chava! Let’s go and help Mrs Walder quickly - before we miss the chance!”

***Torah teachings are holy –  
please treat this page with care***