

## Nature in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

### *Parashat Chukat - The Perfect Mother Cow*

#### Holy Cow

In Israel or at least in Gush Etzion we don't pass by many cows. From my bedroom window, I often hear the braying of donkeys and the bleating of goats and sheep, but never any mooing of cows. This is not because Israel doesn't raise cows. In the Galilee and other places in the north where the grass is greener there are several cow-raising kibbutzim. Still, due to a lack of grass and high production of shrubs about two-thirds of Israeli beef consumption has been imported frozen until 1996. Today nearly half of Israel's beef supply is now fresh beef from local producers. In fact, you can buy organic grass fed cow meat here in Bat Ayin. A young family from Bat Ayin Bet buy the cows from friends who live in the Itamar Yishuv, in Shomron. The husband who is a certified ritual slaughterer butchers the cow, whereas the wife delivers the chosen cut to our home. Still, cows are not the main livestock in Israel. Perhaps this is because they are heavy, kind of coarse and associated with the material. Netivot Shalom explains in the name of the Chida that the Red Heifer alludes to the most physical part of a person. This is the part of ourselves that could bring us to immorality. The cow corresponds to physicality, and the red color corresponds to additional, extra physicality. This is why it states, "He must burn the cow" (*Bamidbar* 19:5). We need to burn away our unholy physical desires. As long as we are sunken into physicality, we are unworthy of seeing the greatness of our Creator. We also lose the ability to recognize the great value of a holy Jew (*Netivot Shalom, Parashat Chukat*, p. 115). The association between cows and the physical is what brought Ya'acov and Moshe to compare Yosef to the ox (*Bereishit* 49:6, 22), (*Devarim* 33:17). Yosef was involved in the physical realm, in the distribution of grain and running the kingdom of Egypt. The Golden Calf was actually produced through casting a plate, whereupon was written, "Rise ox, rise ox" into the melting pot. This was the same plate that brought Yosef's coffin out of the Nile (Rashi, *Shemot* 32:4). Judaism, does not negate the physical, we work on elevating it as Yosef did, using the physical for the sake of the spiritual. We live in this world in a physical body that can become a holy vehicle for our soul. However, a body without a soul can no longer serve the spiritual. Therefore, it becomes טָמֵא/*tamee* – impure. Like in homeopathic medicine, the Torah teaches that "like cures like." An example of that we see later in this week's *parasha* when the Israelites were healed from their snakebites by starring at the copper serpent (*Bamidbar* 21:8). Perhaps this is why a cow is used for purification from the impurity of death. That which is most physical (body without soul) is rectified by and animal associated with the physical.

#### Let the Mother Clean the Mess of her Child

I often give a childless wife the blessing that her home will be a mess. After thinking about it for a second, she usually answers amen to cleaning up her forthcoming children's mess. Similarly, the Red Heifer came to clean up the muck of the Golden Calf. "To what can this be likened? To a maid who worked in the palace of the king. One day her child came and soiled the palace with his filth. The king

said, “Let his mother come, and clean her child’s filth.” Likewise, the Holy One said, “Let the Red Heifer come, and atone for the Golden Calf” (*Midrash Rabbah, Bamidbar* 19:8). Rashi quoting the midrash of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan offers us several parallels between the Golden Calf and the Red Heifer:

- Why must the heifer be red? To rectify the infamous idol, which shone with a reddish hue... it is an atonement for Israel’s ‘red’ sin. Scripture likens sin to red, because when a person sins, he forfeits his blood: “Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool” (*Yeshā’yahu* 1:18). The Holy One says: “Since Israel’s sins are red, let the heifer also be red – and when it is burned, its ashes are white...” thus the prophet assures his people in the Creator’s name that G-d promises, “they shall whiten as snow.”
- In order for the heifer to be fit, it must never have carried a yoke. This is an allusion to Israel, who threw off the yoke of Heaven in insubordination when they worshipped the Golden Calf.
- Why must the heifer be given to Eleazar, an assistant, and not to the *Kohen Gadol* himself? Because Aharon oversaw the creation of the Golden Calf, and therefore it would not seem proper for him to officiate with the heifer. There is a principle, “the one who was prosecutor, cannot become defense attorney.”
- Three species are used: hyssop, cedar, and scarlet wool, which are reminiscent of the 3,000 who fell at the sin of the calf. Why these three? The cedar is the highest, and the hyssop is the lowest ... and whoever is haughty (equal to the sin of idolatry) must become like a worm (from which the red dye is obtained) in his own eyes, as King David prayed: “I am a worm and not a man” (*Tehillim* 22:7). If he will lower and humble himself, his sins will be atoned.
- The heifer is burned, an allusion to the calf that was burned: “He took the calf which they had made, and burned it in the fire...” (*Shemot* 32:20).
- Just as the sin of the Golden Calf exerts its influence forever, as it states, “on that day I will remember you and I will remember your sin” (*Shemot* 32:34). So too the Holy One commanded that the ashes of the Red Heifer be kept as a remembrance for all generations: “They shall be for the congregation of the children of Israel for a remembrance” (*Bamidbar* 19:19).
- Just as the Golden Calf rendered all those who participated in it impure – for idolatry causes impurity, as it is written: “You shall cast it away as a thing impure...” (*Yeshā’yahu* 30:22), so the heifer renders all those who come into contact with it impure. As Israel became pure when Moshe burned the Golden Calf – fire being the symbol of purging sin – so Israel becomes pure through the burning of the Red Heifer (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 19:22).

The impurity of death was actually caused by the Golden Calf. How is that? At the giving of the Torah, Israel were freed from the Angel of Death (*Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 41:7). This does not imply that they gained immortality, but only that they were free from dying through the Angel of Death. Instead, they died through a Divine Kiss, which does not cause impurity. Therefore, the mother cow (The Red Heifer) indeed comes to clean up the mess i.e. rectify the impurity of death caused by her child (The Golden Calf) (Kli Yakar, *Bamidbar* 19:2).

## From Heifer to Humility

The Red Heifer teaches us about rectification and *teshuva*. In order to open our heart to the way of repentance, even if we are aware of our own good qualities, we need to view ourselves as ‘impure,’ compared to others. Let him “make the pure (himself) impure” –

So that he may “purify the impure.” We can do this by believing in our own heart that our friends are good and righteous. When we give the benefit of the doubt, and feel enough compassion to allow others to make amends for their mistakes, while regarding them as pure, we then merit one level of the heifer’s ashes: true humility, upon which spirit the Divine Presence can rest. Humility is exemplified by Moshe Rabbeinu, as G-d Himself testifies that, “The man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any man on the face of the earth” (*Bamidbar* 12:3). This is why there is a special link between the Red Heifer and Moshe.

ספר במדבר פרק יט פסוק ב ... ויקחו אליך פרה אדמה תמימה...

“...Have them bring you a red heifer...” (*Bamidbar* 19:2).

Why do we need the extra אֵלֶיךָ /*alecha* – “for you?” It will always be called by your name, people will speak of the cow which Moshe prepared in the wilderness” (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 19:2). The heifer is called after Moshe, because Moshe’s humility helps us to repent. Moshe’s holiness and righteousness will illuminate and manifest itself to all those who truly desire to emulate him – it is called by his name forever, and his power will shine through to all who seek to emulate his quality.

(The Temple Institute, [https://www.templeinstitute.org/red\\_heifer/red\\_heifer\\_contents.htm](https://www.templeinstitute.org/red_heifer/red_heifer_contents.htm))

## The Tenth Red Heifer and the Mashiach

In Talmudic times they counted nine Red Heifers from the first one mentioned in this week’s *parasha*. Since then, no one found any additional cow that qualifies for the Red Heifer until recently in a small farm in New Jersey. According to Breaking Israel News April 5, 2015 a red cow was born on April 2, 2013 during Pesach. The gentile farmer, who owns it, has been “extremely vigilant” in making sure that the cow does not engage in any work or sustains any blemishes, which may disqualify it from being a Red Heifer. He refuses to sell it even for millions but plans to bring it in person to the Temple, may it be built soon. (<http://www.breakingisraelnews.com/35243/red-heifer-found-small-farm-new-jersey-jewish-world/#UE13Gb7hSdchUxEG.99>)

Rambam teaches that “... the tenth Red Heifer will be accomplished by the king, the Mashiach; may he be revealed speedily” (*Mishna Torah, Sefer Tahara, Hilchot Parah Aduma* 3:4). Does this imply that the appearance of a Red Heifer in these redemptive times is an indication, a forerunner of the appearance of the Mashiach himself, who will officiate at its preparation? If there has been no Red Heifer for the past 2,000 years, perhaps it is because the time was not right. We cannot help but wonder and pray: If there are now Red Heifers, perhaps we now live in the era that will need them? Which comes first, a mother or her child? The intrinsic necessity of a mother to precede her child is one way of understanding that cryptic parable, “Let the mother come and clean up her child’s filth:” Let the concept of repentance come and erase the sin.

([https://www.templeinstitute.org/red\\_heifer/tenth\\_red\\_heifer.htm](https://www.templeinstitute.org/red_heifer/tenth_red_heifer.htm)).