

**June 2, 2019 - Num. 19:1-22 - The Red Heifer**  
**Torah Reading: Numbers 19:1-22 - The Red Heifer**  
**Psalm 104:1-9**  
**Haftarah: Ezekiel 36:16-38**

### **The Ordinance of the Red Heifer**

The people had complained about the strictness of the law that forbade them to approach the Tabernacle (**Numbers 17:13**) The death of so many in the plague had made all their relatives unclean from touching a dead body. The Red Heifer ordinance was the way to let them regain a legally clean state to approach God without fear.

But some authorities put the giving of this law earlier, before they departed from Sinai, the day after the tabernacle was erected (Seder Olam Rabba, c. 7. p. 22.), when the Lord commanded to put unclean persons out of the camp, and when some were defiled with a dead body, and unfit for the passover (**Numbers 5:2**) and mention is made of the "water of purifying" (**Numbers 8:7**). It was repeated here because the priesthood had been confirmed by Aaron's rod budding, and to remind the people of this provision of cleansing.

But also because Moses' humility was displayed in the incident of Korah, and tradition says Moses has a special relationship with the Red Heifer.

The Red Heifer was a mystery to the sages and rabbis for two reasons:

- it makes no sense that the priests and others involved become impure even as the waters of separation convey cleansing.
- the sacrifice takes place entirely outside the Tabernacle/Temple precincts "outside the camp"

These problems are both resolved only in seeing the ritual as a type of Christ - **Hebrews 13:11** and **2 Corinthians 5:21**.

**Numbers 19:1-2** - "And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke:"

Note this was spoken to both Moses and Aaron.

### **A 'Supra-Rational' Decree**

"ordinance" = chukkah - one of the three kinds of commandments (mikvah).

- Chukkim are statutes given without a reason (i.e., fiats, edicts or divine decrees). As such they are sometimes called "supra-rational" decrees. The classic example is the chukkah (decree) regarding the Red Heifer, which, legend has it, defied even the

wisdom of King Solomon. Other examples include dietary law (kashrut), the prohibition of mixing seeds or fabrics (kilayim), or the laws concerning family purity (niddah). These laws can seem irrational to human reason.

- Mishpatim are laws given for a clearly specified reason (i.e., logical laws).

- Eidot are testimonials (from the root 'ed, "witness") that commemorate or represent something -- e.g., the commandments to observe Shabbat and the holidays, to wear tzitzit, eat matzah on Passover, blow a shofar, etc.

Many of the sages believe that each of the 613 commandments given in the Torah should be regarded as if it were a decree given without a reason (i.e., chok). Someone who thinks it is "reasonable" to obey one commandment might later change their mind if their passions sway them to suddenly regard it as irrational.

This conflict between pure faith and pure reason occurred at the Akeda, when Abraham offered up his "only begotten son" Isaac upon the altar as a burnt sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-14). Abraham surely understood all the "commandments, decrees, and laws" of God (Genesis 26:5), but his faith led him to surrender his reasoning in complete devotion to the LORD.

Rashi - "This is the ordinance of the law": Because Satan and the nations of the world ["the evil inclination and the gentile nations"] taunt Israel, saying, "What is this commandment, and what purpose does it have?" Therefore, the Torah uses the term "statute." I have decreed it; You have no right to challenge it. — [Yoma 67b] (Numbers Rabbah 19:5–6)

### **A Seminal Decree**

"The ordinance of the law" - Why not say this is the "ordinance of the Red Heifer," or something similar?

The plain sense of the phrase, "THIS is the decree of the Torah," appears to make the ritual surrounding the red heifer "the seminal decree" of the entire Torah.... Indeed, this phrase is used only two times in the Torah (Numbers 19:2, 31:21), both of which concern ritual purification.

The Red Heifer sacrifice was thought to be "well-nigh unintelligible" unless there was some deeper meaning to the ordinance - mainly because the ashes of the Red Heifer conferred both cleanness and impurity *at the same time*. A Jewish tradition said that King Solomon, the wisest of men who knew the meaning of all God's ordinances, was unable to understand that of the Red Heifer: **Ecclesiastes 7:23** - "'All this have I proved by wisdom' that is, all other matters; 'I said, I will be wise' that is, in reference to the meaning of the Red Heifer; 'but it was far from me'"

It is even stated that the reason was not revealed to Moses himself (Eccles. R. 8:1 no. 5).

However, another tradition says the secret WAS revealed to Moses:

"Said Rabbi Yose b. R. Chaninah: What is the meaning of the words "And they shall take it unto *you*?" God told Moses, 'to you, I reveal the secret - but to all others, it is a *chok*, a decree with no explanation'. And let Scripture record that 'they shall take it unto you' for all time; even if all the other heifers are null, yours endures forever - for all the other heifers were sanctified from the one that Moses made, and those ashes were hidden away for the future." Shem Mishmuel says something similar: Moses made himself completely humble and treated himself as insignificant, and thus, was rewarded with the knowledge.

### **Atoning for the Golden Calf?**

Some said the Red Heifer ordinance was given to atone for the sin of the golden calf, so that the mother – the Red Heifer – should purify the defilement caused by her offspring, the golden calf (PR 14:65a and see the whole chapter).

The tradition says that the pestilence of death, introduced into the world by Adam's sin and banished at Sinai, was reintroduced by the sin of the golden calf.

A parable in the Mishnah explains:

"A maid's child once dirtied the royal palace. Said the king: 'Let his mother come and clean up her child's filth.' By the same token, God says: "Let the heifer atone for the deed of the calf" (Midrash Tanchuma, Chukat 8)

But this explanation was not universally accepted.

### **Thought of 'Before the Foundation of the World'**

The Sages note that the laws of how to prepare the Red Heifer are given before revealing that the sacrifice will provide ashes to make the waters of separation. In a similar way, they said, repentance was one of seven things which God "thought of" even before He created the world, knowing that man would sin.

Red Heifer is *parah adumah* in Hebrew. "*adumah*" = "red" similar to the words Adam and Edom

"a red heifer without spot" - Rashi - lit., red, perfect. It shall be perfect in redness, so that two black hairs disqualify it. — [Sifrei Chukath 5]

### **'Red' Sacrifices in the Ancient World**

Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (Bibliothec. I. 1. p. 79., written 60-30 B.C.) reported the Egyptians in their times sacrificed red bullocks to Typhon, who they supposed was of the same color, and to whom they had an aversion, accounting him the god of evil; and because red oxen were odious to them, they offered them to him; as red-haired

men also were slain by them for the same reason, at the tomb of Osiris, who they say was murdered by the red-haired Typhon. If the ox had but one hair black or white, they reckoned it was not fit to be sacrificed; in which perhaps they imitated the Jews: it being without blemish was what was common to all sacrifices, See **Leviticus 22:22**.

Targum of Jonathan: A young cow of two years old. (Mishnah Parah, c. 1. sect. 1.) although others say three, four or five year old would do.

"without blemish" - applies also to all burnt offerings (**Leviticus 1:3, 10**) peace offerings (**Leviticus 3:1, 6**) and sin offerings (**Leviticus 4:3**)

"no defect" - applies to all sacrifices (**Leviticus 22:19, 21; Deuteronomy 17:1**), is explained in **Leviticus 22:22**.

"upon which never came yoke" - applies also to the calf whose neck is broken to atone for the bloodguilt of the unidentified manslayer (**Deuteronomy 21:3**) Not even a cloth could have been laid upon the Red Heifer.

### The Red Heifer Slain

**Numbers 19:3** - "And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face"

The Red Heifer is called a sin offering (*hattat*; **Numbers 19:9**)

The Red Heifer was brought forth as impure, as a type of Christ, having the sins of his people on him, and who in conformity to this type suffered outside the gates of Jerusalem (**Hebrews 13:11**). The "one" who slays it can be anyone, even a stranger, according to the rabbis. The slaying of it denotes the putting of Christ to death, not by their hands (i.e. the Romans crucified) but done in the presence, and with the approval and oversight, of the priests and elders of the people.

Rashi - The mitzvah was performed by the deputy [to the *kohen gadol*/High Priest]. — [Sifrei Chukath 8] Then a non-priest slaughters it while Eleazar watches. — [Yoma 42a]

It was not given to Aaron, so that he might not be defiled or hindered in the High Priest's office even for a short time. Aaron was also not supposed to leave the Tabernacle confines.

"Not slaughtered in the camp" are likewise the scapegoat (**Leviticus 16:10**), the calf whose neck is broken (**Deuteronomy 21:4**), and the birds used in the purification of the recovered leper (**Leviticus 14:7**).

### Sprinkling the Blood

**Numbers 19:4** - "And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times:"

Seven times means completion, finality and perfection.

Eleazar took the blood in his left hand, and sprinkled it with the finger of his right hand, as Maimonides says (Hilchot Parah Adumah, c. 3. sect. 2.); and so the Targum of Jonathan, which says, he did not receive it into a vessel, but into the palm of his hand, and from thence sprinkled it with his finger.

- **Luke 11:20** - "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you."

By the finger of God - i.e. The Holy Spirit takes the cleansing blood of Christ, and sprinkles it on the hearts of his people.

Rashi - [In later generations, when this rite will be performed outside the Temple in Jerusalem,] he is to stand (on the mount of Olives) to the east of Jerusalem and to direct his gaze toward the entrance to the Temple while sprinkling the blood, so that he might see the door of the temple. — [Sifrei Chukath 14] The eastern Temple wall was made low so that the Temple door could be seen from there. (In Misn, Middot, c. 2. sect. 4.)

The burning of the Red Heifer on the Mount of Olives could be analogous to Jesus' anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, at the foot of the Mount of Olives.

### **Uniqueness**

The Red Heifer was a female, all other sin-offerings for the congregation being males. (**Leviticus 4:14**)

It was a sacrifice offered *once for all* (at least so long as its ashes lasted) not periodically or even annually. And in fact, ashes from previous heifers were mixed in with new ones, so there was a continuity.

The Red Heifer was wholly burnt outside the camp, and other sin-offerings only partially so (**Leviticus 4:11,12,20**).

This was the only sacrifice in which the blood was not drained out, but rather was burned up in the fire.

It was the only sacrifice that explicitly cleansed from the contact with sin and death.

### **Burning of the Red Heifer**

**Numbers 19:5** - "And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn:"

When the priest came to the mount of Olives, accompanied by the elders of Israel,

before he burnt the cow, he dipped himself in a dipping place there; and the wood being laid there in order, wood of cedar, ash, fir, and fig trees, made in the form of a tower, with holes opened in it (to put in the fire, and that it might burn the quicker), and its aspect being to the west, he bound the cow, and laid her upon the pile, with her head to the south, and her face to the west; and then having slain it, and sprinkled its blood, as before related, he set fire to it by the help of some small wood: the burning of it may signify the dolorous sufferings of Christ, when the wrath of God was poured forth like fire upon him; the same was signified by roasting the passover lamb. - *Gills Exposition*

A picture of Christ's sufferings, reaching to all parts of his body, skin, flesh and blood, and the shame and reproach that attended them, signified by the dung and loss of continence. Christ's soul as well as his body suffered, and were made an offering for sin.

Though the crucifixion of Christ was a very great sin, and done by wicked hands, yet it was pardonable through the very blood that was shed by them, **Acts 2:23**.

### Outside the Camp

Like the bull used in the induction of Aaron and his sons (**Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 8:17**), the bull for the sin offering of the anointed priest (**Leviticus 4:11**), and the goat and the bull for the sin offering of the Day of Atonement (**Leviticus 16:27**), the Red Heifer was burned outside the camp along with its flesh and dung. In the Red Heifer ritual the greater part of the blood as well was burned outside the camp (**Numbers 19:5**).

The area outside the camp is the sphere of uncleanness to which lepers, gonorrhoeal persons, and those defiled by contact with the dead are sent (**Numbers 5:2**), as are men who have had nocturnal emissions (**Deuteronomy 23:11 [10]**). Excrement likewise was to be buried outside the camp (**Deuteronomy 23:14 [13]**). The stoning to death of the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath also took place outside the camp (**Numbers 15:35**). The Book of Leviticus (**Leviticus 14:45**) speaks of the domain of the unclean as "outside the town" rather than as "outside the camp" but there is no practical difference, since the camp of the wilderness period actually represents the towns of the settled period.

### Cedar Wood, Hyssop and Scarlet

**Numbers 19:6** - "And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer."

Cedar wood, as the symbol of imperishable existence, hyssop represents purification from corruption as well as humility, and 'scarlet' is the color of blood and the emblem of life.

- **Leviticus 17:11** - "For the life of the flesh is in the blood..."

When he took them, the priest said, is this cedar wood? is this hyssop? is this scarlet? so he said three times for everyone of them, and he was answered, yes, three times to each of them: these were the same that were used at the cleansing of the leper, **Leviticus 14:4**. (Misn. Parah, c. 3. sect. 10.)

The ashes of this sin-offering, mixed with living water, was sprinkled with a sprig of hyssop:

- **Psalms 51:7** - "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

The sages say of one who wishes to repent: "He raised himself like the cedar; let him lower himself like the hyssop, the lowest of all trees, and like the worm (from which the scarlet dye is produced) - for the attributes of submission and humility are very dear in the eyes of the Holy One." Thus the Midrash states that "the hyssop is compared to a [repentant] human being: it appears to be inconsequential, yet in reality its power is very great before the Lord."

- **Hebrews 9:19** - "For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves (or heifers) and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people..."

### Decontamination

**Numbers 19:7-8** - "Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even. And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even."

In forty *seahs* of water (like a *mikvah* bath), as the Targum of Jonathan; not his clothes only, but his body was to be dipped in water.

Rashi - Transpose it [the verse] and explain it [thus]: He shall be unclean until evening, and then he may enter the camp.

### Gathering the Ashes / Waters of Separation

**Numbers 19:9** - "And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin."

The gatherer of the ashes could evidently be a layman as could also the slaughterer of a freewill offering (**Leviticus 1:5**). Both the priest and the gatherer became unclean until evening, as did a person who carried the carcass of an animal from a species that is forbidden for food and as did a person who ate or carried the carcass of a permissible animal that was not properly slaughtered (**Leviticus 11:28, 39**).

The ashes of the red heifer were combined with spring water or "living water" (Heb. *mayim hayyim*) in a vessel (**Numbers 19:17**) to produce a mixture called "water of lustration" (Heb. *me niddah* - separation). Living water is "water that has seeped through the veins of the earth... and is thus refined and rarefied." (Likkutei Torah, Chukat 62b.)

The mixture was applied by dipping into it and sprinkling (**Numbers 19:18**) on the third and seventh days after defilement (**Numbers 19:19**). This defilement was acquired by touching a corpse, a grave, or a human bone, or by being under the same roof with any of these.

An ongoing controversy later developed over whether the one who sprinkles the waters also becomes unclean. The Sefer HaChinuch, who provides reasons for almost all of the mitzvot, when writing about the Red Heifer (397), reflected the general bewilderment: "My hands grew weak and I was afraid to open my mouth."

The two components of the purifying mixture—ashes and spring water—represent two contradictory forces: fire, which represents the power of ascent; and water, which embodies the quality of "settling down" and saturation.

Rashi - Just as the Golden Calf was *fashioned* by fire, the body of the Red Heifer was to be consumed and *destroyed* by fire. Out of the former came catastrophe for Israel; out of the latter comes cleansing and life.

Tradition said the making of the Golden Calf involved a transformation from an inanimate object (gold) into something that became alive, through fire. The making of the Ashes of the Red Heifer was a reverse process: something alive would, through fire, become inanimate (ashes).

The cleansing with the waters of separation is mentioned by the prophets as part of the promised new covenant:

- **Zechariah 13:1** - "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and from uncleanness (*niddah*)."

**Ezekiel 36:25-27** - "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

But one of the Sages asks, to what water is this verse actually referring? It can't be speaking of the waters mixed with the heifer's ashes - for although that solution is the key to cleansing, purifying all it touches - the mixture itself is impure, which is why it contaminates those who were already pure!

Rambam states that one cannot explain the verse according to its simple meaning because it is illogical that the act of sprinkling the *mei chatat* purifies one person and defiles another.

That is the part that they couldn't ever figure out - but it was fulfilled by Christ taking impurity on Himself as He purifies His Bride.

**2 Corinthians 5:21**- "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

## Decontamination Again

**Numbers 19:10** - "And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever."

## Jewish Cleansing Rituals - Death vs Life

All classes of Levitical defilement can ultimately be traced back to death, with its two great outward symptoms, the corruption which appears in the skin on the surface of the body, and to which leprosy may be regarded as akin, and the fluxes from the dead body, which have their counterpart in the issues from the living body.

This purification pointed, in all its details, to 'the gift of God,' which is 'eternal life,' through the sacrifice of Him in whom is the fullness of life.

## Three Cleansing Rituals

There is a remarkable analogy between three sacrifices: **The Scapegoat**, which was to remove the personal guilt of the Israelites; the **Ashes of the Red Heifer**, which was to take away the defilement of death, as that which stood between God and man; and the 'living bird,' dipped in 'the water and the blood,' and then 'let loose in the field' at the purification from **leprosy**, which symbolized the "living death" of personal sinfulness, were all, either wholly offered, or in their essentials completed outside the sanctuary.

Spiritual death, as the consequence of the Fall, personal sinfulness, and personal guilt lay beyond the reach of the Temple provision. It had to take place *outside the camp*, and pointed directly to Him who was to come, who was crucified outside the camp.

- **Hebrews 9:13, 14** - "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and **the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the defiled**, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

According to R. Meir in all of Jewish history only seven heifers were burned, but according to the rabbis there were nine (Parah 3:5), and the tenth and last will be

prepared by the Messiah (Yad, Parah Adummah 3:4,5).

### **The Whole Process in Detail**

Alfred Edersheim's book, "*The Temple*," explains the process of making the Water of Separation:

Seven days before, the priest destined for the service was separated and kept in the Temple - in 'the House of Stones. ' [It was constructed completely out of stone, and all of the vessels which the priest used within were also fashioned exclusively out of stone. This is because Biblical law mandates that the only material which is impervious to the penetration of impurity is stone.] There he was daily sprinkled with [a solution of the "waters of sanctification" which had been prepared from] the ashes - as the Rabbis fable - of all the red heifers ever offered. [For every time a heifer was burned, one third of the ashes were removed and kept by the priests for future generations because all the heifers are sanctified through Moses' original heifer.] [Why daily? One who has been exposed to death must undergo the sprinkling of the ashes on the third and seventh day following his exposure. Therefore, he is sprinkled every day of his week, in case this day happens to be the third or seventh day of the count.]

When bringing the sacrifice, he was to wear his white priestly raiments. According to their tradition, there was an arched roadway leading from the east gate of the Temple out upon the Mount of Olives - double arched, that is, arched also over the supporting pillars, for fear of any possible pollution through the ground upwards [from an unknown grave].

[This stringency is unusual - Maimonides ruled for leniency in cases of doubt concerning ritual impurity in a public place. But with the Red Heifer ritual, the purity of the entire congregation of Israel hung in the balance]

Over this the procession passed. On the Mount of Olives the elders of Israel were already in waiting. First, the priest immersed his whole body, then he approached the pile of cedar-, pine-, and fig-wood which was heaped like a pyramid, but having an opening in the middle, looking towards the west. Into this the red heifer was thrust, and bound, with its head towards the south and its face looking to the west, the priest standing east of the sacrifice, his face, of course, also turned westwards. Slaying the sacrifice with his right hand, he caught up the blood in his left. Seven times he dipped his finger in it, sprinkling it towards the Most Holy Place, which he was supposed to have in full view over the Porch of Solomon or through the eastern gate. Then, immediately descending, he kindled the fire.

As soon as the flames burst forth, the priest, standing outside the pit in which the pile was built up, took cedar wood, hyssop, and 'scarlet' wool, asking three times as he held up each 'Is this cedar wood? Is this hyssop? Is this scarlet?' so as to call to the memory of every one the Divine ordinance. Then tying them together with the scarlet wool, he threw the bundle upon the burning heifer. The burnt remains were beaten into ashes by sticks or stone mallets and passed through coarse sieves; then divided into three parts -

one of which was kept in the Temple-terrace (the Chel), the other on the Mount of Olives, and the third distributed among the priesthood throughout the land.

The next care was to find one to whom no suspicion of possible defilement could attach, who might administer purification to such as needed it. For this purpose a priest was not required; but any one - even a child - was fit for the service. In point of fact, according to Jewish tradition, children were exclusively employed in this ministry. If we are to believe the Mishnah there were at Jerusalem certain dwellings built upon rocks, that were hollowed beneath, so as to render impossible pollution from unknown graves beneath. Here the children destined for this ministry were to be born, and here they were reared and kept till fit for their service, Peculiar precautions were adopted in leading them out to their work.

The child was to ride on a bullock, and to mount and descend it by boards. He was first to proceed to the Pool of Siloam, and to fill a stone cup with its water, and thence to ride to the Temple Mount, which, with all its courts, was also supposed to be free from possible pollutions by being hollowed beneath. [Recall that Siloam was the site of drawing water for the Festival of the Water Libation which took place daily during the Feast of Tabernacles] Dismounting, he would approach the 'Beautiful Gate,' [at the entrance to the Court of Women] where the stone vessel [known as the *kelal*] with the ashes of the red heifer was kept. Next a goat would be brought out, and a rope, with a stick attached to it, tied between its horns. The stick was put into the vessel with the ashes, the goat driven backwards, and of the ashes thereby spilt the child would take for use in the sacred service so much as to be visible upon the water.

The purification was made by sprinkling with hyssop. According to the Rabbis, (Mishnah Parah, c. 9. sect. 9.) three separate stalks, each with a blossom on it, were tied together, and the tip of these blossoms dipped into the water of separation, the hyssop itself being grasped while sprinkling the unclean. The same authorities make the most incredible assertion that altogether, from the time of Moses to the, final destruction of the Temple, only seven, or else nine, such red heifers had been offered: the first by Moses, the second by Ezra, and the other five, or else seven, between the time of Ezra and that of the taking of Jerusalem by the Romans. We only add that the cost of this sacrifice, which was always great, since a pure red heifer was very rare, was defrayed from the Temple treasury, as being offered for the whole people. Those who lived in the country would, for purification from defilement by the dead, come up to Jerusalem seven days before the great festival, and, as part of the ashes were distributed among the priesthood, there could never be any difficulty in purifying houses or vessels.

### **After the Destruction of the Temple**

Although it was impossible to prepare the Ashes of the Red Heifer after the destruction of the Temple, its use did not cease with the destruction, since there was still a supply of the ashes. As late as the amoraic period, those who had become ritually unclean through contact with the dead still used to cleanse themselves with it (see Nid. 6b, Y. Gilat, Mishnato shel R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus (1968), 252; Neusner (1987), 146ff.; and Sussmann, 306–16).

The rabbis of the talmudic period never really resolved the question of what the Red Heifer sacrifice meant.

In the medieval Midrash Tanhuma, Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai said: "The truth is that the rite of the Red Heifer is [simply] a decree of the King who is King of Kings... I have engraved an ordinance with no explanation [and] you are not permitted to transgress..."

Another version: Moses cried, "Master of the universe! This is a purification?!" God replied: "it is a *chok*, a decree that I have decreed." (Midrash Rabbah, Kohelet 8:5.)

In other words, we believe and obey it even though we don't understand it.

One Jewish tradition says there were nine Red Heifers offered so far on behalf of the Jewish people. The first was offered by Moses and Eleazar; the second by Ezra the Scribe; two more were offered by Simon the Righteous and another two by Yochanan the High Priest; a seventh was offered by the prophet Elijah; the eighth by Hanamel the Egyptian (a Babylonian was appointed high priest by Herod), and the ninth by Yishmael the son of Piabi (15-16 AD). Jewish tradition says that the tenth (and final) Red Heifer will be burned by the Messiah at the time of the rebuilding of the Temple (Mishnah, Parah 3:5).

Since the creation of the state of Israel, preparations for a rebuilding of the Temple have been undertaken by some Jews, and supported by many Christians. The key to this, however, is dependent on the ashes of the Red Heifer to sanctify the High Priest. The birth of a "perfect" Red Heifer was reported in 1997, in 2014 and most recently in 2018. All were eventually disqualified.

Tradition seems to say that ashes from the previous Red Heifers would have to be mixed in with the new to be valid. In the Copper Scroll, part of the Dead Sea Scrolls, there are said to be cryptic instructions on where the container of the last ashes along with other Temple artifacts were hidden from the Romans. But no one has been able to decipher the scroll sufficiently to find them.

### **Jesus as the Red Heifer**

Modern Jews and the rabbinical sages did not understand that Jesus is the fulfillment and substance of this type of sacrifice (**Hebrews 9:11-28**).

Like the mysterious Red Heifer, Jesus was completely without sin or defect (**2 Corinthians 5:21; John 8:46**); He was utterly unique (**John 1:14,18; Matthew 17:5**, etc.); He was sacrificed outside the camp (**Hebrews 13:13**); He became contaminated by offering Himself as sin for us (**2 Corinthians 5:21**); His blood was part of the sacrifice (**Ephesians 2:13, Hebrews 9:14, 1 Peter 1:19**, etc.); His sprinkling makes us clean (**1 Peter 1:2; Hebrews 12:24; Revelation 1:5**); and the "water of separation" that His sacrifice created is the means by which we are made clean from the impurity of sin

and death (**Ephesians 5:25-6; Hebrews 10:22**).

### **The Red Heifer and the Body of Christ**

Why is the Red Heifer female? This is the only female representation of a type of Christ in scripture.

The picture of Christ in his Church - his Body and his Bride - can be the only explanation.

The children of Israel - the people - "bring forth" this Red Heifer themselves. It was at their expense, and because it was completely burned, the priests gained nothing from its sacrifice, as they did for others. But Priests, Levites and Israelites all would benefit equally from the cleansing with the water of separation made from its ashes.

We have hints in the New Testament:

- **Colossians 1:24-25** - "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: "

"which is behind" = "what is lacking"

So what IS lacking? The connection between Christ's sacrifice and having it become real experience in us now - in his body and Bride.

Paul experienced the "sufferings of Christ"

- **2 Corinthians 1:5** - "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation."

The Red Heifer sacrifice speaks of our own personal embrace of the crucifixion, of becoming a "burnt offering" in identifying with Him. Experiencing the suffering means we also experience the comfort, which is shared among us. It's a personal experience that makes us aware we are a community of believers.

### **How will this be expressed in us? Through Love and Humility**

The Ashes of the Red Heifer are to be "kept for the congregation of the children of Israel" (**Numbers 19:9**) The congregation - or community - is "*edah*" in Hebrew, and comes from a root that means "witness, testimony, evidence."

- **John 13:35** - "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

- **1 John 3:14** - "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."

Death is what the Ashes of the Red Heifer are meant to cleanse us from.

"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." (**Job 14:4**) But "not one" in Hebrew can be read as a play on words; "*lo echad*" - *lo* can indicate a negative, but also "the" - "the oneness!" or "only The One."

But this "oneness" can also indicate the way we are to look at one another. The Red Heifer's ashes both "cleanse the impure and render impure the clean." The ashes have the effect of both cleansing and rendering impure at the same time. This was the mystery.

When "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God like the waters that cover the sea" (**Isaiah 11:9**) in the Days of messiah, the Sages write that everyone will then understand the mystery of the Red Heifer.

## Humility

The Ashes of the Red Heifer reflect the level of humility achieved by Abraham when he declared before God "I am but dust and ashes" (**Genesis 18:24**). He identified with the dust of Adam's creation but also ashes of the Red Heifer!

The sages record that God told Abraham: "In the merit of these words you have spoken - 'I am but dust and ashes' - I will give your children a commandment they will perform through ashes, and by your life, they will receive atonement through it."

This is stated again in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Hullin 6.7 1.6/88b-89a: A. Said Raba, "As a reward for what Abraham our forefather said, '[Abraham answered, Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord], I who am but dust and ashes' (Genesis 18:27), his descendants merited two commandments, the ashes of the Red Heifer and the dust given to the woman accused of infidelity."

Moses was said to have a special, personal association with the concept of the Red Heifer. "... Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without defect" because he was "the most humble man on earth" (**Numbers 12:3**). And the Messiah was to be a prophet "like unto Moses."

Although we have some level of understanding in many areas, at the end of the day, we know we really are small, like the hyssop plant.

The end of the daily Jewish Amidah prayer states, "May my soul be as dust to all." The Lord's Prayer is an abbreviated version of this prayer.

***Thus we should see ourselves as unclean (the 'chief of sinners' as Paul said) and yet see our brother as clean.***

**1 Timothy 1:15** - "...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

As the waters of separation become real to us, we fall into the attitude Paul prescribes in Philippians:

- **Philippians 4:8** - "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

i.e. concerning our brothers and sisters.

The trick is to not think about yourself at all. Otherwise we become defiled:

- **Titus 1:15** - "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled."

As we pick up our cross, as we are consumed as the living sacrifice, as we - as the Bride - fill up through our own experience "what is lacking" in the burnt offering of the Red Heifer, the love and humility that is expressed in our lives becomes the sweet savor of Christ that is acceptable to God.

**Resources:**

[https://hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Parashah/Summaries/Chukat/Red\\_Heifer/red\\_heifer.html](https://hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Parashah/Summaries/Chukat/Red_Heifer/red_heifer.html)

[http://www.templeinstitute.org/red\\_heifer/introduction.htm](http://www.templeinstitute.org/red_heifer/introduction.htm)

[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/39595/jewish/The-Calfs-Mother.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/39595/jewish/The-Calfs-Mother.htm)

[https://www.ou.org/torah/machshava/tzarich-iyun/tzarich\\_iyun\\_the\\_parah\\_adumah/](https://www.ou.org/torah/machshava/tzarich-iyun/tzarich_iyun_the_parah_adumah/)