



Sicha Summary

Chelek 16 | Parah

The Talmud:

On the Shabbos that falls on or before the first of Nissan, we read *parshas HaChodesh* (*Shemos* 12:1–20), which records G-d’s instructions for the Jewish court to set the Jewish calendar based on the appearance of the new moon each month, and to regard Nissan as the “head of months.” This *parshah* also records the details of the Passover offering. On the week prior to *parshas HaChodesh*, we read *parshas Parah* (*Bamidbar* 19:1-20), which records the laws of the Red Heifer that was used to purify a person who became ritually impure due to contact with a corpse.

The *Jerusalem Talmud* notes that it would be fitting for *HaChodesh* to precede *Parah*, being that the Tabernacle’s inauguration concluded on the first of Nissan — the day associated with the theme of *Hachodesh* — and the Red Heifer was prepared for the first time on the second day of Nissan, following the Tabernacle’s inauguration.

Yet, the *Talmud* concludes, *Parah* is read first because it “purifies all of Israel.” Meaning, first the people purify themselves before they can offer the Pesach sacrifice as recorded in *HaChodesh*. (*Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah* 3:5; *Rashi on Babylonian Talmud, Megillah* 29a)

The Question:

The Red Heifer was only able to purify those who contracted impurity by contact with a corpse. Furthermore, the law states that when the majority of the Jewish people are impure, the requirement for a sacrifice to be offered in purity is waived. Thus, the Red Heifer was only used for purification

when a **minority** of the people were impure. Why, then, does the Talmud say that we read *Parah* first because it “purifies **all** of Israel?”

The Explanation:

Rambam defines the *mitzvah* of the Red Heifer as follows: “To prepare the Red Heifer to have it ready for the procedure of purifying those who are impure.... The source of this commandment is the verse, “(A ritually pure person shall gather up the cow’s ashes and...) it shall be a keepsake for the congregation of Israel.” (*Sefer Hamitzvos, Positive Mitzvah* 113)

What is unique here is that Rambam does not define the *mitzvah* as the purification process itself, but rather, having the ashes available for this procedure at all times.

In spiritual terms this means the following: The purification process of the Red Heifer alludes to repentance. Impurity through contact with a corpse represents spiritual separation from the source of life — from G-d. The Red Heifer, which purifies a person from that state of spiritual lifelessness, is the work of repairing one’s relationship with G-d.

This is why the Red Heifer is prepared outside the encampment of the Jewish people — it addresses a person who is “outside” the camp of spiritual connection. Yet, the sprinkling of its ashes is oriented toward the opening of the Sanctuary — it realigns the person toward the proper spiritual path.

Now, a person may assume that this process is reserved for those who have literally sinned and ruptured their connection with G-d. The way Rambam frames this *mitzvah*, however, refutes this assumption. The purifying ashes of the Red Heifer must be ready at all times, for all people. Meaning, every person — even a righteous individual who remains connected to G-d — must remain attentive to the call of the Red Heifer to return to G-d. On a simple level, this is because no one can be sure of their own righteous conduct. On a deeper level, every created being is distant from G-d because each of us has a sense of self separate from G-d.

Therefore, the *Talmud* says, the Red Heifer is the “purification of all of Israel,” because in a spiritual sense, every person requires the purification process of repentance to bring him closer to G-d.

And as the *Talmud* concludes, “we do not interrupt between *Parah* and *Hachodesh*,” for through the process of earnest repentance, we usher in Nissan, “the month of redemption,” leading to the complete and final redemption of Moshiach.