

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 33

Chukas, Sicha 1

The Context:

The mitzvah of the Red Heifer is uniquely and explicitly connected to Moshe, both in its practical performance as well as in its theoretical study. The Torah opens its discussion of this law with the verse, “they shall bring to you a red heifer” — to Moshe himself. Why was it important for Moshe to personally be involved in the preparation of the Red Heifer? The Midrash explains: “all other red heifers will eventually be nullified, but yours will exist eternally.” Meaning, all future kohanim who prepared Red Heifers had to be themselves purified by Moshe’s Red Heifer. All Red Heifers, therefore, are called by Moshe’s name.

The sages make a second comment based on this phrase, “to you” — G-d said to Moshe, “[only] to you will I reveal the reason for the Red Heifer.” The cryptic and logically elusive mitzvah of purification through the ashes of the Red Heifer confounded the greatest minds, only Moshe (according to this Midrash) was privy to its internal, spiritual logic.

The Question:

Why does the mitzvah of the Red Heifer share such a deep connection to Moshe, more so than any other mitzvah?

The Explanation:

The Midrash (Tanchuma, Chukas, 8) interprets the mitzvah of the Red Heifer as an atonement for the sin of the golden calf. Commentaries explain that at Mount Sinai the Jewish people were cleansed from any vestige of sin, and so were redeemed from death which originated with Adam and Chava’s sin. The golden calf immediately returned the taint of sin, and with it, death to the people. Thus, the Red Heifer, which purifies from death, is ultimately intended to purify us from the very cause of death, sin, and so to bring to an era when death itself will be eradicated.

This lends insight into the Rambam’s unusual formulation in the laws of the Red Heifer:

“Nine red heifers were offered from the time that they were commanded to fulfill this mitzvah until the time when the Temple was destroyed a second time. The first was

brought by Moses our teacher... And the tenth will be brought by the king Mashiach; may he speedily be revealed. Amen, so may it be God's will." (Parah Adumah 3:4)

Why would the Rambam, in his book of law, include the number of red heifers throughout history? And why, of all the sacrifices that the Messianic king will offer, did he single out the red heifer that he will bring? Rather, with this Rambam alludes to the purpose of the red heifer. In its fullest expression it is intended to purify the world of sin and therefore of death. Thus, the red heifer is only fully realized when the Messianic king offers the red heifer and death truly is eradicated from existence.

We can now appreciate why the red heifer was uniquely linked with Moshe. Moshe personifies eternity. The sages tell us that "the actions of Moshe," such as the Mishkan and the red heifer, "are eternal," and even Moshe himself is eternal, "just as there Moshe stands and serves, so, too, here he stands and serves." Thus, the mitzvah which would usher in the era of eternity, by erasing the stain of sin which cuts short life and connection with the Divine, had to be entrusted to Moshe, the one leader who is synonymous with eternity.

The Lesson:

Moshe achieved this dimension of eternity since he transcended the limitations of the ego and body by submitting himself entirely to G-d. The purification from death comes from the ashes of Moshe's red heifer since the salve for "death," for disconnection from the Divine source, comes from Moshe's quality of self-effacement and surrender to the Divine. We see this self-transcendence expressed in two ways within Moshe. Moshe himself is eternal, and his eternity is also integrated with all eventual red heifers (since the ashes of his were used to consecrate all future red heifers).

So, too, we must arouse our essential core of eternity, our Moshe within that lives forever and is uniquely devoted to G-d alone. And we must also integrate that eternity within all our eventual endeavors within the world (the ashes of Moshe's red heifer within all other red heifers). All our actions, sacred and mundane, should be suffused with our hard-earned self-transcendence and sacrifice.
