

THE TRUE RED THREAT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d told Moshe and Aharon, "This is the statute (chukas) of the law which G-d commanded to be told. Tell the Children of Israel to take an unblemished, completely red heifer which has never worn a yoke." (Bamidbar 19:1-2)

THIS IS THE STATUTE OF THE LAW: Since the Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel saying, "What is this command and what reason is there for it," the term 'statute' is used, as if to say, "It is an enactment from Me and you have no right to think into it." (Rashi)

As it is well known, there are two types of commandments: those to which we can relate (Mishpatim) and those to which we cannot relate (Chukim). The former refers to mitzvos that benefit society and we can easily perceive, and the latter refers to those mitzvos whose benefit to society we do not quite understand - at least until they are given to us - such as the parah adumah, or red heifer.

This does not mean that we can (completely) fathom the depths of any mitzvah, let alone the statutes and the red heifer. However, as Rashi is about to point out, once we have been told to integrate a particular statute into our way of life, we can often see into it and some of its wisdom.

Says Rashi:

THEY WILL TAKE: they will take from their own, for just as they gave of their own gold earrings for the making of the calf, so must they bring a calf as an atonement from their own. (Rashi, Bamidbar 19:22)

Thus, Rashi is making a connection that we otherwise would not have seen: the red heifer is conceptually connected to the golden calf, though we do not yet know how. Therefore, Rashi adds:

A RED HEIFER: it is similar to a handmaid whose son defiled the palace of the king. They said, "Let the mother come and clean up the filth." Thus, the heifer comes to atone for the calf. (Ibid.)

What did the creation of the golden calf do? It returned death and defilement to the world, as the Midrash teaches, when the Jewish people answered G-d, "We will do and we will understand" (Shemos 24:7) at Mt. Sinai at the acceptance of Torah, they returned to the state of Adam HaRishon before the sin. That is, they became immortal.

Therefore, says the Arizal, the sin of the golden calf was a replication of the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Just as the eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil resulted in mankind's inability to remain alive forever in its present physical state, so too did the creation of the golden calf return death to mankind until the time of Resurrection of the Dead.

The primary purpose of the red heifer, therefore, was to purify a person from the level of spiritual impurity that comes from contact with the dead. The golden calf led to such a powerful level of impurity and the red heifer was given as its 'antidote.' Exactly how the 'medicine' works to achieve this remains a mystery for now, but at least we can understand this much about the most mysterious of all mitzvos.

In addition, Rashi explains:

RED: an allusion to, "Though they be red as scarlet" (Yeshayahu 1:18); PERFECT: an allusion to the Jewish people who used to be perfect but through it (the golden calf) they became spiritually blemished; let this come and atone for them so they can regain their perfection. WHICH HAS NEVER WORN A YOKE: just as they threw off the yoke of Heaven. (Rashi, Bamidbar 19:22)

Thus, we can see that the sin of the golden calf was quite a comprehensive one, and that the red heifer had tremendous spiritual healing powers to counteract its effect. The only question is, what did the Brisker Rav mean when he said that it is THIS specific mitzvah, the mitzvah of the RED heifer that is the key to ending the final exile, Golus Edom, the 'Exile of Edom,' and bringing on the 'Final Redemption' for which we yearn to this very day (Bais HaLevi al HaHaggadah)?

Shabbos Day:

Eisav said to Ya'akov, "Please, let me devour from this red, this red thing, because I am faint;" therefore his name is called Edom. (Bereishis 25:30)

The truth is, five verses before we get to this posuk we have:

The first one came out completely red (admoni)... (Bereishis 25:5)

Is this not a sufficient reason to name Eisav 'Edom,' which comes from the Hebrew word 'adom,' which means 'red?' I mean, the man came out fully red, "all over like a hairy robe!"

This is the K'li Yakar's question, and he answers it by saying that many children are born red, so there was nothing yet at the time of his birth to indicate any propensity for red things on Eisav's part. However, once he said, "Please, let me devour from this red, this red thing," it was an indication that Eisav wanted to eat the dish Ya'akov was preparing for Yitzchak, his father, the mourner, not

because he desired lentils, but specifically because they were red.

Thus, the episode of the lentils confirmed that Eisav's red appearance was not incidental, but part and parcel of his nature. And, what nature was that? Says Rashi:

The first one came out completely red (admoni)... (Bereishis 25:5)

RED: a sign that he would always be shedding blood. (Rashi)

Because red is the color of blood, and blood is the symbol of man's physicality and of the transient, of this physical world in which we live. The world of Eisav, in fact, as his true name indicates:

They called him 'Eisav.' (Bereishis 25:25)

- from the word 'l'asos,' which means 'to do,' or 'to make,' which is why the lowest of all spiritual worlds is called 'Olam HaAsiyah' - the 'World of Doing.'

However, Ya'akov related to the lentils as lentils, for they were a mourner's food more because of their shape than their color:

...They are round like a wheel, and mourning is a wheel that revolves in this world. (Rashi, Bereishis 25:30) As such, they symbolized the need to rise above the cycle of physicality and the temporal, just like the bechor - the birthright - that Eisav so easily surrendered to quench his hunger for things red, and more importantly, his portion in the World-to-Come:

Eisav cried out, "Why do I need the birthright?" (Bereishis 25:32); A Heavenly Voice echoed, "Why do you need the blessing?" (Midrash HaGadol 25:32)

Blessings which made the difference between living ONLY in this world and also living in the World-to-Come:

Yitzchak avoided using G-d's Name in Eisav's blessing since the purpose of Eisav's blessing was to grant him his full reward in this world so that he should be excluded from the blessings of the World-to-Come. (Midrash Pliah)

For, that is what Edom is all about - THIS WORLD - even at the cost of eternity. Thus, by extension, Golus Edom, the fourth and final exile the Jewish people have been meant to endure in advance of Moshiach's arrival, is one that eternalizes the temporal. This was precisely what the golden calf represented, for a calf represents the carefree and therefore, by necessity, G-d-free society of Egypt, and the gold represents a desire to make it eternal.

By definition, the red heifer represented just the opposite. It exemplified the need to be willing to give up things in this world when they interfere with the acquisition of the World-to-Come. It represents seeing death not as the end of one's existence, which the Midrash said was Eisav's belief, but the portal to a higher, far more spiritual, eternal reality.

And, if the Brisker Rav says that the red heifer will play a central role in the bringing about of the end to Golus Edom, it must mean that society in general, and many Jews in particular, will be sharing Eisav's point of view just in advance of Moshiach's arrival - even religious ones.

After all, Ya'akov was and IS, the TWIN brother of Eisav. And, if history has proven anything at all, it is that we can be just as Eisavian as Eisav himself, and just as Edomian as Edom himself, and all too often, even more so. Thus, it is with great precision that the death of Miriam occurs right after this extremely important key to Geulah Shlaimah - Complete Redemption.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

The entire nation of Israel reached the Tzin desert in the first month. The people camped in Kadesh, and that is where Miriam died and was buried. (Bamidbar 20:1)

The Talmud teaches that Miriam's death in juxtaposition with the mitzvah of the red heifer is to indicate that the death of the righteous atones for the nation, just as sacrifices do (Moed Katan 28a). However, based upon what we have just written and what we recall from Miriam's youth, we can easily find another connection between the two sections.

After all, it was Miriam who, at the age of six years old, advised her father to remarry his wife Yocheved, and to continue having children in spite of Paroah's decree to murder them (Sotah 12a). From this advice came the baby Moshe, who quickly grew into the redeemer of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery, better known for all time as 'Moshe Rabbeinu.'

However, if you recall the words of the Arizal:

There is not a single generation in which Moshe Rabbeinu does not return, as the verse hints, "The sun rises and the sun sets" (Koheles 1:5), and, "One generation goes, and another comes" (Koheles 1:4), in order to rectify that generation. Thus, the Generation of the Desert, along with the Erev Rav reincarnate in the final generation, "like in the days of leaving Egypt" (Michah 7:15). And Moshe will also arise among them... (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 20)

Thus, Miriam's contribution to the Jewish people was not just in the past, but also in the future, and particularly at the End-of-Days and the redemption from Golus Edom. In fact, her advice was the result of looking past the present and into the future, knowing that Pharaoh's come and go, but Torah and the Jewish people are eternal.

This is why, as the Talmud further points out, Miriam had the foresight to bring along musical instruments upon departing Egypt. The present called for simply leaving Egypt and surviving the test of traveling in the desert, being completely and directly dependent upon G-d for survival. However, Miriam foresaw the future, demanded being in a position to praise G-d for all the good He

was about to perform.

That is why the miraculous well that followed the Jewish people around for forty years had been in her merit. The life-giving source of water and symbol of G-d's direct, daily involvement in the affairs of the Jewish people was in the merit of the woman who lived by that fact of life. A fact of life that is becoming increasingly apparent in our own day and age as historical Torah undercurrents begin to shake and shatter the illusory stability of Western society.

Which is why the continuation of this episode is a stunning conclusion to what we have begun.

MELAVE MALKAH:

G-d told Moshe and Aharon, "Since you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me..." (Bamidbar 20:12)

(The following d'var Torah is based upon another series of essays called 'Crossing The Yabok.' Anyone wishing to read the complete essays and to see how they relate to the events of September 11 should go to my website: www.thirtysix.org.)

Not only does this section about Moshe hitting the rock represent the climax of Sefer Bamidbar, it also represents on another level, the climax of all that Torah is trying to teach a Jew to become. Not only that, but once Moshe hit the rock and brought upon himself a decree to die in the desert, it ended the Jewish people's last chance to usher in the Final Redemption right then and there.

The main lesson that speaking to the rock was supposed to teach the Jewish people was that:

Survival in Eretz Yisroel means using one's spiritual abilities to accomplish physical goals.

Though bringing water from a rock by hitting it was also a miracle, it was one that still required physical involvement in the physical world. Speech, on the other hand, is a function of the soul, a spiritual activity. Bringing water from a rock by speaking to it was a miracle far beyond the one of hitting it and bringing forth water - like working for a living versus praying and learning Torah for a living.

Since the message did not come about through Moshe's mitzvah, it came about instead through his punishment of not entering Eretz Yisroel, which at first did not seem to fit the crime. After all, as the Talmud teaches more than once, G-d punishes measure-for-measure. However, what did hitting the rock instead of speaking to the rock have to do with entering Eretz Yisroel, if not that it was one of the last great tests and lessons for leaving the desert and entering Eretz Yisroel.

G-d told Moshe and Aharon, "Since you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me..." (Bamidbar 20:12)

That is, you did not believe that I would bring the water out from the rock - your parnassah from an impossible situation - by speaking to the rock - by simply working the spiritual channels.

What follows this episode in the Torah? Near war with Edom, which many commentaries say is an allusion to the war with Edom at the End-of-Days? Another coincidence? No such thing, especially in the Torah. As Rashi points out more than once, sections of the Torah are placed together because their context is often a clue to their meaning and deeper message for Jews throughout history.

Hence, on one side of the episode is the red heifer, which the Brisker Rav said is a key to ending Golus Edom, and on the other side is an actual unfriendly confrontation with the people of Edom themselves, which many say is an allusion to the future and final exile itself! Sandwiched between the two is the tragic episode of Moshe hitting the rock, and the last chance for the Jewish people to bring the Final Redemption in Moshe Rabbeinu's time, and more than likely, until the End-of-Days since Moshe is the only who possessed the ability to actually bring it early.

All of it comes against the concept embodied and emboldened by the golden calf, represented by the color red and the physical blood it symbolizes: the willingness to forsake the World-to-Come for this world, either completely, as Western society has done, or partly as many Jews have done today. It takes the litmus test to know if and when you fall into this category? Just ask yourself: What mitzvos have I, and do I sacrifice in the name of physical comfort? As the Torah points out, doing so does not just interfere with one's spiritual level and portion in the World-to-Come, it also results in Chillul Hashem. For, the more our ways resemble those of Eisav, the less the nations of the world are impressed with our commitment to G-d and Torah.

If our faithfulness to Torah results in enhanced trust in G-d, then the Torah system appears to elevate the Jew above the mundane. However, if we do mitzvos but practice Eisav-type trust in G-d, especially in areas of livelihood, then our adherence to Torah and mitzvos stops making sense, appearing instead as just another Western religion for religion-sake - a profaning of G-d's Holy Name.

For many, it's a tough and bitter pill to swallow in our generation. We are a generation that has grown up with a world war, and for the most part, with far more materialism than our ancestors ever knew. In many cases, it even enhances our ability to perform certain mitzvos, except for trusting and having faith in G-d's Providence.

However, as the Torah points out, if we do not learn to speak to the rock, or rather, to THE 'Rock' to survive, to stop acting like the twin brother of Eisav in order to rise above such a level, then Edom waits for us at the other end. Then, after so many years of thinking how alike we can really be, we learn just how different we really are. Then, the message imbued by the red heifer is imposed upon us, rather than utilized by us, to bring an end to the last, longest, and most difficult exile of all history.

Have a great Shabbos,
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