

CURE OR PREVENTION?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

PURIM IS GONE, PESACH is on its way, b"H. This week's parsha discusses different issues, but the most dramatic by far is the episode of the golden calf. That's why it is always interesting when Parashas Parah, the mitzvah of the red heifer and third of the special parshios for this time of year, occurs at the same time.

Parashas Parah is in Parashas Chukas, all the way in Sefer Bamidbar. We won't get to that parsha until the summer, b"H, but historically, it occurred long before. The red heifer was the purification process necessary for the service in the Mishkan described in both Sefer Shemos and Sefer Vayikra.

Even if you hold that the Mishkan was the Divine response to the golden calf, the parah adumah—red heifer—would have still been necessary for the service in the Temple that would have eventually been built. According to this opinion, even if there wasn't always meant to be a Mishkan, there was always meant to be a Temple.

This is why it is interesting that Rashi mentions that the parah adumah was the "tikun" for the golden calf. Just as a mother cleans up after her child, Rashi says, likewise does the heifer "clean up" after its calf. If so, then it is a good example of how, when it comes to the Jewish people, God creates the "cure" before the "illness."

Thus if anything, the red heifer existed BEFORE the golden calf. If anything, it was not the CURE for the golden calf, but should have been preventative medicine against it. We take vitamins to AVOID illness, not BECAUSE we are sick, to fortify the immune system to make it less vulnerable to infection.

The answer to the question may have to do with something the Zohar says, regarding an incident in Parashas Vayaitzai. The Torah explains that when Ya'akov Avinu wanted to quickly increase the amount of sheep he had, he prepared some kind of stick and caused the sheep to mate. It worked, and in a very short time, he was successful.

Without question mysticism was involved. Otherwise, shepherds over the ages would have used the same technique to increase their flocks. Ya'akov Avinu did something spiritual to multiply his sheep, but it worked physically.

So much so in fact that the Zohar says, that when Ya'akov did this, he actually fulfilled the mitzvah of Tefillin. That's right, Tefillin. What? How? Why?

This is a good reminder that the essence of a mitzvah is its underlying concept. The means prescribed to fulfill mitzvos is the best way FOR NOW for us to accomplish what the mitzvah is designed to do. It takes into account who we are and the world we live in. It maximizes our current potential to partner with God in Tikun Olam—World Rectification.

This idea was reflected in the second set of tablets, also in this week's parsha. Kabbalah explains that the difference between the first set of tablets which Moshe Rabbeinu broke, and the second set he actually brought down, was more than just he hewed the latter. The first set of tablets was a much higher level of Torah, the one we will re-receive for the Messianic Era.

In the Messianic Era, there will be no yetzer hara. No one will sin. There will be no need for warnings against sin, and no need for courts to punish any sinners. No one will have to bring a sin offering or a transgression offering, only thanksgiving offerings.

Does that mean that any mitzvah that has to do with sinning will be expunged from the Torah, God forbid? Not at all. Rather, the concepts behind the mitzvos can and will be achieved in other ways. Ya'akov Avinu was able to accomplish with some sticks what our Tefillin accomplishes through finely handcrafted black leather boxes.

This probably sounds a little strange to most. It is because from a young age, people are taught to relate to the mitzvos in terms of how we now do them. We are taught to look at them as acts of loyalty, which they are as well, as opposed to in terms of their tikun potential.

Most teachers and parents just never get into the reasons for the mitzvos. Instead, they emphasize more the technical fulfillment of mitzvos than anything else. Why wouldn't we grow up believing that mitzvos can only be performed in one way?

Thus, when Rashi says that the parah adumah was the "cure" for the sin of the golden calf, he is talking about what the parah adumah had to "become" as a result of the calf. Its purpose goes back to Creation itself, and it can accomplish its share of world rectification in a number of ways. It was the sin of the calf that established how we access its energy today.

Why did it not prevent the calf, if that energy was already in the world, at least in potential? It previously had operated on a higher plain of spirituality, and perhaps had worked for the Jewish people in Egypt prior to their departure. In other words, it WAS operating in the world prior to the calf, just on a higher level of reality.

As the Leshem explains, the Jewish people by the time of the Korban Pesach in Egypt were so elevated that evil was almost destroyed, and with it, spiritual impurity. They had accessed the light of the red heifer without having to actually use one.

What changed? The Erev Rav. Moshe Rabbeinu took them out of Egypt without God's consent, as Rashi explains in this week's parsha, during the episode of the calf. They dragged the spiritual stragglers down to their level, where the energy of the parah adumah could not protect them on its

level at that time.

After the incident with the calf, the method of the parah adumah had to be adjusted. This was so it could operate even on the level to which the Jewish people had descended. It is THIS procedure of spiritual purification that is described by the Torah, and Rashi explains.