

## After the Golden Calf comes the Cleansing Cow



Parashat Parah is the third of the four special Shabbatot which fall around Purim (Shekalim, Zachor, Parah and HaChodesh). Shekalim is normally read before Rosh Chodesh Adar. Zachor is always the Shabbat before Purim and the remaining two fall on the Shabbatot on or before Rosh Chodesh Nisan. They are normally spread over five or occasionally six weeks. Unlike Shabbat Hagadol (the Shabbat immediately preceding Pesach) each has its own special Maftir and Haftarah.

Shekalim reminds us of the obligation to bring the Half-Shekel used to purchase communal offerings; Zachor, of the mitzvah to remember and blot out Amalek; Parah of the Red Heifer and HaChodesh of the sanctification of the New Moon of Nisan, our responsibility to manage our calendar and readying ourselves for Pesach ahead of redemption.

The timely leining of these parshiyot precedes the institution of our annual Torah cycle. The four parshiyot and holiday readings are identified in the Talmud (Megilla 29a). A triennial Torah cycle was prevalent in Eretz Yisrael and annual cycle in Babylon.

Every year we are punctilious to announce that special attention should be paid to the reading of Zachor; each word should be heard and correctly enunciated as it is a specific Torah requirement to hear the pessukim fulfilling our responsibility, reminding us of the evil of Amalek. Indeed, in leap years, where Zachor falls 13 months after the previous reading, there is Rabbinic discussion over the potential obligation to have a special reading a month early so that no twelvemonth is Zachor-free. Ultimately, in those years we rely on the reading of those verses when they appear at the end of Parashat Ki Tetze.

According to some authorities, Parashat Parah is also a Torah requirement and special attention should be taken (Shulchan Aruch OC 146:2 / 685:7) though the Mishna Berura (146:13 / 685:15) holds with those opinions that it is Rabbinic. Nonetheless, particular attention should be paid

and, in some communities, Parah was only leined by older Baalei Keriah.

The Maftir of Parah (Bemidbar 19:1-22) explains the purification process necessary to cleanse oneself from ritual impurity so that one can bring the sacrificial offerings into the Temple. Essential to this were the ashes of the rare red heifer. The preparation of the ashes is described as a *Chok*, one of those laws which we could not evince nor explain through the logic that it benefits society, the *Mishpatim*, or reminds us of Hashem's Agency in our history, the *Eiduyot*). Counterintuitively, the preparation of the cleansing ashes renders the person who does the preparation *tamei* (ritually impure).

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In the recent monthly "**Chance to Remember and Reflect**" we looked at coping with smachot and chagim without a loved one – these are particularly difficult times when we remember or would most wish for their presence. Our next meeting will be **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> March at 9am**. There's no need to RSVP but it is helpful if you let Rochelle in the office know that you are interested.

Also, please be in touch with us if you know of people who require any particular assistance over Pesach or if you are able to host or assist others over this time.

My next "**Monthly Munch**" with the pre-Bar / Bat Mitzvah group will be **Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March at 9am**. It is great to see some of the families joining us for Shacharit and some of the young men in their still-shiny Tefillin!

Please do sign up for the **Berlin Trip 10-11 June**. **Closing date for bookings is 14<sup>th</sup> March**.

Shabbat Shalom

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeremy Lawrence".

Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence