

Parshas Parah

Parshas Parah, the description of how we prepare the ashes of the *Parah Adumah* (Red Heifer) and use them to purify ourselves, is added to this week's *Torah* reading to help us get ready for the coming *Yom Tov* of *Pesach*. At a superficial level, it is a technical necessity that we all be ritually pure so that we may bring the *Korban Pesach* on the 14th of *Nissan*. We hope that this will occur this year with the coming of *Mashiach* and this reading is an expression of this hope even though we don't really have a Red Heifer in practice.

The theme of this *Shabbos* is expanded in the *haftorah*, which comes from *Sefer Yechezkael*. The *navi* speaks of another kind of ritual cleansing, that which *Hashem* will do when he removes our sins prior to the Redemption. He uses the imagery of the *Parah Adumah* ritual, "I will spray upon you pure waters and you will be purified, from all of your impurity and idolatry I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart and infuse you with a new spirit. I will remove the stone heart from your bodies and replace it with a flesh heart."

This promise of spiritual cleansing by Divine intervention differs from other descriptions of the Redemption in the *Torah* (example *Devarim* 30:2-6) where the impetus is on the people to do *teshuvah* in order for *Hashem* to respond to them. Rav Eliyahu Dessler (renown *Baal Mussar*, thinker and *Mashgiach*, 1892-1953) writes in his *Michtav M'Eliyahu* that this prophecy assures us that if we cannot muster the spiritual energy to repent before *Hashem* redeems us, then *Hashem* will gift us with that spirit from above. The reason He will do this is because we are His representatives and carry His name and when we are not the way we should be, it is a desecration of His name.

The message is that preparing for redemption involves preparing our souls. We must be ready to shed the negative aspects of our personal exile in order to merit personal and communal redemption. We can do it on our own volition or with Divine inspiration. When we ready ourselves for *Pesach* and the Festival of Freedom, this is what we need to think about. We shouldn't get distracted by the physical preparations for *Yom Tov*. We should also prepare our minds and hearts as well.