

IMPURITY & PURITY by Rabbi Gideon Weitzman

In this week's special Maftir we read of the Para Aduma, the totally red cow that was burnt and the ashes were used to purify the person who was tamei met, who had become impure through contact with a dead body. (Bemidbar 19:1-22)...

...it is interesting to note that the portion taken from the prophet Yechezkel to be read as the Haftara contains no mention of the para aduma. The passage does speak about purity and impurity but on a different level, not a human one, but more of a Divine concept of tum'a and tahara.

The Haftara opens with God admonishing the Jewish people for making the Land of Israel impure. "The house of Israel dwell in their land and they defiled it through their ways like the impurity of the menstrual woman thus were their ways before Me." The Jewish people were given a great Divine gift, they lived in the Land of Israel, God's land and the land were one can be close to Him.

However, instead of using this gift wisely, they followed evil ways and corrupted themselves and the land together with them.

God promises "I will pour My wrath on them due to the blood that they spilt on the land, I will spread them among the nations and they will become

strangers in their lands." If the Jewish people cannot use the Land properly then they will be exiled from her. They will wander and suffer among the nations of the world.

There, among the nations, they will commit the worst possible crime. "They will desecrate My holy name that they [the other nations] will say of them 'These are the people of God and they have left their land'". The fact that the Jews have been exiled from their land is a desecration of the Divine Name. If these are the people of God and they have been ejected from their land and their glory is shattered, what can one say of their God?

...The definition of chilul Hashem, is given by the Gemara. "Whoever learns Torah and is close to Torah scholars and is dishonest in business and does not deal nicely with others, what do people say of him? Woe to him who learnt Torah, woe to his rabbi who taught him Torah, see how corrupt his deeds are and how despicable his ways are" (Yoma 86a). The Gemara "proves" this by bringing our verse that tells of the desecration of God's name by the people living in exile.

The same can be said with regards the Jewish people in exile. The other nations see them and are aghast. If these are the people that are supposed

to be representing God in the world, how come they are outside of their land? The conclusion may be reached that God is ineffectual and incapable of supporting and protecting His people... This is a chilul Hashem, the ultimate desecration of God's name.

The prophet immediately tells us what will become of this chilul Hashem. "I will be compassionate on My holy name that the children of Israel desecrated among the nations that they came to. Thus say to Israel, 'God says not for your sake will I do, rather for the sake of My holy name that you desecrated among the nations that you came to. I will sanctify My name that was desecrated among the nations that you desecrated among them, and the nations will know that I am God when I sanctify Myself before them. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all of the lands and bring you to your land. I will pour on you purifying waters and purify you from all of your impurity and iniquity'".

The rest of the Haftarah deals with the return to the Land and the rebuilding and rebirth of the nation.

God promises Divine tahara. Whether the Jewish people are in a fit state we will be purified when the time comes, as God has decreed that this is what will be. God frees us as part of a grand Divine plan, not only because we 'deserve' it.

This is clearly related to the theme of Parah and the preparation for the festival of Pesach that requires a state of purity.

The Haftara opens with the words "The house of Israel dwell in their land and they defiled it through their ways like the impurity of the menstrual woman thus were their ways before Me". Why does the prophet use the image of the impurity of the nida, the menstrual woman as opposed to any other type of tum'a?

The Midrash explains that the tum'a of nida has a positive outcome, as it is a sign of fertility. (Tanchuma, Metzora 9) The Midrash continues "Therefore God equates the impurity of Israel to that of the nida, as she becomes impure and then pure again [by immersion in the mikvah, the ritual bath]. Thus God will purify Israel as it says 'I will pour on you purifying waters and purify you.'"

The Midrash uses the image of the nida to show that impurity is not something to be afraid of or to run from. Impurity is a necessary stage that leads to greater purity and to rebirth. Thus the impurity of Israel will lead to a greater purity during the rebirth of the redemption.

It is totally natural for a person to experience periods of impurity. One needs to learn to purify oneself and to achieve even greater heights. This is the positive side of impurity and it is as true for the national impurity as it is for the impurity of the individual.

How are we to achieve purity? How can we end our long period of exile, desecration of the Divine name and impurity?

The Midrash supplies the answer. "Like

the impurity of the nida and not that of the dead person. As when a corpse is in a house a kohen cannot enter there, as it is tamei. But with the impurity of the nida, a kohen can enter the house and sit with her.

Thus were God to liken Israel to the impurity of the corpse, the Divine presence would never return. However He likened them to the nida, the Divine presence dwells among Israel even when they are impure, as it says 'Who dwells among them in their impurity' (Vayikra 16:16)."

The prophet promises us that God did not leave us even in our darkest hour. Even when it seemed as though He was absent... still He dwelled among us.

God took us out of Egypt even though we may not have deserved it and not have been on the highest spiritual level. So will He redeem and purify us in our days. He brought us back to our land from among the nations of the world, and He will purify us. Like the nida, we suffer times of distance and tum'a. But we know that this is temporary and will lead to rebirth and even greater tahara.

