

Purity and Integrity

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

The laws of the Red Heifer are considered to be among the inscrutable commandments of the Torah. The elaborate ritual was ordained for the purpose of purifying those who had become ritually unclean through contact with a dead body.

One of the strange features of this procedure was that while it purified the impure, it defiled all those who were connected with the preparation of the ashes and water of purification "It purifies the impure, and simultaneously defiles the pure." How could the exact same ingredients lead to opposite results? I suggest a possible explanation.

Those engaged in purifying others might naturally come to think of themselves as being highly important individuals. The impure people must turn to them for help. Being in this position of spiritual power could easily lead the "purifiers" to aggrandize themselves, to subtly (or not so subtly) adopt feelings of superiority. To prevent this eventuality, the Torah declares that the purifiers must themselves be rendered impure. Thus, they will not develop an inflated sense of self-importance, because they will realize that they must become ritually

defiled while they purify others. The process does not raise them above those they serve, but actually lowers their status of ritual purity.

The ancient Red Heifer ceremony relates to a deeply significant aspect of religious psychology. Its message continues to be relevant today.

Some years ago I attended a meeting of Orthodox rabbis to discuss policies relating to conversion to Judaism. One of the rabbis unabashedly proclaimed: "We have the power! We can demand prospective converts to do everything our way. We do not need to make any concessions because we have total control. They need us, we don't need them. We have the power!"

I responded: "Did we become rabbis so that we can gain and exert power? Isn't it our responsibility to help others and bring them closer to God and Torah, humbly and sincerely? Isn't it antithetical to our religious worldview to arrogate to ourselves "power" to make people squirm, and bend to our will, and meet our demands—even when these demands far exceed what the actual halakha requires?" He responded: "We have the power, let's use it." His attitude has largely prevailed in the Orthodox rabbinic establishment. I frequently receive emails

and phone calls from prospective converts who have faced abuse and arrogance in their dealings with Orthodox rabbis and rabbinic courts. Among the criticisms I've heard: the would-be converts are treated like numbers, not like people; the rabbis don't return calls, don't keep scheduled meetings, keep delaying the actual conversion; the rabbis keep adding requirements, well beyond anything stated in Rambam and Shulhan Arukh; in some cases the rabbis have made rude comments, even questioning the morality or integrity of the would-be converts. "We have the power, let's use it!"

This is not "power" but arrogance and corruption. In halakhic terms, this is called "inuy hadin", a miscarriage of justice causing undue suffering. It is a mockery of halakhic process, not fulfillment of it.

It is not that the rabbis are bad people. Certainly, they consider themselves to be good people who seek to implement Jewish law and tradition in the best standards possible. The problem is that when people are in positions of "power", they are easily corrupted by this "power". They come to see themselves as the ultimate arbiters of halakha and truth; they become part of a larger culture of power-grabbing and power-holding; they see themselves as representatives

Prayer Schedule

SHABBAT

ROSH HODESH TAMMUZ

PARASHAT CHUKKAT

Friday, July 1st, 2011

Shaharit 6:30 am

Minhah & Arbit 6:30 pm

Candle Lighting 7:50 pm

Saturday, July 2nd, 2011

Shaharit 8:30 am

Tehillim 6:00 pm

Class w/R. Batzri 6:15 pm

Minhah & Arbit 7:00 pm

Motzei Shabbat 8:53 pm

WEEKDAYS

Sun-Mon, July 3rd & 4th

Shaharit 7:30 am

Tuesday-Friday

Shaharit 6:30 am

EREV SHABBAT

PARASHAT BALAK

Friday, July 8th, 2011

Shaharit 6:30 am

Minhah & Arbit 6:30 pm

Candle Lighting 7:49 pm

of real truth and threaten or malign those who disagree.

The ritual of the Red Heifer provides a vital lesson for those in positions of religious leadership—whether rabbis or laypeople. It teaches us to see our roles with humility and sensitivity, not to inflate our self-importance, and certainly not to seek "power" over others. It reminds us to focus full attention on those who turn to us, to do our best to serve and to help. It is not "power" that we seek, but compassion and justice. It is not lordship that we desire, but service to God and humanity.

In Memoriam

CONGRATULATIONS 2011 GRADUATES

Adina Jalali
Emerson Middle School



Joseph Miskabi
Juris Doctor
University of California
Hastings College of
Law

Max Sheff
Emerson Middle School



Ryan Noah Shiri
Hawthorne Middle
School

SHABBAT KIDDUSH

is in honor of the marriage of
Michelle Lavian & David Ischayek

by the
Lavian and Ischayek
Families

MAZAL TOV

Michelle & David

Congratulations
to your parents
Linda and Jimmy Ischayek
Zohreh and Jamshid Lavian

It is customary to light a memorial candle and to donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend prayer services in honor of loved ones.

Shabbat / 30 Sivan
Ester bat Sofi

Sunday / 1 Tammuz
Selina Jacobs
Ezra Yaacov Kemara
Moshe ben Abdullah
Lulu bat Simha
Abraham ben Isser Posmentier*
Yitzhak ben haim

Monday / 2 Tammuz
Isaac Amron
Eugene Cornateanu
Simha bat Lulu*
Meir ben Ezra Nathan

Tuesday / 3 Tammuz
Yosef ben Aharon Moshe*
Habib ben Mordecai Rokhsar

Wednesday / 4 Tammuz
Aharon Shaul Levi*

Friday / 6 Tammuz
Eliyahu ben Moshe

*To update, please call the office
at 310.474.0559.*

Refuah Shlemah

Yonatan ben Alizah • Mazal Tov
bat Sulha Mitana • Matilda
Louisa • Yaheskel ben Regina •
Ayala bat Naomi • Khayah Noa
bat Sara • Haim ben Mordechai •
Pnina bat Esther • Yosi ben
Esther • Ramah Regina bat
Farha • Aziza bat Sara Judith bat
Malka • Ofek ben Yochai •
Efrayim Zev ben Fayga • Sulha
Matana bat Mozelle • Gershon
ben David • Farangis Miriam bat
Touran • David ben Leah • Avra-
ham Haim ben Miryam • Yaakov
ben Freda • Rachel bat Mazal
Tov • Avraham ben Rabbie • Ma-
zal Sigalit bat Rivkah • Orit bat
Tikvah • Yaakov ben Aliyah •
Chana Leah bat Reiza • Avra-
ham Moshe ben Miriam Morde-
cai Haim ben Hanna • Rahel bat
Regina • Yousef ben Rivka

Victoria Cohen, z"l

By Nadine Dabby

Many of you knew Victoria Cohen as a very sweet, quiet lady. She was a woman of great integrity and great spirit, with a zeal for life.

Vicky was born in Baghdad, to Hanina and Abdallah Cohen. Vicky left Iraq in 1950 during the great Alia to Israel. She arrived in Southern California in 1973.

You would be hard-pressed to find a woman of her caliber. Vicky was one of the last of a generation of people who were strong but soft and above all a lady.

She will be missed by her family and friends.

SEUDAH SHLISHEET'

is sponsored
in memory of

Victoria Cohen, z"l

by her family

NOTICE TO PARENTS

- 1.Children under 5 years old must be supervised by a parent when using our KIDS ZONE upstairs.
2. No child is allowed to remain in the synagogue lobby without the constant supervision of a parent or guardian.
3. We are not responsible for children walking out the front door.

Torah Readings

Parasha 652-664
Haftara 944-947