המוסד למען קדושת חיי אדם

Saving Jewish Lives



Healing Jewish Hearts

TORAH READINGS:
Shemini: Leviticus 9:1-11:47, Parshat Parah: Numbers 19:1-22, Parah: Ezekiel 36:16-36.

The torah reading this week, Shemini 9:1-11:47, as well as the additional readings, Numbers 19:1-22 and Parah: Ezekiel 36:16-36, focus on different forms of impurity and purification remedies.

Shemini begins on a very special day - the first day of priestly duties in the Tabernacle, the first day to offer animal sacrifices, the first day of the new month, and the first day that the Divine Presence fills the Mishkan. A crash course in priestly standards of purity follows serious errors by Aaron's sons that results in their untimely death. The text then lists dietary laws, distinguishing between allowed animal foods that Jews may eat to remain pure and separate from non-Jews, and prohibited animal foods that cause a state of impurity and unholiness. The daily practice of surrendering prohibited foods was meant to engender an overall willingness and ability to surrender other behaviors leading to moral degradation, sin and separation from God.

Parshat Parah: Numbers 19:1-22 looks at a person who has become unclean after contact with a dead human body. For seven days the person remains unclean and can only purify by sprinkling himself with water derived from the sacrificial burning of a red heifer. If the cleansing process doesn't occur, the impure person is cut off from the congregation and from the nation of Israel.

Parah: Ezekiel 36:16-36 recounts Ezekiel warning the Jews of serious consequences for their relapse into idol worship and child sacrifice. While the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Egyptians vie for control over the region, Jews adopt their pagan lifestyles, ultimately suffering the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE. Ezekiel closes by reassuring His people of God's perennial love. He promises the Jewish nation a new era of holiness, sanctification and restoration.

Since the time of Adam, God's many remonstrations to abstain from idol worship and child sacrifice have often fallen on deaf ears. The tragic consequences of defiance - exile, terror, isolation, desolation - loom ahead as we continue our association with today's wickedly efficient culture of death, its millions of discarded corpses, debasement and criminality. May the loving and forgiving God of Abraham soon offer us opportunity for redemption, restoration, and holiness.