



Shabbat Parah
Ezekial 36:16-38
March 14, 2015 / 23 Adar 5775

This week's Torah portion is connected to the special haftarah thematically. The connection is the concept of purity. The Torah, through the ritual of the Red Heifer, focuses on how one who has had contact with the dead can be restored (made pure) to the community. The haftarah develops this concept further focusing on all of Israel who will be rejuvenated with a new heart and spirit by God. The requirements in both texts require some type of physical cleansing. At the same time the texts reinforce the need for us to physically prepare ourselves and our homes for Passover.

While I understand that physical effort is required, I am concerned that both the Torah and haftarah's concepts of purity doesn't resonate with moderns. The rabbis understood purity in a ritual sense. One needs to perform certain types of actions in order to be suitable to offer sacrifices in the Temple. Moderns, at least most moderns, do not understand or accept the rabbinic concept of ritual purity and more often than not conceive of purity as it has been portrayed to us via the film industry. Those who selected this text to serve as the haftarah, living hundreds of years after the destruction of the Temple, understood purity metaphorically.

I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your fetishes.

Unfortunately, the metaphor can provoke a negative response and might reflect a concept of inspiration that is too lofty for most of us.

Does it imply I will lose my taste for coffee, will only drink alcohol in moderation, and lose my fascination with ... (oh never mind), you get the point. The physical act that was necessary in the Torah to become ritually acceptable has been transformed into an act of faith where God performs the cleansing and all I need to do is to have faith.

Again, a problem for some moderns.

One wonders, would another word more effectively resonate with moderns? Would, clarity of focus serve an effective substitution for "purity". What about the word "commitment?" No, I don't think so.

Perhaps the concept of purity, of God cleansing us and restoring us through our faith and commitment is precisely what we need. Think about it.

Shabbat shalom.

This week's Haftarah commentary was written by Rabbi Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of numerous books, including "Understanding the Haftarat. An Everyperson's Guide" and "The Non-Jewish Spouse: Strategies for Clergy and Lay Leadership". [Both of these books are available in the FJMC on-line store.]