

Torah Tidbits from Rabbi Larry Moldo

The Torah portion this week is perplexing, at best. Over the years I have developed a way of looking at it which makes the most sense I have seen yet. (which is not to keep something I have yet to see make even more sense - it just hasn't happened yet)

In a nutshell, when a red heifer is born, if it remains without something that would render it unacceptable, it is brought to the central gathering place, slaughtered and burned. The ashes are gathered and ground to a powder, which is then saved until it is needed to help those who need a bit more assistance in becoming ritually pure. Along the way, everyone involved in the process of creating this ritually purifying powder becomes ritually impure, at least until the sun sets - and some of them have to do some laundry and take a shower to finalize their journey from ritual impurity to ritual purity.

So what gives? How does the substance which provides ritual purity also provide ritual impurity? And why?

The how I have no clue about. The why, however -

Listen. It would be really easy for the priests to become sanctimonious, and to look down their noses at all the poor plebes who come by whining because they are ritually impure. "Why can't they live holy lives?" the priests might say. "These idiots are always doing something stupid which makes them ritually impure." he might further think. This is not conducive to positive interactions.

So God provided a solution. The priests cannot avoid becoming ritually impure themselves. Since they also share that particular state, there is no call to demean anyone else who arrives at that state.

Imagine, for example, that each Prison Warden and worker must spend 2 months every year incognito in somebody else's prison. How much better might the conditions be, if everyone knew that some of the prisoners were actually colleagues? What if part of continuing medical training involved going to a different state and becoming a patient? What if the insurance overseers also had to do this - and you could not become an insurance overseer unless you had a medical problem? How much more humane might those systems become?

On a different note - our sympathies to all those who have lost loved ones over the past week or so - whether the incident made it into the headlines or the social media feeds, or not; may the day soon come that every Sanctuary is indeed considered a sanctuary, even by those who would otherwise lash out and violently harm others.