

## Seeing Red

Tzav/Parah 5784

Of all the asinine, morally offensive and downright loony reasons given for the October 7 massacre, there is one I bet you didn't consider: cows. Specifically, red ones.

Some of you may recall the field trip over 100 members the Dallas Jewish community took a few months ago to the Rockwall farm of Dr. Ty Davenport and his brother Bryan, breeders of red angus cows. If you were there, you may recall that Dr. Davenport told us how he began to breed red angus heifers as a result of what he described as a divine revelation- that the only color mentioned of cattle in the bible is red. Some years ago, the Temple Institute made contact with the Davenports and, in 2022, several Rabbis, including Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimon, inspected their herd to see if there were any *parrot adumot*. Rav Rimon identified five that met the stringent requirements of being a *Parah Adumah*, about which we read in this morning's special reading. They were sent to Israel via American Airlines, declared as pets to bypass the strict protocols curtailing importation of cattle from the US to Israel, and are being kept in a secret location somewhere in Yehuda and Shomron. An area on Har Hazeitim has already been purchased for the slaughtering of the *Parah Adumah*, with a view toward possibly shechting the animals as soon as within the next few week, before Pesach.

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Evangelical Christian groups are heavily invested in these cows because they believe that slaughtering them and building an altar for the burning of their ashes will usher in the period known as the End of Days, in which *oto ha'ish* reveals himself as Messiah. You only had to listen to Ty Davenport for about five minutes to determine that this is his intent in shipping his cows to Israel. A trucking company boss named Byron Stinson, who is obsessed with Israel and the End of Days, was the connection between the Temple Institute and the Davenports. In an interview with Zola Levitt Ministries in 2022, he said,

*"The question we need to ask is, 'Do we want the Messiah to come? Whether we go through it three years from now, 30 years from now, or 300 years from now, there's a group of people who have to go through it, and I for one would just as soon go ahead. I'm from Texas, you know. So, let's get it on!'"*<sup>1</sup>

When I spoke about it nine months ago, I described the Davenports as *mishuga'im*, and the intervening time has done nothing to change that assessment. In retrospect, perhaps I should have been more worried that these five cows would start World War III- because it is not only Christians whose eyes are on these cows. According to a report from CBS earlier this month<sup>2</sup>, Hamas spokesperson Abu Ubaida, *Yemach shmo*, delivered

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<sup>1</sup>

[https://www.truthdig.com/articles/the-gaza-war-and-the-red-cows-of-prophecy/?fbclid=IwAR06Rpd5HK8-zmUtugeSwW2GUuuOIVYYBLDDtxRCrrWFfRs1UerDqwY\\_P\\_I&s=08](https://www.truthdig.com/articles/the-gaza-war-and-the-red-cows-of-prophecy/?fbclid=IwAR06Rpd5HK8-zmUtugeSwW2GUuuOIVYYBLDDtxRCrrWFfRs1UerDqwY_P_I&s=08)

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/israel-war-hamas-red-heifers-from-texas-jerusalem-jewish-temple-al-aqa/>

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a speech on the 100th day following October 7 in which he listed some of the motives for the attack. One of them was that the Jews “brought red cows” to the Holy Land. The thinking is that the Jews are trying to do whatever is in their power to replace the Al Aqsa Mosque with the third Beit Hamikdash; to avenge and preempt this plan, the attack on October 7 was described as the Al Aqsa Flood, a necessary act of resistance.

The Parah Adumah has always been a big deal, because of what it symbolizes, the inscrutability of the mitzvah, and the rarity with which a red cow appears. The Talmud in several places<sup>3</sup> tells a remarkable story about a gentile named Dama ben Netinah, who possessed a gemstone of rare beauty that the Rabbis wished to purchase for the breastplate of the Kohen Gadol. Unfortunately for them, the stone rested underneath a pillow on which Netinah, his father, was sleeping (as any gem dealer will tell you, this is not the most secure method for storing your stones). Dama refused to wake his father despite the Rabbis’ repeated entreaties, and their offers of increasingly extravagant sums of money to do so. Ultimately, his father woke up, but even then, Dama insisted on selling the stone for the original asking price, and no more. The Talmud tells us that Dama was rewarded with another treasure significant to the Beit Hamikdash- a red cow was born in his herd, which he was able to sell for a princely sum. Traditionally, this passage is cited by works of philosophy and *mussar* as a reminder of the extent to which

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<sup>3</sup> Kiddushin 31a, Avodah Zarah 23b  
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a person should strive to fulfill the commandment of honoring one's parents. After all, the Talmud itself says that Dama was a gentile, yet he was meticulous in his observance of the mitzvah of *kibbutz av ve'eim*- how much more are we Jews must be, as we are obligated in the mitzvah! More broadly, though, this story is not just about one specific mitzvah- it is about a person who had a red line that he refused to cross. There was no amount of money that could induce him to violate his moral code. Chazal are therefore telling us that the key to spiritual success is to be the sort of person who maintains inviolable standards.

We understand the need for communal, institutional and personal red lines, even if we don't always agree with where those lines are or should be drawn. For instance, we know about communities and schools that strictly legislate dress codes for students in and out of school. Others mandate strict conditions for acceptance, such as filtered internet in the home or no smartphones. Some shuls even make you sign a no-talking pledge as a prerequisite for membership, and there have been some synagogues that made the observance of Shabbos a requirement for membership, a policy that we of course do not hold. Fascinatingly, Congregation Anshe Shalom B'nai Israel in Chicago<sup>4</sup> was founded over a dispute concerning an inviolable shul policy regarding dress.

Duber Ginsburg appeared at Congregation Beth Hamedrash Hagadol one scorching

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<sup>4</sup> Courtesy of Rabbi Dr. Zev Eleff and <https://www.asbi.org/history.html>  
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Shabbos in the summer sporting a straw hat, an egregious display of frivolity that the shul leadership refused to countenance. The shammas ordered him to leave the shul. Ginsburg's *landsleit* from Mariumpol were so outraged at this affront that they held an emergency meeting that very evening, and unanimously agreed that none of them would ever set foot in Beth Hamedrash Hagadol again. In short order, they formed their own congregation called Ohave Sholom- because every breakaway has the word Shalom in it-which was known locally as the "Mariampoler shul" or the "straw hat shul." Some of these lines are laughable, others less resonant with our community, but the point is that Jews understand that inviolable rules are essential to maintaining a community's integrity. This principle is also illustrated by a passage in the Talmud in Tractate Yevamos 21a:

רב כהנא אָמַר מְהֵרָא: "וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת מִשְׁמַרְתִּי" — עֲשׂוּ מִשְׁמֶרֶת לְמִשְׁמַרְתִּי.

*Rav Kahana said that the prohibition of secondary forbidden relationships is alluded to from here, in the verse stated at the conclusion of the verses discussing the halakhos of forbidden relationships: "Therefore shall you protect [ushmartem] My prized possession [mishmarti], that you do not any of these abominable customs" (Leviticus 18:30). This means: Establish a safeguard [mishmeret] for My prized possession.*

In order to safeguard that which is vouchsafed to us by God, we need to create boundaries and guardrails that we will not cross.

I think that the idea of having red lines is one of the most important lessons from the legacy of the late Senator Joseph Lieberman, z"l. Yes, Senator Leiberman a mensch who could work with anyone and, in a less partisan era, was respected on both sides of the aisle. What made him unique, though, was that he was an Orthodox Jew who was proudly and unwaveringly Shomer Shabbos. When he was named as Al Gore's running mate, The Daily Show even did a hilarious send up<sup>5</sup> of Lieberman's Shemiras Shabbos, asserting that he will be bound by a different set of rules- the 39 Avoth Melacha of Shabbat!

Senior Correspondent Steve Carell asked, "Can our nation survive with a Vice President who is restricted from binding sheaves on a Saturday?!"

Jon Stewart replied, "I think we can; it's never happened before."

Steve Carell responded, "The year was 1897. Garret A. Hobart was serving as Vice President to William McKinley- *not an easy thing to do*. French emissaries, brokering a trade deal with the US, demanded sheaves, but those sheaves were delivered to the White House unbound. The fragile pact would have disintegrated if not for Hobart's quick work. Jon...*it was a Saturday.*"

All kidding aside, Joe Lieberman cherished Shabbos, and even wrote a book about it. It is called *The Gift of Rest: Rediscovering the Beauty of the Sabbath*. In it, he described the

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<sup>5</sup> <https://twitter.com/hasidicus/status/1447970985882398727>  
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way his observance of Shabbos has enhanced his life and even advanced his career, relating stories of his Shabbos interactions in different countries and with various world leaders. In what is perhaps the best known of these stories, he told about Friday, December 8, 2000<sup>6</sup>, when he was a recount away from being a “heartbeat away” from the Presidency. It was one month after Election Day, but the Florida Supreme Court was still deciding what to do about those disputed ballots in Florida. Nationally the Gore-Lieberman ticket had outpolled the Bush- Cheney slate by more than 500,000 votes, but it was all going to come down to the electoral college vote, and the race was so tight that the winner in Florida would take the White House. Moments before Hadassah Lieberman lit her Shabbos candles the phone rang, and on the other end was Al Gore, asking if it was sunset yet. Gore was concerned that crucial legal decisions would have to be made requiring his consultation with Lieberman, who AL Gore knew was not going to pick up the phone. Al Gore was calling to invite the Liebermans to spend Friday night with them. Immediately, they packed up their Shabbos candles, wine and Challah and headed over to the Gores, who lived a mile away. The Gores accommodated every need of the Liebermans, including providing a private room for Mrs. Lieberman to light Shabbos candles and a quiet corner for them to daven. At the conclusion of Friday night dinner and the legal consultation, Secret Service agents walked them back to their Georgetown residence. Joseph Lieberman was in the middle

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<sup>6</sup> <https://mishpacha.com/on-shabbos-the-senator-stays-home/>  
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of making history, so he could easily have rationalized jumping into a car he wasn't driving, but he drew a red line at *kedushas Shabbos*- the sanctity, integrity and character of Shabbos. Indeed, throughout his life, Lieberman was a model of integrity in general, traveling to the South to fight for civil rights when that was considered crazy or dangerous, and then later, taking unpopular middle of the road stances in favor of Israel and against Iran- all of which spoke to his deeply held convictions.

Do we strive for such integrity in our lives? Do we draw firm lines in our observance? What are *we* prepared to give up to preserve the sanctity of Shabbos? Do we have inviolable boundaries when it comes to kashrus standards? The need for boundaries is especially important in the interpersonal realm. Are there certain conversations we refuse to engage in because they border on or actually are lashon hara? What lines do we draw to prevent ourselves from embarrassing others or otherwise hurting them verbally? Are there questionable business practices which we assiduously avoid, even if they might be technically legal? Are we careful to maintain appropriate halachic and social boundaries in our interactions with people with whom a relationship is forbidden? The book of Vayikra, that we just began last week, deals with all of these realms, a fact that is often overlooked because our reading of Vayikra overlaps with so much else going on in the Jewish calendar.



When painting for us a picture of the scarcity of the *Parah Adumah*, our sages chose to focus on the legacy of Dama Ben Netinah because he held deep and unwavering convictions. *The red heifer is about red lines*, the key to holiness and purity in our lives.