

Parashat Vayakheil-P'Kudei

Shabbat Parah

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Shabbat Shalom,

March Madness has begun. No, I'm not referring to the men's college basketball tournament that takes place every year at this time--though I've picked the University of Michigan to finish first (What can I say? I'm a man of faith). Rather, the march toward Passover has begun. Purim is past. Groceries stores are beginning to stock their shelves with all our favorite kosher-for-passover goodies. Women and men across the world are beginning to get that jitter: that early on-set panic that comes with beginning to think about the enormity that is Passover preparation. Others are starting to get that twinkle in their eye that comes from a new Seder idea to excite the children and engage the grown-ups. We have begun the march toward Passover.

In our weekly cycle of Torah readings the countdown has begun as well. This week is Shabbat Parah, followed next week by Shabbat HaChodesh, then Shabbat HaGadol and then, you guessed it, Pesach.

In addition to our weekly Torah portion, Vayakheil-Pekudei, we will read a maffir aliyah discussing the laws concerning the mystical red heifer. God commanded Moses and Aaron to bring for sacrifice a "red cow without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which no yoke has been laid" (Numbers 19:2). The ashes of this red cow were mixed with water and used as a purification rite for all those ritually impure. A state of ritual purity was required of all Israelites at Passover time, since they were required to bring their Paschal lamb offering to the Holy Temple as part of the Passover celebration. In modern times, this mitzvah has fallen into the category of those unable to be practiced; no Holy Temple and no red heifers can be found. In ancient times, however, there were no grocery stores stocking the shelves with Manischewitz; reading this special mitzvah was a reminder to our ancestors to begin their preparations for Passover.

The march is on. How will you slam dunk your Seder differently this year than previous years? What will you do to move from a two-pointer to a three-pointer in your level of Passover observance? How will you advance to the next round in fulfilling the mitzvah of "Let all who are hungry come and eat"? Friends, the time to begin planning for Pesach ... has arrived. I hope it is a championship season for us all.

Rebecca, Caleb, and Ayal join me in wishing you Shabbat shalom um'vorach.



Rabbi Aaron L. Starr