

פרשת פרה
PORROSHAS PORROH

When Rosh Chodesh Nissan falls to be on a weekday, Shabbos Porroshas Porroh is the Shabbos which follows Purim. When Rosh Chodesh Nissan falls on Shabbos, Porroshas Porroh is read on the last Shabbos in the month of Addar.

1. Our Chachommim, of blessed memory, instituted that we commemorate certain events, acts or Mitzvos by means of special readings from the Sefer Torah and special Haftorahs (readings from the נביאים, the Books of the Prophets). This week, the Shabbos is called Shabbos Porroshas Porroh. It commemorates the Mitzvah of the Red Heifer — the “Porroh Adumoh” (פרה אדומה) and it takes its name from the special Maftir and Haftorah read on Shabbos morning.
2. *The Torah reading is taken from Sefer BeMidbor, and is the whole of Chapter 19 (the first Chapter of Sidra Chukkas) and the Haftorah is from the Sefer Yechezkel, Chapter 36, Pessukim 16 — 36 inclusive. (Ashkenazzim continue to the end of the Chapter.)*
3. Porroshas Porroh is read in the month of Addar as a warning and reminder to all that they should be *Tohor* when they bring their Korbon Pessach (and their other Korbonnos) at the coming Yom Tov of Pessach. In this Parrashah are set out the laws of the Red Heifer, the פרה אדומה whose ashes are used in the *Taharah* process to make a person *Tohor* after he or she has become *Tommay* by coming into contact with a dead body.
4. The Mitzvah of the Red Heifer is held up for us by the Torah as the epitome of a חוק (a Mitzvah for which no reason is stated) and together with all the laws of *Tum’oh* and *Taharah* they are obeyed for no other reason than because HaShem has commanded them. That’s not to say that there are no reasons for these laws. On the contrary, many reasons and explanations **are** put forward. But the Law of the Red Heifer more than any other Law of the Torah is the prime example of a Law of HaShem which demands our unquestioning obedience, because whatever rationale or symbolism is read into it, there always remain unresolved paradoxes which defy ordinary human logic and understanding. Ultimately, therefore, it is a command of HaShem, and it is not for us to question His orders to us.
5. The translation of the word “Tum’oh” commonly given as “unclean” is particularly unfortunate. “Unclean” gives the impression of physical or hygienic uncleanliness, and this is manifestly untrue. Strictly speaking, the word “Tum’oh” cannot always be taken to mean “spiritual uncleanliness” either, because this too implies blame or censure, as if the person is deserving of reproach for being “Tum’oh,” and obviously this is not always the case. (Indeed, sometimes it is a Mitzvah to make oneself Tum’oh.) “Tum’oh” is perhaps

best understood as a spiritual condition to which various laws apply, and concerning which the Torah commands a special process of “Taharah.” In the more severe or pronounced kinds of *Tum’oh*, this process involves the use of the ashes of the Red Heifer, and the intricate laws of the preparation of these ashes make up the first section of Sidra Chukkas, which is the special reading of this Shabbos.

6. By reading Porroshas Porroh at this time of the year we give expression to the hope that we should once again — and soon — be able to fulfil this Mitzvah so that we too can be made *Tohor*, as it says (in the special Haftorah of this Shabbos): ... So says HaShem ... “I will take you from among the nations and I will gather you all together from all the countries to bring you back to your own Land. Then I will sprinkle the waters of *Taharah* upon you and make you *Tohor*: from all your different kinds of *Tum’oh* I Myself will make you *Tohor*.”

The Haftorah of Porroshas Porroh is in preparation.