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Purification by Fire
31: 19-24

Purification by fire DIG: What do you see as the main reason for the army's purification rights? What does this say about God? Do you think this ceremony would have helped the people view any more seriously their actions? Themselves? Their relationship with God?

REFLECT: What does this ceremony teach you about the importance of walking in purity before ADONAI? What enemies, or threats to God's people, do we face today? How has God tested your faith by putting you through the fire of adversity? What did you learn?

**God uses trials to test the reality of our faith,
in a similar way to the process of purifying precious metals.**

Though the Midianite war was a holy war (**to see link click Fr – Holy War**), carried out in obedience to divine command and sanctified by the presence of the high priest, those involved became unclean through killing and contact with dead bodies.[714] Therefore, before anyone or anything could enter **the camp** (see **Am – The Camp of the Twelve Tribes of Isra'el**), they had to be **purified**. As a result of the combat, **the** returning **army** had returned in a state of corpse contamination. Those who had fought in the battle and come into contact with death were rendered ritually unclean (see **Leviticus Bj – The Mitzvot of Purification**).[715]

The purification of the soldiers (31:19-20): ADONAI, speaking through **His** servant **Moshe**, declared: **Any of you who have killed anyone or touched anyone who was** taking the spoil from a dead body **must pitch your tents outside the camp for seven days** while the sprinkling of **the water** of **the red heifer** was administered to **them** (see **Da – The Red Heifer**)**. Then, purify yourselves on the third and seventh days, you and the young girls** taken as **captives** (see **Fr – Holy War: ADONAI's mercy**)**. Also purify every garment, whether of skin or goat's hair, and everything made of wood.** One-day **purification**, being minor, required **immersion (Leviticus 11:32)**. But severe

impurities, like dead bodies, which transfer their impurity to others, needed to undergo a **seven-day purification** and, as indicated here, needed the stronger purging effect of **fire**.[716]

The purifying of the spoil (31:21-24): In addition, the spoil that they brought with them was needed to undergo **purification**. Then **Eleazar, the high priest,** reported a new mitzvah of making kosher (Hebrew: *kashering*). **He said to the soldiers who had gone to the front, "This is the regulation from the Torah which ADONAI has ordered Moshe."** All vessels fell into two categories: material that can survive **fire** and materials that cannot survive **fire**. Vessels that can survive **fire** (namely metals) were to be passed through **the fire** and then sprinkled with **the water** of the red heifer. **Even though gold, silver, brass, iron, tin and lead can all withstand fire, you are indeed to purify everything made of these materials by having them pass through fire; nevertheless, they must also be purified with the water for purification.** One-day **purification**, being minor, required **immersion (Leviticus 11:32)**.

The water of **the red heifer** is referred to in this passage as **the water of niddah**. In this context, it does not refer to a menstruation (see **Leviticus Cn – Female Menstrual Uncleanness**). It should be understood as **waters of purification**. **The early Sages, however, equated the waters of niddah and the immersion into a mikvah of water that a woman passes through at the end of her niddah period. This midrashic reading of the text led to the halachah that vessels purified by fire also required immersion in a mikvah.**

Materials that could not survive **the fire** were simply sprinkled with **the water** of **the red heifer** and then **passed through the water**. **Everything that can't withstand fire, every garment, whether of skin or goat's hair, and everything made of wood, you are to pass them through the water.** It does not specify the use of a mikvah for this purpose. **Since the Sages supposed a mikvah was necessary for the metals, it was similarly understood for the material that could not go through the fire.** Then summarizing the instruction, **Eleazar** declared: **On the seventh day you are to wash your clothes, and you will be clean; after that you may enter the camp.** And bathing was assumed **(19:19b)** in **purification** mitzvot **(Leviticus 11:25, 28** and **40)**. Also assumed was that contact with sacred food must wait until evening **(Leviticus 22:6-7)**.

The purification of these items was specifically in regard to **purification** from corpse contamination. They had been taken as spoils in battle and had been

rendered ritually unclean from the contact with death. **But the concept of *kashering* vessels or materials opens up a whole area of Jewish law, minutely discussed and argued in the tractate Kelim (Vessels) of the Mishnah** (see **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**)**. Immersion of vessels into a mikvah became a standard practice as a means to remove ritual impurity.** The Gospel of **Mark** comments on this development of halachah. **There are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots (Mark 7:4).** So it turns out that the washing of vessels to remove impurity does have a basis from the Torah, **but the detail and scrupulous concern required by the halachah of the Sages seems far afield from the original intention.**

ADONAI ordains trials to test the reality of our faith in a way that's similar to the process of purifying precious metals. **Gold**, for example, is **purified** through a process of high temperature heating or chemical exposure. According to *Sciencing*, an online magazine, "If **the gold** is a low-grade ore, then it is broken up into chunks that are then put in carefully lined pads and treated with a dilute cyanide solution, which dissolves **the gold**. For high grade ore, the metal is sent to a grinding mill and made into a powder. Refractory ore contains carbon and is heated to over 1000 degrees."

But **God** says that our faith is even more precious than **gold**, which is perishable. For this reason, He sometime turns up the thermostat. He heats up the furnace of affliction, in order to reveal impurity in our hearts, so that it can be skimmed off. As **Peter** writes, our faith is **tested by fire** when we **suffer grief in all kinds of trials (First Peter 1:6-7)**. Greek scholar, Kenneth Wuest, provides a beautiful illustration of **God's** refining **fire**.



“The picture here is of an ancient goldsmith who puts his crude **gold** ore in a crucible, subjects it to intense heat, and thus liquefies the mass. The impurities rise to the surface and are skimmed off. When the metalworker is able to see the reflection of his face clearly mirrored in the surface of the liquid, he takes it off **the fire**, for he knows that the contents are pure **gold**. So it is with **God** and **His** child. **He** puts us in the crucible of suffering, in which process sin is gradually put out of our lives, our faith is **purified** from the slag of unbelief that somehow mingles with it so often, and the result is the reflection of the face of **Jesus Christ** in the character of the believer. This, above all, **God the Father** desires to see. **Being conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29)** is **the Father’s** ideal for **His** children, and suffering is one of the most potent means to that end.”

Job, the hero of the faith in the TaNaKh, understood this picture. It was after **his** horrendous trial, which is beyond anything we have yet to experience, that **he** testified of **God, “When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10)**. It is my prayer that **the Lord** would so work in our hearts during our times of testing, so that we may one day say the same. Oh, may **He** purify **His** Church!

The teaching of Scripture is clear: In order to produce a godly, mature believer, **ADONAI** increases the temperature of life, in order to bring to the surface the sin that is already in our hearts, which we may be blinded from seeing, or just too stubborn to address. To use a similar metaphor, like the boiling hot water that

steeps the tea out of the bag, trials draw out the issues of life that reside in our heart. The trial is not the problem, nor does it create the issues of the heart. They are already “in the tea bag,” so to speak.

The purpose of the trial is to draw out our hidden sins **(Ps 139:23)**, so that they may be repented of, and the process of sanctification may be stimulated. As we make sometimes-slow, gradual progress, we become like **Messiah**, in whose image we are being re-made **(Col 3:10)**. This is the refiner’s **fire**, of which Scripture speaks.

Proverbs 17:3 says: **The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the hearts.**

Zechariah 13:9, referring to the believing remnant during the Great Tribulation, says, **“And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested, they will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are My people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is My God.’”**

Malachi 3:4, which is prophetic of **Messiah**, says: **He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to ADONAI offerings in righteousness.** Just as the refining process is used to remove impurities, in order to bring out the beauty of **gold**, so trials reveal our inner self. This gives us the opportunity to repent of sin, and be made more like **Messiah**. For this reason, we know at least some of the good that **the Lord** is using for our benefit in our trials.

In **First Peter 1:6-9**, we get a glimpse of **God’s** will for our trials. **In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials (verse 6), so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (verse 7). Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is indescribable and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls (verses 8-9). God** wants you to understand **His** good will in all that **He** is doing – right now – in your life. So when you find yourself under a trial, **God** wants you to respond in three ways. First, rejoice in the superior promise of your inheritance **(verse 6)**; second, recognize the sanctifying purpose of

your **trials (verse 7)**; and remain steadfast in the perseverance of faith **(verses 8-9)**.

The point is clear: **ADONAI** uses suffering to heat up our lives in order to bring the scum of our hearts into full view in order that we may repent and be refined – to reflect more accurately the beauty of **Yeshua**.[717]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise you for **Your** great wisdom and love. **You** not only paid the price for the rescue of mankind from sin's punishment, but **You** adopt as **Your children (Jn 1:12)** all who love **You** are **"in Messiah". He chose us in the Messiah before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before Him in love (Eph 1:4, 10-14).** Thank you for graciously maturing **Your children** thru hard and easy times and for promising to give them wisdom in **trials**. **Trials** can be looked at through new eyes that see **they** are a time to rejoice, for **You** use them as **Your** tools to mature and mold **Your children** to be purer and more like **You**. **Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect work, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all without hesitation and without reproach; and it will be given to him (Ja 1:2-5).** Thank **You** that earth's **trials** will soon be over and in its place will be an eternity of shalom **(Rom 8:18).** What a joy it will be, living with **You** and praising **You** for all eternity! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*