Dear Rabbi,

As rare as it may be, the birth of a red heifer is nothing more than a curiosity. There is no source in Jewish tradition that sees the birth of a red heifer as a sign of the arrival of the Mashiach.

According to the Torah, someone who comes into contact with a dead body becomes halachically ‘impure.’ The Torah describes a very specific process that enables a person to purify himself. This process involves slaughtering a heifer which is completely red, burning it and mixing its ashes with water. Some of this ‘purifying water’ is sprinkled on the impure person twice over a seven-day period.

This had great practical importance during Temple times, because all participants in the Temple service needed to be ritually pure, and the connection with the restoration of the Temple and the Mashiach. Thank you.

David Wajsman

About twenty years ago, a red heifer born in Israel caused a similar stir. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, the noted halachic authority of the time, was unmoved. “One of the requirements of the red heifer is that it be at least two years old. What if the Mashiach were to come tomorrow? Would we have to wait two years in order to become pure? When Mashiach comes, they'll find a red heifer that's two-years old.”

The reason for the commandment of the red heifer is considered the deepest secret in the Torah. So much so that even King Solomon, the wisest scholar who ever lived, was unable to fathom its deep meaning. According to the Midrash, its meaning will be revealed in the era of the Mashiach.

Sources:
- Bamidbar (Numbers) 19
- Mishna Parah 3:5
- Rambam, ibid. 3:4
- Bamidbar Rabba 19:4

Yiddle Riddle

How can you have a mixture which is dairy, and when meat accidentally falls in, the mixture becomes pare (neither meat nor dairy)?

Answer next week...