

HEART TALK

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

This week, besides the regular Torah reading, we also read parshas Para Adumah - the laws of the Red Heifer whose ashes were sprinkled on anyone who had become defiled by exposure to a dead body. Parshas Para begins:

And Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aaron, saying, "This is the law of the Torah which Hashem commanded, saying..."

Two questions: 1) Why is the law of Para Adumah referred as the law of the Torah more so than other mitzvos? 2) There seems to be an extra "saying"? The Torah is eternal. Sefarim write that even in our times, when we read the section of the Red Heifer - which in its time purified the most severe form of contamination - we connect to it and are purified. (To be clear, reading the parsha can not remove true contamination from exposure to the dead. Still, inasmuch as this section of the Torah teaches the laws of purity, its study too has the power to impart purity.)

The Maggid of Koznitz in Avodas Yisrael says this concept explains the double "saying": The Torah is hinting that a time will come during which we will not be able to perform the ritual of the Para. Even so, by saying and studying the parsha and its laws, we will experience the pureness it was meant to give over.

It is interesting, he notes, that Chazal (our Sages) derive that "studying the laws of the sacrificial offerings is equivalent to performing them" from the verse, "And our lips will fulfill the [lost] heifers." The prophet could have spoken about any one of the sacrificial animals (cow, goat, sheep, etc.), or not mentioned any animal by name, yet he singles out heifers. Perhaps he alludes to the Red Heifer, for which the Torah hints we will one day receive its sanctity through the study of its laws.

Many people recite the Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith daily, some even more than once. A talmid once asked his rebbe: "How can I recite the Thirteen Principles if in my heart I know that my faith is not as strong as it should be? Look - if I really, truly believed that 'Hashem will reward those who perform mitzvos and will punish those who sin,' I would never sin, right? Obviously, I'm lacking in faith. So how can I lie and say, 'I firmly believe...?'"

"The Thirteen Principles," the rebbe replied, "are also a prayer. We ask Hashem to grant us the wisdom to believe."

The Ropshitzer Rebbe quotes the verse, "Speak - that you should be righteous!" Since when does

speaking make us righteous?

He explains that people often get depressed because they feel, rightly, that they've fallen behind. They're not where they want to be in life. They feel alone and abandoned, like they've strayed, and have no idea how to get back on the path.

Instead of keeping it inside, he says, speak it out. Tell Hashem you're upset. That you feel out of the loop and don't know how to get back inside. That you want to believe, but you don't feel it. That you want to overcome your shortcomings, but they keep getting the better of you. That you want to be more neshama (soul) and less guf (body).

Even though the choice to change is ultimately ours, when we "speak our hearts" to Hashem, telling Him how hard it is and how badly we want to change, Hashem helps us by steering us in the right direction. Even more; we just have to open our mouths, he says, and begin pouring out our hearts. Once we take that initial step, Hashem helps by sending us the proper words and prayers. Speak - your heart, and you will be righteous - with Hashem's help.

This, the Ropshitzer Rebbe explains, is the hidden meaning of the "son who knows not how to ask" in the Haggada:

The son who doesn't know how to ask - you open things up for him, as it says, "Tell your son on that day, saying, 'For this Hashem took me out of Egypt.'"

To some extent, he explains, we all lack the ability to ask. We feel distanced, and we worry our words lack sincerity, and are perhaps better unspoken. To this the Haggada counters: Open things up - don't worry about speaking your heart. Don't allow the 'silence of sincerity' to prevent you from speaking your heart to Hashem. Even if at first it seems forced, keep saying, Hashem took me out of Egypt... Hashem took me out of Egypt... Speech has the power to sway the heart; to turn the insincere into the palpable.

Going back to Para Adumah, we now see that it's not only through learning the laws of the Red Heifer that we connect to its sanctity. By using our speech, which emanates from the neshama, to call out - reminding ourselves that we are holy, even if we don't feel it, and asking Hashem to guide our words and thoughts - we achieve a measure of purify, and begin the process of setting ourselves free of our inhibitions and past shortcomings.

This is why, the Bobover Rebbe Shlita explains, the Torah refers to Para Adumah as chukkas HaTorah, the law of the entire Torah. Although the Torah expresses the concept here, the idea that by learning, speaking and beseeching we connect to kedusha, overcoming obstacles and reaching levels we are incapable of on our own, is central to the entire Torah.

One of the themes of the Para Adumah is that its explanation remains a mystery. It is the one mitzvah that can't be understood. The Sanzer Rebbe implies that although on a grand scale the mitzvah will forever be a mystery, on a personal level, every Jew is capable of achieving some level of

understanding of the mitzvah according to his/her neshama.

In light of the above, this is not surprising. In fact, it goes a long way to explaining why the mitzvah of Para Adumah - which contains the hidden mystery of connecting to Hashem through speaking one's heart even when he doesn't feel sincere - is both an eternal mystery, and something so intimate it can only be understood in the deepest chambers of one's neshama. Have a good Shabbos. [Based on Imrei Kodesh of the Bobover Rebbe, Para, 5766] Text Copyright © 2008 by [Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann](#) and [Torah.org](#)