

WORKING ON THE OUTSIDE

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

the Red Heifer. This mitzvah details the seven-day process through which the impurity associated with coming in contact with a dead body is removed.

The Parah Adumah is considered the quintessential Chok statute. (A mitzvah that seems to confound logic and reason, yet, must still be performed because it is G-d's command.) The enigmatic nature of the Red Heifer is more than just the how and why of the process. The Medresh notes that the same process that purifies the impure causes all the Kohanim who participated in the process of preparing and administering the Parah Adumah to themselves became impure. How is it possible that the same ash of the Parah Adumah that purifies the impure also makes the pure impure?

Considering that King Solomon himself said that he could explain everything in the Torah, except for the Parah Adumah, it would be presumptuous for me to attempt to unravel its mystery. However, there are many lessons that can be gleaned from the seemingly illogic of the Red Heifer.

As with all the Mitzvos, the Parah Adumah is symbolic as well as practical. From a symbolic point of view I would suggest that the process was intended to contrast the administering Kohain, who was Tahor pure, with the recipient of the process, who was Tameh impure.

The Kohain was far more than a priest. In fact, the priestly functions were by far the least time consuming part of his duties. Most of the Kohanim served only two weeks out of the year in the Bais Hamikdash - Temple. The rest of the year they were devoted to teaching Torah, disseminating justice, and teaching people how to integrate G-d into their lives. They were supported through the priestly gifts listed at the end of last week's Parsha, and were otherwise occupied in the pursuit and teaching of Torah and spirituality. In essence, the Kohain was a role model for the rest of the nation as to what a life of Kedusha sanctity, and Taharah purity was supposed to be like. They lived their lives serving G-d and trusting that He would support them and take care of all their needs. As the verse says, G-d is their portion; therefore, the tribe of Layvie was not given a portion in the land of Israel.

In Sefer Vayikra the Book of Leviticus it was explained that the Bais Hamikdash and the Kohanim were to avoid any contact with the dead. As Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explained, the Bais Hamikdash and the Kohanim represented life with all its opportunities for willfully serving G-d. Through following the Mitzvos we are able to subdue the physical in the service of the spiritual. Death on the other hand represents the loss of free will and the inability to willfully serve G-d by

doing Mitzvos. It represents the inevitable triumph of the physical over the spiritual. Therefore, as a symbolic statement as to the purpose of life the Kohain had to avoid coming in contact with the dead, and anyone who had contact with the dead was restricted from entering the Temple Mount.

We know that the tribe of Layvie lived in 48 cities spread out among all the other tribes. These Lavitical cities also functioned as cities of refuge in the event someone killed shogaig; inadvertently. An important reason for the cities of refuge was to provide the inadvertent killer with a safe haven for his rehabilitation. The need for rehabilitation was that shogaig does not mean accidental. shogaig means with negligence. If the death was truly an accident it would be called ness and there would be no penalty at all. Therefore, when the courts concluded that the death was shogaig, the killer was instructed to flee to a Lavitical city. There he would be safe from revenge and provided with an opportunity for immersing himself in an environment of purity and sanctity that cherished the value of human life. The mere notion that a person's negligence resulted in the death of another human being showed that the inadvertent killer did not cherish the value of life enough, otherwise he would have been more careful.

(Keep in mind that sanctity is a product of separation. Separation is a product of accepting G-d as the creator Who created all things separate from each other for a reason. His reasons are first made evident by recognizing and accepting the physical demarcations that exist between all things. The most fundamental division that exists within society and the delineation that provides the greatest safety for every individual is the value of every single human life.)

In the same way that Tahara; purity symbolizes life, Tumah; impurity symbolizes death. The purity of the Kohain and Layvie was not their own creation. It was a product of their early education, training, and the environment of Kedusha that permeated their homes and cities. Therefore, there was a tremendous emphasis on maintaining the purity of that environment. In order for the Kohain to be a Kohain and for a Layvie to be a Layvie their supportive environment had to be more restricted and demanding in order to maintain the sanctity.

One of the difficult dilemmas facing every parent is how much to restrict (protect) a child. On the one hand, we want our children to be ready and worldly. On the other hand, we do not want their young and impressionable minds perverted by the values of an amoral world. Therefore, we try to control their environment long enough to instill in them the importance of Torah, Mitzvos, and human dignity. If we succeed they will encounter and survive the challenges of the outside world with integrity, dignity, and Jewish pride. If we fail, they will succumb to the temptations society has to offer and never appreciate the sanctity of Am Yisroel.

Considering the symbolic message of the Kohain and Layvie and the importance of environment in maintaining sanctity and Tahara, it makes sense that the Torah would have placed great emphasis on the purity of their environment. Therefore, any intrusion or encounter with Tumah would be treated with concern. The reason why the Kohain who administers the ashes of the Red Heifer

becomes Tameh while at the same time effecting purity for the recipient of the process is because the Kohain had to come in contact with a person who was Tameh. It is not the process that makes him impure but the proximity of the impure person that renders the Kohain impure.

The person needing the ashes of the Parah Adumah was attempting to remove the most significant impurity possible; the impurity associated with a dead body that represents the triumph of the physical over the spiritual. While impure, this person was restricted from entering the Temple and willfully subjugating himself in the close proximity of G-d. The Kohain, on the other hand, represented the opportunity for the living to be pure and to willfully serve G-d. This was done by subjugating his physical self within the confines of the Bais Hamikdash where he could transcend his mortal bounds and be as physically close to G-d as was humanly possible. However, the Kohain's real function was to help others attain the same degree of purity and closeness. It was his job to help remove the impurity of the nation and affect a status of purity. In order to do so, the Kohain had to spend time with the mundane and the impure. He had to understand their motives, challenges, and desires. He had to be both part of them as well as apart from them. As their teacher, the Kohain, could help them transcend their mortal bounds and find intimacy with G-d. However, in order to facilitate the nation's sanctity the Kohain had to leave the protected environment of the Bais Hamikdash and the Lavitical cities and be among the people. As a result, it was inevitably, the Kohain himself became a little impure.

The verses in this week's Parsha support this understanding of the Parah Adumah. First, the slaughtering and burning of the Parah Adumah had to take place outside of the encampment outside of Temple Mount. (19:3) Second, the ashes of the Red Heifer were stored outside of the camp. (19:9) Third, the administration of the purification process had to take place outside of the camp. (Although that is not expressively stated in the verse, it is obvious because the person or things that are Tameh can not enter the environment of the Temple Mount. the camp until they had become pure. Therefore, the process had to be done outside.) Fourth, the Kohanim who participated only became impure till the evening. They did not acquire the same severe degree of Tumah as the person who had been exposed to the dead. (19:7-8-21)

The lesson of the Parah Adumah is relevant to all aspects of education and personal development. It is always easier to be pure within the protective walls of our homes, Yeshivos, and Shuls. However, that is not the mission of the kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The purpose of sanctity and purity is to teach sanctity and purity. The fear of becoming contaminated through contact with society and losing our own exalted level of Tahara is more than real, it is a given. However, when we are prepared and committed to doing the job of teaching sanctity, the degree of impurity contracted is only until the evening. (19:8) It is a low-grade form of impurity that is quickly removed by returning every evening to the protected environment of our homes and communities. The symbolic immersion in the Mikveh of Torah (19:8) re-elevates us to our previous status of purity and sanctity.

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