

PARAH ADUMAH
THE POWER OF JEWISH CONTINUITY

Published in this week's Yated Ne'eman

Offered to our Shul in lieu of the regular Divrei Torah

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We usually – and quite properly so – associate *Parshas Parah* with achieving the *taharah* (purity) needed for offering the *Korban Pesach*. However, there is another component which is not often mentioned, let alone explored, which is the secret of Jewish continuity. The *Rambam* (*Hilchos Parah Adumah* 3:4) writes that “the ashes of the *Parah* were divided into three parts...the third was deposited in the *Cheil* which was hidden away; each *Parah* that was burned had some of its ashes deposited there. There were nine red cows which were prepared from the time this mitzvah was commanded until the destruction of the Second *Bais Hamikdash*. The first was done by Moshe Rabbeinu, the second by Ezra. There were seven from Ezra until the *churban* and the tenth will be made by the king *Moshiach*, may he soon be revealed.”

Rav Dovid Cohen (*Birchas Yaavetz* 1:165; 4:228) notes that this consolidation of ashes over many centuries is absolutely unique in the annals of *korbanos* and other aspects of the *avodah* in the *Bais Hamikdash*. He therefore suggests that we know that the *Parah Adumah* represents atonement for the sin of the *Egel* -- the Golden Calf – which will stretch across all of Jewish history (see *Shemos* 32:34 with *Rashi* from *Sanhedrin* 102a). Therefore, the *kaparah* must be rendered by a cumulative effort of all the generations until the advent of *Moshiach*. Rav Cohen uses this important concept to explain many abstruse aspects of the *Parah Adumah*, such as why it purifies the defiled and defiles the pure and why its power comes from the mother cow which “cleans up” the mess left by its child, the calf which brought such trouble to our people.

However, this year I would like to take this tremendous insight in a different direction. We know that the order of the *Parshiyos* before Pesach take us from *sur m'rah* – eradication of evil (*Parshas Zochor*), to personal purification (*Parshas Parah*) to sanctifying time itself and enabling us to do *mitzvos* (*Parshas Hachodesh*). This process, too, represents a series of actions over time where we grow from stage to stage and go from strength to strength. The *Baalei Mussar* often teach us that *kedushah* – the process of achieving holiness – is accomplished by a ladder, for we cannot jump up the rungs; they must be ascended slowly and methodically. In the same way, all of the generations of *Klal Yisrael* must so-to-speak pool their resources and aggregate merits to

achieve the ultimate goal of a perfect world and a return to the perfection of pre-sin Adam.

My rebbe, Rav Yitzchok Hutner zt"l (see *Maamarei Pachad Yitzchok* 32:9) once painted a verbal picture for us of what such a combination of generations would mean. Imagine, he explained, all of the *doros* of *Klal Yisrael* as one giant human being. The eyes would represent the first generations which left Mitzrayim, received the Torah and entered Eretz Yisrael. We would be the lower extremities, perhaps even the heel or feet. That would explain why only the earlier generations “saw” miracles and we do not. The arms, torso and legs *never* see anything but they don't have to. The eyes see for the entire body, for it is one entity. We, too, have no need or capacity to witness the wonders of those generations for that is not our role, any more than toes must grow their own eyes. Therefore, if we develop and hone our perception of all of Jewish history as one indivisible organism, we will have no need to impute to one generation what belongs rightfully to another. Perhaps this is one secret of the cumulative purification of all the *Parah Adumas*. They provide the infinite link of one *dor* to the next, allowing each to make its unique contribution to the march toward *geulah*. This may also explain a cryptic structure in the Rambam's introduction to his *Mishnah Torah*. The Rambam lists the 40 generation from Sinai to the close of the Talmud with Ravina and Rav Ashi. Then, uncharacteristically, he reviews the process by going backwards from Ravina and Rav Ashi to Sinai. The message may indeed be that those 40 generations do not merely mirror the march of time. They join arms, souls, hearts and minds so that each generation provides a vital link on the road to Moshiach.

We may perceive a deepening of this approach in the teachings of the *Sefas Emes* (5664). He reveals that the concept of “*taharah* – purification – flows from the triumph of the soul over the body.” He explains that the more that the body cleaves onto the holiness of its own soul, the closer the body itself comes to absolute purity. He continues that this is the *avodah* of the *Parah Adumah* to help the body to become a vessel for serving the *neshamah* in its quest for holiness and purity. The *Parah Adumah* overcomes the *tumah* defilement of death by “connecting to *Elokim Chaim* through the *Toras Chaim*.” We might add at this point that the Torah of all generations, also, combines into the edifice which we call Torah itself (see *Yerushalmi Peah* 2:3). That, too, is the legacy of the *Parah Adumah*.

Another incredible example of this idea of connecting all the generations through the various *Poros* may be derived from a *Medrash* (Parshas Chukas): ‘*And a pure man shall gather.*’ This refers to Hashem... ‘*The ashes of the Parah*’ refers to the exiles of the Jewish people. ‘*He shall place it in a holy place*’ refers to Yerushalayim. ‘*The*

ashes are the remnants of all the holy Jews who were burned *al Kiddush Hashem throughout the generations.*” Thus we see that every Jew who gave up his life for the sake of Hashem adds up to the totality of *kedusha* and *taharah* which bring the people to their final resting place in the Holy City. In effect, no act of self-sacrifice remains alone. It is immediately entered into the tally whose cumulative effect changes the nation, one individual at a time.

Interestingly, the Skolya Rebbe zt”l (*Chakima B’remiza*, Korach, page 340) quotes a *Medrash* that Korach’s mistake was that he thought that once a *Parah Adumah* was offered, all was forgiven and each and every Jew was on the loftiest of planes and did not require a leader such as Moshe Rabbeinu. Perhaps Korach did not realize that each *Parah Adumah* only contributed *part* of the *kaparah* and therefore *Klal Yisrael* remained imperfect until Moshiach, still requiring the leadership of Moshe and Aharon. According to this interpretation, the irony is very powerful. Korach thought that he would lead a popular revolt since all in *Klal Yisrael* were equal. His mistake was that indeed every generation and individual counts but there still must be leaders in every generation to guide us in the delicate decisions of what is wanted of each of us, according to our capabilities and spiritual prowess. The *Medrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Chukas 17)* expounds each of the first words of *Parshas Parah* to stand for *Klal Yisrael* itself. In other words, we *are* the *Parah Adumah*, especially in the two millennia when we have not actually had a proper Red Heifer to assuage our *tumah*. It is ultimately the power of *Klal Yisrael* itself which is *mechaper* when we accept our responsibilities and fulfill our duties.

Indeed *Parshas Parah* is the perfect introduction to *Yetzias Mitzrayim* because as we became a nation (*vayehi sham l’goy*) we had to come to the realization that this was just the beginning of a long arduous journey. If we join hands with every other Jew and with generations past and future, we have a chance to bring about the final *geulah bimeheira b’yameinu*.