

## "And they shall take to you a completely red cow." (19:2)

The laws of *Parah Adumah* are shrouded in mystery. *Chazal* teach us that the *Parah Adumah* served as an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. How does this take effect, and what relationship do the two have with each other? Another paradoxical aspect of the law is that the one who had prepared the ashes of the *Parah Adumah* became spiritually defiled, while the unclean person became purified. How could the *parah* be *me'tameh tehorim* and simultaneously be *me'tahar tema'im*? How could the same substances defile those handling them and yet purify those who were spiritually unclean?

A number of approaches attempt to shed light on the mystery of *Parah Adumah*. They are of course merely homiletical explanations, since the foundation of *Parah Adumah* is a *chok*, decree from Hashem, for which there is no stated reason. Hashem has concealed the reason from us as a means of testing our devotion. Will we serve out of love and commitment, or do we need a reason to guide our every devotion?

*Horav Mozeson, z.l.*, explains the following: The *Parah Adumah* had to be totally red. Two black or white hairs disqualified it. Indeed, if the roots of the hairs were red and the tips were black, it was permissible to cut off the tips so that the young cow appeared to be glistening red. The Red Heifer, as it is called in modern vernacular, looked somewhat golden, as a result of the apparent relationship between the colors of gold and red. It was in this manner that the Red Heifer atoned for the Golden Calf. We sin by worshipping the Golden Calf -- by pursuing the almighty dollar. We drive ourselves mercilessly, acquiring more and more gold, as if it were an end in itself. The pursuit of money has defiled and destroyed many who were at one time pure.

The message of the *Parah Adumah* is that some individuals can be corrupted by dealing with gold. Others acquire gold in order to use it as a means to uplift themselves spiritually. These people use their wealth in the service of Hashem. Gold may corrupt the pure, but paradoxically it may also purify. Those who had been content with doing nothing constructive with their life now have new goals. Their sudden wealth enables them to help the needy and support *Torah* institutions and endeavors. In short, the *Parah Adumah* teaches us that the purpose for which we expend our time and money is the determining factor of its ultimate value. The gold which can defile can also purify. It only depends upon how one makes use of his gift.