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The *Parah Adumah*, Red Heifer/cow, symbolizes two seemingly conflicting concepts. On the one hand, the *Parah Adumah* should be completely red in color. Indeed, if only two hairs are not red, it is rendered invalid. The color red traditionally represents sin in an allusion to blood and murder. This idea is consistent with the *pasuk* in *Yeshayah 1:18*, "Though your errors will be like scarlet, they will become white as snow; though they will be red as crimson, they will become like wool." On the other hand, the *Torah* demands that the *Parah Adumah* be without blemish. This concept implies perfection, flawlessness and excellence. Is it possible for something that is completely "red" or spiritually stained to be viewed simultaneously as "without blemish" ?

In response to this question, *Horav Nissan Alpert, z.l.*, views this disparity as analogous to an individual who is blessed with amazing abilities and attributes. He chooses, however, to make use of his remarkable G-d given gifts for his own self-aggrandizement. A Jew is placed on this world for one purpose -- to help others. If Hashem blesses someone with a special talent, if He has conferred upon him distinction, it is for the purpose of enabling him to serve others. If one locks himself up in his own little environment, ignoring the needs of others, obsessed with his own petty self-concerns, he takes a special gift and spoils it. He transforms himself into an arrogant and reprehensible human being. The golden opportunity which was his for the taking suddenly becomes a *rhzj ;tc cvz ozb*, "a golden ring in the nostril of a pig." This analogy implies egotism and insolence.

How does one cleanse his character of such egocentrism? The answer, notes *Horav Alpert*, lies in the same procedure used to purify one who is *tamei meis*, one who has come in contact with a dead body. The manner in which the *Parah Adumah* cleanses one from spiritual defilement serves as a model for expiating arrogance and disdain for others.

The ritual of purification involves the use of cedarwood, hyssop, and a thread dyed with the blood of a worm, a combination that symbolizes repentance. The sinner who has acted haughtily, like the lofty cedar tree, must now humble himself like the low hyssop grass and the lowly worm. The individual who has looked down at everyone and who has put down those he felt were actually higher than he, must now interact with the rest of the community. The Jew who has separated himself from the *klal*, who feels that others are not good enough for him -- wastes his G-d-given potential. He also distorts the purpose of his own creation. Together with the *tzibbur*, community, his potential and his purpose in life will be realized.

With this in mind, *Horav Alpert* explains the *Midrash* which states that the *Parah Adumah* atones for the sin of the Golden Calf. The *Midrash* declares, "Let the mother/*Parah Adumah* come and make repentance for the mess made by her calf/Golden Calf." We must endeavor to understand the relationship between the sin of the Golden Calf and the manner in which the *Parah Adumah* expiates that sin.

What is the reason that all Jews were held responsible for the dastardly act of a few? It was only the "erev rav," mixed multitude, who were actually involved in the sin of worshipping the Golden Calf. We tend to ignore this sin, because we ourselves are still doing the same thing -- demonstrating indifference and non-involvement. When a portion of Jews are worshipping an idol, what right does the remainder of *Klal Yisrael* have to look away in ignorance? Why do people shy away from their responsibility to reprove their brethren, to stop them from committing spiritual suicide? We are obligated to answer for our apathy to the spiritual dereliction of others. Indeed, we are as guilty today of that sin as we were then! For whatever reason, be it political, social, or material, we tend to shirk our responsibility to the greater Jewish community by ignoring iniquity, by looking away when a public desecration of Hashem's Name is committed. Yes, we are still guilty of the same indifference today as we were in the times of the *Eigal Ha'Zahav*.

The lesson of the *Parah Adumah* is involvement. It teaches us that one who is totally obsessed with focusing upon himself -- at the expense of the Jewish community -- is considered to be completely red, the symbol of sin. He must descend from his pedestal and burn/purge himself of this "redness" by interacting, sharing and showing the true colors of a Jew. He must do whatever he can to help the alienated, to bring closer the unaffiliated, and to repel the impudent who openly defy Hashem. Only then can the message of the "mother" serve as an expiation for the sin of its "calf."