

## This is the chok, statute/decreed... take to you – red heifer. (19:2)

*Parah Adumah*, the Red Heifer, is from its very beginning, a paradox. It is used to purify one who has become spiritually defiled by coming in contact with a human corpse. This is done by burning the cow and mixing its ashes with pure water, with the mixture then being sprinkled on the defiled person. What is the meaning of *tumah*, impurity, and how is it purified by means of sprinkling water? The paradox goes deeper. The *Kohen* who burnt the *Parah Adumah* and sprinkled the water on the defiled person – himself becomes *tamei*, impure, while the subject of his sprinkling becomes *tahor*, pure.

*Chazal* teach: *Zos chukas*, “This is the *chok*.” This is what is meant by the *pasuk* (*Iyov* 14:4), *Mi yitein tahor mitamei; lo Echad*, “Who can bring purity from impure? Not One. Like Jews from non-Jews, the next world from this world, who did so? Who commanded, also decreed? Was it not the Single One of the Universe?”

“Those who are involved in preparing the *Parah Adumah* become impure, while the *Parah* itself purifies! (Is this not paradoxical?) The Holy One, blessed be He, says, ‘I set My statute; I decreed My decree; there is no permission to transgress it.’”

Having quoted this *Midrash*, we are in a deeper quandary as to its meaning. Originally, we had no clue as to the workings of *tumah* and *taharah*. Now we see that we know even less. Whatever we thought might make sense is now the opposite.

The **Sfas Emes** explains that, indeed, it is illogical for purity to be derived from an impure substance. Purity should beget purity; impurity should generate impurity. That is the natural order; that is the logical understanding of how things are supposed to work, but *tumah* and *taharah* are not part of the natural order of the world. They are spiritual in nature, decreed by G-d. Thus, the purification process of the *Parah Adumah* cannot be analyzed by applying human logic. The human mind cannot comprehend the Divine. When one realizes this, when he senses this paradox, when he begins to question: *Mi yitein tahar mitamei*, “Who can bring pure from impure?” – he approaches the answer – Hashem. He begins to acknowledge and becomes acutely aware of the power that brings purity to the world.

*Chazal* continue with a *pasuk* in *Sefer Tehillim* 12:7, *Imros Hashem amaros tehoros*, “The words of Hashem are pure words.” The *taharah*, purification, which is engendered by the *Parah Adumah* is not due to some purifying factor, hocus pocus that is done by sprinkling the water/ash on the defiled person. It is by virtue of connecting to the pure words of the Torah and fulfilling Hashem’s decree – despite not understanding it – that generates purity. In other words, it is specifically the paradoxical essence of *tumah/taharah/Parah Adumah* that creates the purity.

When we are overwhelmed with questions, when doubt consumes our mind, when nothing seems to make sense – yet, we continue to believe, accept and do: this is *taharah*. By accepting and connecting with Hashem's words, we elevate and purify ourselves.

When we confront two conflicting realities, we are able to reconcile one with the other only with the realization that everything originates with Hashem's decree.

The *Sfas Emes* explains two other wonders of Creation. We are aware that the world was established on *Asarah Maamaros*, Ten Statements, which emanated from Hashem. These statements were the force behind the Creation of the world, and they continue to uphold and maintain Creation to this very day. In other words, the world continues to exist only by virtue of Hashem's Will. Now, if the world continues to exist only through Hashem's continued desire to create, how can any force that opposes Hashem's Will exist?

Let us face it, from man's early youth he is in a constant battle between good and bad. The *yetzer hora* does everything to seduce man to sin, to violate and rebel against the very force which upholds creation. This is truly a wonder – a paradox! The *yetzer hora* persuades us to fight against the powers of good, to sin against Hashem, without Whom there is no world, there is no "us"! This, says *Sfas Emes*, is the meaning of the *Midrash's* question, *Mi gazar kein*, "Who decreed so?"

Another wonder is manifest from the flipside of the *yetzer hora/yetzer tov* battle of wills. Despite the evil inclination's incredible ability to entice us to sin, we have the power within us to prevail over and conquer it, to draw spirituality into a world of darkness, a world filled with hedonism, a world in which ethics are archaic and morality is as bankrupt as the economy. How do we do it? What gives us the ability to prevail? This is the second question presented by the *Midrash*. *Mi tzivah kein*, "Who commanded so?"

The answer to these questions is forced on us, because there is no logical answer. Thus, it must be noted as above. We come to the conclusion that only Hashem could command these conflicting realities.

The *Parah Adumah* is called a *chukah*, which is also related to the word *chakikah*, etching, engraving. Hashem's Will is engraved into the physical matter of Creation that seems to oppose it. When we recognize that everything originates from Hashem, and that everything continues to exist only because this is His Divine Will, we return Creation to its Creator. This is how *tamei* brings about *tahor* – by returning the universe to its pure, spiritual source.

The **Kotzker Rebbe, zl**, wonders why a woman who gives birth becomes *tamei*. Hashem has the "key," the power that opens the womb which releases the child. Hashem's pure hands release the child from an impure place. The mother is *tamei*; the child is *tahor*. It has all been orchestrated by Hashem, Who is the essence of purity. Is this not paradoxical? **Horav Gedalyah Schorr, zl**, explains that the child's purity is an indication that it comes from Hashem and has no real

connection to its impure source. The mere fact that a pure child is derived from an impure place demonstrates the Hashem factor in this creation. Likewise, with the *Parah Adumah*: the one who touches the ash becomes impure, while the one upon whom it is sprinkled becomes pure. This teaches us that purity really comes from Hashem.