

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## Why PARA ADUMA

The obvious question that is asked about the mitzva of Para Aduma is basically answered in the opening verse of the parsha: ZOT CHUKAT HATORAH - this is the statute of the Torah - it is a CHOK. And by definition, a CHOK is not to be understood. We are allowed to search for meaning and reasons but, ultimately, it will elude us. As Shlomo HaMelech said: I thought I could become wise but it is beyond me (Kohelet 7:23). According to the midrash on Chukat, Shlomo referred to his inability to fathom and understand the mitzva of Para Aduma despite his research.

Chukim are part and parcel of the Torah. One of the reasons given for the juxtaposition of this parsha to the previous one on Korach is because Korach was trying to understand the laws of the Torah according to his limited knowledge. It didn't "make sense" to him that a cloak which was completely t'chelet still needed a p'til techelet or why a house full of sefarim would still require a mezuzah. The mitzva of Para Aduma comes to correct that misconception - a person should never think that he can fully understand the depths behind the laws of the Torah, even those that seem "logical". It certainly doesn't "make sense" that a procedure that purifies the impure should cause the pure one involved to

thus become impure. That is the nature of a chok.

The word CHOK is from the word CHAKIKA - engraved, etched. Every mitzva of the Torah is etched into the essence of Creation. Midrash Rabba, Vayikra 35:4 tells us that chukim were used to create the world. Every chok influences the order of behavior Above as well as below. Even a mitzva whose reason is not revealed in our earthly world influences the order of the workings of our world. The flowing of blessing into our world is dependent upon our fulfillment of the mitzvot. Something which, basically tells us this daily, but which we probably ignore as we glibly say the Sh'ma: V'HAYA IM SHAMO'A TISHM'U EL MITZVOTAI... - and it will be that if you observe my mitzvot..., then, as a result, Gd will send down the blessing of rain.

In some way, the purification engendered by the ashes of the Para Aduma remove the tum'ah contracted by contact with the dead. "Death is that partition that separates the upper world from the lower world. "Life" indicates the connection of a being to its source" (Ramchal). A weakening of the partition that separates the lower world from its root is the essence of the ritual of Para Aduma. It tells us that one who is tamei can renew the tie and connection to the source of life. The goal of this procedure is to strengthen the connection between these two worlds.

This process is hinted to in the verses

that follow, that talk about the actual laws that relate to the purifying of one who is T'MEI MEIT. A person who comes into contact with death is, apparently, influenced by this separation of the body from the soul, of the separation from the upper world. The purification process is meant to create a new connection between the body and the soul. In this process, the Torah says: They shall take for the impure person some of the ashes (earth) of the burning of the animal and put upon it spring water in a vessel (19:17). The word used for 'ashes' is not EIFER with an ALEF but AFAR with an AYIN. (While EIFER means ashes, AFAR means earth, dust.) But what is actually left from the burning of the Para Aduma? EIFER HAPARA - ashes. AFAR is something from which things can grow, which can take a form. EIFER is what is left from fire. It can take no form; it is truly the end. And yet, here the Torah tells us to take of the AFAR of the Para.

It's interesting to note that when Avraham is bargaining with HaShem to save S'dom and its environs, he uses these very words to belittle himself in daring to ask favors from HaShem: V'ANOCHI AFAR VA'EIFER (Vayeira 18:27). The Netziv explains Avraham's statement: Avraham compares himself to AFAR which connotes a future, progeny to carry on with his mission, which, at that point in time, he didn't have. And a z'chut avot, of EIFER, the end product of previous generations which he also didn't have.

This change in the usage of the words tells us that what was once over, EIFER, and considered the end, is now AFAR, considered a possible beginning. The purifying power of the Para Aduma converts the EIFER into AFAR. Exactly what is it that causes this to happen. The process isn't completed with the burning of the Para Aduma, nor with the collection of its ashes. It only takes affect when mixed with MAYIM CHAYIM and then paced into a K'LI. The S'fat Emet (Sh'mot, Parshat Para), tells us This is the root of all mitzvot: to glue the body to the life of the soul, for the body becomes a utensil for the soul through the mitzvot; the body becomes a vessel through the mitzvot. The body is the K'LI and the MAYIM CHAYIM are the Torah and mitzvot.

If I am correct about the power that this MAYIM CHAYIM has, then maybe, it is no coincidence that this parsha deals so much with matters of water: Miriam's death and the subsequent lack of her water; Mei Meriva; the next complaint about water, concluding with the song of the well, ALI BE'ER. The Or HaChayim strengthens this possibility when he observes that this 'song' to the well is actually a song to Torah for, as we know, Torah is compared to water.

I admit to drawing no conclusions from all of this, other than to pay more attention to the words of my davening and to try to imagine the effect my performance of any mitzva might have upon the running of this world and the

behavior in the world above. And maybe there is more meaning for me in AVINU MALKEINU, Z'CHOR KI AFAR ANACHNU. Merciful Father, remember, we are not EIFER, it is not over; we are AFAR - there is more to us - we can improve and we can grow.

Let us. ✨