

Chukat 5781

BS"D Parashat Chukat (Para) 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Para Aduma

The Tahara (ritual purification) process necessitated by an encounter with a corpse was understood by only Moshe Rabbeinu. The Gemara (Yoma 14a) states that even the wisest of men, Shlomo Hamelech, after investigating the natural and supernatural aspects of Para Aduma (red heifer) threw up his hands, exclaiming that the matter was beyond his understanding.

HaShem instilled in man the desire to obtain that which is just beyond his reach, either too distant physically or halachically prohibited. This characteristic is called "yetzer". When it is for a car or the house on the corner which are just beyond one's budget it is called "yetzer hara" (evil instinct). When the drive is for Torah and wisdom it is called "yetzer tov" (good instinct).

To understand that which the wisest of all men was incapable of is certainly beyond the reach of mortal man, but that is what makes the matter all the more enticing: to try and succeed where others have failed.

When studying the matter of para aduma, the following thought occurred to me, which might allow us a direction in making the matter just a little less obscure. The atomic (or periodical) table contains (to my latest knowledge) 115 elements, some natural and some artificially produced. However, according to the Zohar's table of elements there are only 4, which due to the qualitative and quantitative mixtures produce every

physical object in the universe:

Afar – dust, soil or ashes

Mayim – water

Aish – fire

Ru'ach – wind

The Torah relates that at the dawn of mankind there were 4 major holocausts:

1) When one third of mankind was killed when Kayin (Cain) murdered his brother Hevel (Abel).

Tradition states that Kayin murdered his brother with a rock and then buried him in the ground, over their dispute regarding ownership of Mount Moriah. All on the background of afar (soil and dust).

2) The deluge in the time of Noach.

Humanity was destroyed in the time of Noach through the second element, "mayim" (water).

3) When the five centers of culture, Sodom and Amora and their three sister cities were destroyed.

The advanced cities of Sodom and Amora were decimated by the third element, "aish" (fire).

4) When the army of the then superpower of Egypt was destroyed in the Red Sea.

The waters of the Red Sea (parshat Beshalach) were split by the fourth element, "ruach" (wind), when a great wind raged all night and then the wind blew again to restore the waters to their natural state.

Para Aduma utilizes uses all of these elements: 1) "aish"

(fire) burns the para, 2) which turns into "afar" (ashes), 3) the Kohen then mixes the afar with "mayim" (water) and 4) he does not pour the liquid on the person coming to be purified but flings it on him using the "ruach" (wind) which the kohen creates by the force of his arm.

The lesson to be learned from this, is that when each element is taken alone it brings death and tuma (impurity); however, when taken together through the Para Aduma, the joint forces of all the elements brings tahara (purity) and life.

I don't know if this is the true track to understanding Para Aduma, but the lesson is applicable to our time: that unity in the Jewish Nation creates an atmosphere of tahara, while disunity produces strife and tuma.

As an example, I would like to relate a most unfortunate incident which occurred several years ago in New York City. The major orthodox organizations were planning a prayer occasion near Wall Street, in view of the difficult military situation that was confronting the Medina at the time. Agudat Yisrael made their participation conditional on no one reciting the "mi sha'bay'rach" prayer for the Medina or for Tzahal!

When I learned of this condition imposed by Agudat Yisrael, I wrote a letter to one of their leading administrators, as if asking his advice on a delicate matter.

"I have a son who is an officer in Tzahal. Many Jews owe their lives to the daily and nightly efforts of him and his soldiers.

What should I tell my son when he finds out the holy Agudat Yisrael refused to offer up a prayer and asks, "Abba, why didn't they pray that I should come home safely to my wife and children?"

And when his wife, who is a talmida chachama (she knows

more about korbanot being a teacher in an ulpana than most rabbis living abroad), asks me: "Abba why didn't they pray that my husband should return safely to me and our children?"

And when their children ask: "Saba why didn't they pray that Abba comes home safely to us?"

I ask you learned rabbi: what should I tell them?"

I did not receive a reply to my letter.

Let us inculcate the lesson of the Para Aduma: disunity brings death and tuma (unity) brings life and tahara (purity). Perhaps this is the direction that HaShem is taking us with regard to the newly formed Israeli government composed of parties which are very disparate in their ideologies. The Prime Minister Naftali Bennet is the first head of government here to wear a kippa, as are many of his appointees to major positions.

Disparity and conflict were at the core of many of our worst historical experiences, including the destruction of the two holy Temples, and perhaps even of the last Shoah.

Let's hope and pray that Mr. Bennet will succeed in bridging the gaps between our differences to the degree that we acknowledge that our Medina was born as miracle and survives by miracles.

JLMM

Shabbat Shalom,
Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5781/2021 Nachman Kahana