

Rabbi Ephraim Sprecher

Para Aduma -

A Little Dab Will Do Ya

“He (the defiled person) shall purify himself (with the potion of the Red Cow ashes) on the third and on the seventh day, then he will become pure...” (Bamidbar 19:12)

The classic example of a CHOK (a Mitzva beyond human understanding), is the Red Cow, whose ashes are used to purify a person from defilement by a dead body. As Rashi notes, immersion in a MIKVEH is insufficient to remove the tum'ah conveyed by a dead body, even though MIKVEH is effective for many other types of TUM'AH.

As our verse describes, the purification process of the Red Cow ashes takes place on the third and the seventh day, when these ashes are mixed with water and sprinkled on the impure person. The Rambam (Para Aduma 12) rules that it is sufficient for the ashes to be sprinkled even just on the tip of one finger. This reminds me of the old Brylcreem commercial which said “A Little Dab Will Do Ya.” Even one drop of Para Aduma potion causes purification to take full effect.

Despite being a CHOK, Rav Pam explains that Para Aduma contains a fascinating practical insight to everyday life. When the Torah requires immersion in a MIKVEH to remove impurity, EACH and EVERY part of the person's body must be immersed. Even if just one hair is not covered by the MIKVEH water, the entire immersion is invalid and must be repeated.

Yet, regarding the ashes of the Red Cow (called Waters of Purification), even if a tiny part of the body, like the fingernail is sprinkled, it is sufficient for the person to attain total purification. Why is there a difference between the power of the Para Aduma ashes to purify, as opposed to TOTAL immersion in a MIKVEH to become pure.

Rav Pam clarifies the difference between the purification of the Red Cow ashes verses the MIKVEH. Tum'ah is a symbol of sin and purification is a symbol of T'SHUVA. Ideally, a person should strive to become a complete Baal T'shuva for ALL his sins. Nevertheless, for the majority of people this can be extremely difficult, if not almost impossible.

Thus, instead of becoming discouraged and giving up altogether, one should at least attempt the lesser

method of purification, symbolized by the Red Cow ashes. Let us attempt to improve in at least ONE aspect of our Mitzva observance and to correct at least one character deficiency.

This method will be one huge step in the right direction, as the Mishna in Avot states, “One Mitzva brings along another Mitzva.” With G-d’s help, one will STEP BY STEP bring significant changes in his Divine Service and Mitzva Performance. **-ESP**