

Torah Tidbits – June 23, 2014

In this week's portion, Hukkat [rule of], we learn how the concoction which helps people become ritually pure again after being in contact with death is prepared. Every stage of its preparation must be done by a person who is at that moment ritually pure. After that person completes the step they are involved with, they become ritually impure for the rest of the day.

The text never states why, and neither does anyone else. I do have an idea about one of the ramifications, however.

It would be very easy for the Levites and Kohanim to look down on the Israelites. The Levites, after all, were set apart as being more loyal to God than the rest of the Israelites during the Golden Idol incident. This feeling of superiority might have focused at times on the people whom they serviced for ritual impurity. After all, the reasoning could go, those people can't really be all that good if they keep making bad decisions; maybe they really are not worthy of becoming ritually pure?

Having this kind of attitude is a little bit harder to justify when those very people among the Kohanim who were able to participate in something as important as the preparation of the Red Heifer become ritually impure. If following God's rules properly results at times in ritual impurity, then ritual impurity does not render a person less worthy. Helping a person become ritually pure does not make the helper a more worthy person, either.

[Most of the people we have interacted with locally seem to have internalized this already; I think the world would be a better place if everyone did.]