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ON RATIONALIZING BIBLICAL *TUM'A**

T*um'a*, ritual pollution, is a most difficult biblical concept to rationalize. Classical Jewish philosophers, such as Philo and Maimonides, have attempted to give a logical basis for the laws of *tum'a*, and many biblical scholars in more modern times as well. But their theories are unconvincing and do not address the wide variety of different types of *tum'a* with a single comprehensive theory

In this essay we shall briefly review previous attempts to give a logical basis for the laws of *tum'a*, but we will concentrate on two modern attempts to rationalize the laws and explain the problems with accepting them. We will also propose a new rationale which will address most of the laws of *tum'a* and link rituals of purifications to their respective *tum'ot*.

Emanuel Feldman's *Biblical and Post-Biblical Defilement and Mourning: Law as Theology*¹ is among the most recent attempts to rationalize the laws of *tum'a* (ritual defilement). Before presenting his own thesis, he cites Mary Douglas' studies (*Purity and Danger*, Blackwell, Oxford: 1966²), calling them "one of the most important in the field" (p. 49). Feldman notes her dissatisfaction with the interpretations of *tum'a* by Aristeeas, Philo, and Maimonides, as well as Robertson Smith, Driver and Pfeiffer. Then, with the understanding that, as she asserts, "The only sound approach is to forget hygiene, aesthetics, morals and instinctive revulsion . . . and start with the text" (p. 74), he uses her work as a starting point to develop his own thesis.

* I would like to thank Dani Schreiber for his editorial assistance in the preparation of this essay.

All biblical citations are from the Leeser Bible and all Talmudic quotations are from the Soncino edition.

¹ Yeshiva University Press, Ketav Publishing House, Inc. New York, 1977.

² Blackwell, Oxford: 1966.

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I. MARY DOUGLAS AND EMANUEL FELDMAN ON *TUM'A*

Feldman summarizes Mary Douglas' thesis as follows (pp. 49, 51):

Douglas explains everything on the basis of 'holiness,' which indeed is fundamental to the biblical text. *Kodesh* is not merely something set apart; it is also an idea of "wholeness and completeness."

For her, much of Leviticus stresses the physical perfection required of sacrifices and of people approaching the Temple. Perfection is also demanded in the social sphere. "An important enterprise, once begun must not be left incomplete. . .[and] requires that individuals [and]. . .holiness are exemplified by completeness. . .[and] requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong." Thus the Bible "rejects creatures which are anomalous, whether in living between two spheres, or having defined features of members of another sphere, or lacking defining features." It is not holy when different classes of things are confused. Thus, *kodesh* means order, and not confusion. In the dietary legislation, animals "shall conform to their class," and contact with "any class of creatures which is contrary to holiness" disqualifies one from Temple worship. Therefore anything in the water which is without fins and scales is unclean; four-footed creatures which fly are unclean; and anything which creeps, crawls, or swarms on the earth is unclean, "because this form of movement is explicitly contrary to holiness."

But Feldman finds her proposals "somewhat inadequate and, occasionally, even erroneous." Douglas explains that contact with an unclean animal "disqualifies a person from approaching the Temple," and that "to touch it is to be defiled." (pp. 55ff) However, Feldman points out that only when one is in contact with such an animal which died is one disqualified from entering the Temple. Furthermore, even a clean animal which dies without being ritually slaughtered renders anyone who touches it impure (Lev. 11: 39). As well, Feldman asks: "why, for example, should not contact with any element of confusion or disorder in the universe—sickness, dishonesty, destruction—result in similar cultic disqualification?"

FELDMAN'S INTERPRETATIONS OF *TUM'A*

Feldman proposes his own thesis, that *tum'a* is essentially an absence of life and God, and is thus a metaphor for estrangement and desacralization (p 15). Throughout the Bible, *hanyim* is almost synonymous with God (p.24). This, he maintains, reflects "the biblical concept of God as the

deity of life” (Num 19; 11) (p. 25). Thus “death represents the most intense form of desacralization (p. 24)... total absence of physical life and the absence of the ultimate source of life...the Living God” (p. 55). He interprets many passages in the Talmud to accommodate his thesis (p. 28 ff.).

To explain the *tum'a* of leprosy (Num. 12:12), for example, Feldman proposes that because it is a wasting disease, it is therefore a kind of death. A leper is consequently *tamei*. He explains the emission of semen and menstrual discharge (Lev. 15:1 ff), which bring in their aftermath *tum'a*, in the same way. Both wasted semen and menstrual blood are synonymous with the loss of potential life force (p. 37). He interprets the *tum'a* of a woman after childbirth (Lev.12:1-8) in the same vein, claiming that there is “an element of absence of life: once she gives birth, the mother is no longer producing, creating and nurturing life” (p. 37).

Feldman goes into an elaborate explanation of the laws of mourning (p. 79-107), citing all the details of the laws of mourning which make the mourner a non-participant in normal life activities. He is “brushed by the powerful non-life, non-active non-divine force which is *tum'a*...he is de-personalized and thus estranged from God” (p. 93).

Feldman summarizes (p. 96):

In sum, the mourner is a diminished person, one who has been contaminated by the anti-life of *tum'a* and he sits in rent garments, on the ground, without shoes, unkempt, unwashed; he engages neither in work nor in study of Torah; his head is covered; he greets and recognizes no one; and in turn is greeted and recognized by no one. Since he has been desacralized by the force of *tum'a*, the mourner may not offer up a sacrifice for seven days. Nor may he—at the initial moments of the presence of death—perform the positive precepts of prayer or phylacteries or the recitation of amen.

However, Feldman must come to terms with the description of forbidden foods as *tamei*. He therefore explains:

The term *tame* in the dietary regulations of Leviticus 11...however, is not the defiling *tame* of the dead who defile upon contact. He who eats forbidden food does not become defiled; no post-defilement purification is necessary if such food is eaten. The offender has violated a negative commandment and as such may be punished by lashes. The term *tame* used in connection with forbidden foods, then, applies to these foods the pristine, metaphorical meaning of *tame* as ‘something desacralized.’ The term *tame* is an intensely pejorative one in connection with foods, underscoring their undesirability. *Tame* used in this sense means that one

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shall not eat of these foods because they are desacralized, undivine, sacrally unfit. There is nothing intrinsically abominable or defiling about a pig ...But, says God in effect, I have forbidden it to you and you are to consider it an abomination. It is alien and unfit for sacrifice.

Problems with Feldman's Explanations

Feldman's attempt to unify the various *tum'ot* through a single concept, nevertheless, has its shortcomings too. To say that certain animals are referred to as *tamei* in the Torah because God "desacralized" them begs the question. Why did God desacralize these and declare them *tamei* and not other forbidden foods, such as *orlah* – fruit of a tree forbidden for three years after it is planted (Lev 19:23) – and *kil'ei ha-kerem* – grain planted together with seeds of the vine (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9). Why are they not *tamei*? According to Feldman's thesis anything God forbids should be *tamei*. Saying that because God declared certain things "desacralized" and hence *tamei*, while others He did not, cannot count as a rationalization.

Furthermore, claiming that semen emission, period blood, and especially childbirth, are related to death ("loss of potential life force") is a little far-fetched. As far as leprosy being a wasting disease and therefore related to death, what would Feldman say to the same "leprosy-like" spots (*nega'im*) in garments which makes them *tamei* (Lev. 13:47ff), or the spots on the walls of houses, which render the house and its contents *tamei* (Lev. 14:33ff)? What possible relation can these have to human mortality?

Then there are the various *tum'ot* associated with persons involved in the ritual burning of the red heifer (Num 19:7), the sending of the scapegoat to the wilderness (Lev. 16:26), and the burning of the ritual sacrifices of Yom Kippur (Lev. 16:28). How will Feldman explain these on the basis of "desacralization" or relation to death?

Furthermore, mourning practices which he interprets as an expression of having "been touched by the anti-life of *tum'a*," can also be congruent with alternative schemes, as we shall show.

II. *TUM'A* AS DEVIATION FROM THE ORIGINAL PLAN OF CREATION

Mary Douglas is right in perceiving *tum'a* as an absence of perfection – except that her description of perfection, namely "wholeness and completeness," is too vague and too general to serve as a definition. She says

creatures are *tamei* if they do not “conform to their class.” But why are certain classes considered by the Torah to be perfect, while other classes are not? She does not answer this.

We therefore propose that “perfection” in the Bible consists of the original plan of creation, the conditions that prevailed in the Garden of Eden, and that *tum’a* represents deviations from and corruptions of that plan.

When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden everything there was complete and therefore perfect, universally so. Man and woman were destined to live forever; they were without sin or fear, without pain or disease whatsoever; the trees of the Garden provided food; there was no need for shelter or even clothing and therefore little need to labor. And the animals, too, were perfect, *tahor*, eligible to be sacrificed on an altar to God, because they possessed kosher characteristics.³ All of that changed after Adam and Eve sinned. Death, disease, and pain entered the world (see later); Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden; their nakedness now needed to be clothed; the ground was cursed and man now would eat only with the sweat of his brow; he would have to sow, plant, reap and exert himself in the preparation of his food and clothing. Childbirth would now be accompanied with pain. The animals in the Garden of Eden were all herbivorous, and one may assume that they were *tehorim*, with kosher characteristics. But after the original sin, as part of the punishment of Man – because they served him – many mutated, becoming predators, developing habits and characteristics which would render them imperfect and, consequently, sources of *tum’a*.

Defilement, then, is the absence or the corruption of the perfection that prevailed in the Garden of Eden. The changes that occurred in nature as a consequence of Adam’s sin are divergences from the original plan and are designated by the Torah as *tum’a*, ritual impurity.

III. THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF *TUM’A*

We will trace the changes and see how their correspondent *tum’ot*, as well as the rituals of purification, can readily be rationalized by the idea of *tum’a* being a degenerative change from the original plan of creation.

The severest form of *tum’a* is *tum’at met*, impurity imparted through contact with, or in an enclosed proximity of, a dead human body. It is

³ Man was not allowed to eat meat until the time of Noah, but the significance of *tamei* and *tahor* did relate to sacrifices. See Genesis 7:2 and 8:20.

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designated by Hazal as *avi avot ha-tum'a*, the “father of the fathers” of impurity.⁴ The contact may be with a corpse, part of a corpse, a grave, or being under a covering that extends over a corpse.⁵

Aside from *tum'at met*, there are eleven lower forms of *tum'a*, six associated with live persons:

- 1) *Zav*: A man who has a venereal discharge (Leviticus 15:2, 3, 13-15).
- 2) *Niddah*: A woman who experiences her normal monthly flow (Leviticus 15:19).
- 3) *Zava*: A woman who has breakthrough bleeding after the conclusion of her normal menstrual period (Leviticus 15:25).
- 4) *Yoledet*: The parturient, a woman after childbirth (Leviticus 12:2).
- 5) *Metsora*: A man or woman with leper-like symptoms (Leviticus 12:12).
- 6) *Shiklvat zerah*: Seminal emission (Leviticus 15:16).

Another two caused by contact with impure objects:

- 7) *Nevela*: Carrion (Leviticus 11:8).
- 8) *Sherets*: Eight species of “creeping things” named in Leviticus 11:29-38.

Three associated with ritual rites:

- 9) *Parah adumah*: The ashes of a red heifer were required to be used for purification (Numbers 19:7). Gathering the ashes (19:10), or coming into contact with the ashes mixed with spring water when it is not being used for purifying purposes (19:21) causes *tum'a*.
- 10) The bullocks and he-goats of the Yom Kippur ritual (Leviticus 4:12, 21:26 and 16:27-28): The one who burns them is *tamei*.
- 11) *Se'ir ha-mishtale'ah*: The one who leads away the scapegoat during the Yom Kippur service (Leviticus 16:26) is *tamei*.

⁴ *Midrash Aggadah* (Buber) Bemidbar, 19.

⁵ Strictly speaking, the corpse itself is not impure; it merely “radiates” impurity, causing impurity to those who come into contact with it. This halakic paradox is based on Numbers 19:11 where it is written, “Whoever touches the corpse of any human being shall be impure for seven days.” As the *Talkut Shimoni*, quoting the *Sifri Zuta*, puts it, “The person who touches the corpse is impure; the corpse itself is not impure.” What does this mean on a practical level? The *Zayit Ra'anan* remarks that at the time of the resurrection of the dead at the end of days, the newly revived will not have to undergo a purification process because when they were dead they were not impure. However, see *Niddah* 70b. The people of Alexandria asked R. Joshua b. Hanniah whether those who will resurrected after death in the future will require ritual purification. He replied that when the time comes we will deal with the matter.

There is a species of edible creatures listed in Leviticus 11: 3-7 that is called *tamei* by the Torah, though it does not actually render an individual *tamei*. We must account for the Torah's use of the term.

As mentioned above, one may assume that all the animals that roamed the Garden of Eden were herbivorous ruminants with split hooves and therefore not *tamei*, or as in later parlance, kosher. Radak, commenting on *Isaiah* 11:6, states,

There are those who interpret this to say that in the days of the Messiah the nature of wild animals will revert to what they were at the beginning of creation and in the Ark of Noah. What could the lion have eaten as prey? ... Certainly they [predators] ate grass of the field.

After the expulsion from Eden many of them changed, as did nature, and mutated to carnivorous single-hoofed or pawed predators – the characteristics the Torah uses to identify and forbid them. In Genesis 3:6, Rashi records the midrash that Eve gave of the forbidden fruit to all the animals. The animals thereby became corrupted and thus there was introduced a divergence from God's plan in certain species. The *tum'a* of animals, then, is the result of a deviation from God's original plan for creation which existed in the Garden of Eden.

In an allusion to the above, God tells Noah to bring seven pairs of animals that are *tahor*. But the laws of the Torah were not given yet in Noah's time, and consequently there was no definition of *tahor*, so how was he to know which would be considered *tahor*? There must have been a tradition about which animals were *tahor*, and which were not, which was later codified as law in the Torah. Those animals that were present in the Garden of Eden and remained in their original state were *tahor*. The others were deviants, and therefore not *tahor* for both human consumption and sacrifice on the altar.

Between the expulsion and the Flood, there were further corruptions and hence deviations. In Genesis 6:11, the earth itself becomes "corrupt before God." Additional deviations are insects, rodents and creeping things, which did not exist in the Garden and came about as part of the curse on the earth. They were not in the original plan of creation in the Garden and are therefore designated as *tamei*.⁶

Animals dedicated to the Temple that have blemishes are also called *tamei* by the Torah (according to *Temurah* 32b) because, as mentioned, in Eden animals, too, had no defects; everything was perfect. The same

⁶ *Bereshit Rabbah* 20:8, quoted by Rashi with slight variants Gen 3:17

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may even be said of fish. Maimonides writes in his Guide for the Perplexed,⁷ “I maintain that the food which is forbidden by the Law is unwholesome. There is nothing among the forbidden kinds of food whose injurious character is doubted except pork and fat.”

All species in the waters of Eden had fins and scales which accordingly were wholesome and therefore perfect in the design of creation. After Adam’s sin, we may posit, some of them mutated and developed without these kosher characteristics. All animals which the Torah calls, “abominations” (*shekets*; Leeser Bible translation) are unwholesome and therefore not kosher.

IV. TOWARDS RATIONALIZING THE VARIOUS *TUM’OT*

Death in Humans and Animals

According to the simple meaning of the text in Genesis, Adam was created to be immortal. God said to him, regarding the Tree of Knowledge, “on the day you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17), implying that if he will refrain from eating the Tree’s fruit then he will live forever. Indeed, the notion that Adam was not destined to die at all is assumed in many *midrashim*, among them *Beresbit Rabbah* 21:5: “R. Berekiah said in R. Hanina’s name: ‘Like Elijah, just as he did not experience the taste of death, so Adam too was not meant to experience death [but for his sin].’” When Adam sinned, he became mortal, and the original plan was ruined. The world now had the element of death, which negates life as it was to be lived in the Garden of Eden. Death is thus the major source of *tum’a*. The Torah bids the people of Israel to purge this *tum’a* of death by the rituals of *tabarah* (purification).

In fact, even animals were not destined to die. *Nevela*, the carcass of a dead animal, is *tamei*. The severity of this *tum’a* is akin to the *tum’a* of a dead human body. Carrying the dead carcass of an animal renders a person *tamei* as does carrying a *met*, a human corpse. (Except that the carrying of the *met* renders a person *tame* for seven days, while carrying a *nevela* involves only *tum’a* of one day.)

Niddah, Zav, and Zava

The *tum’a* laws of bodily emissions are stated in Leviticus 15:1. For men, discharge from the sexual organ, *zav*, is an especially odious disease, since

⁷ Prt. III, cap 38

it involves the organ of procreation with which God blessed Adam and Eve, “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). For that reason, separation of the husband from the community is mandated in Numbers 5:2.

There was, of course, no such disease in Eden. Nor were women meant to suffer the malaise and unwholesomeness of menstrual blood, *niddah*, or non-period blood discharge, *zava*. The seven days of purification of a *zav* and *zava* correspond symbolically to the seven days of creation, in which everything was created perfectly but subsequently upset by sin.

Emission of semen is considered a *tum'a* because it is associated with the curse of Eve – “*ve-el ishekh tesbukatekh*” – that she will ever desire her husband (Gen. 3:16), which of course normally results in sex and semen emission.

Childbirth

Feldman explains the *tum'a* surrounding childbirth as a kind of death. After the mother produces a child, he maintains, there is an absence of life. While the mother was pregnant, there was much “life” in her. After birth, the “life” became separated from the mother and she is now less “alive,” which is a state akin to death. But it is difficult to associate childbirth with death. In fact, the Torah speaks of *new life* in that context: “If a woman have conceived seed, and born a male child: then shall she be unclean seven days, even as in the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean.” (Leviticus 12:1)

The reason, we maintain, that a woman who bears a child is *tamei* is because birth, labor pains, and the blood related to this phenomenon were not in God’s original plan of creation. In the Garden of Eden, Eve conceived and bore her children immediately, without gestation without birth pangs or labor pains.⁸ As the midrash states:

And she conceived and bore Cain. R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: “Three wonders were performed on that day: On that very day they were created, on that very day they cohabited, and on that very day they produced offspring.” R. Joshua. b. Karhah said: “Only two entered the bed, and seven left it: Cain and his sister, Abel and his two sisters.”

According to the midrash, woman, in addition to not having labor pains, was also not supposed to bleed, a phenomenon associated with childbirth. Childbirth, therefore, which in Eden was not painful, is the cause

⁸ *Bereishit Rabbah* 22:2 (Soncino translation). See also *Sanhedrin* 38b; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 11)

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of the *tum'a* of a *yoledet*. The original plan was that a woman should have no childbirth pain, and, like the fowl, should conceive and give birth the same day.⁹

Leprosy

Leprosy and leprous spots on clothing or wall of a house are considered *tamei* and cause the house to be *tamei* (Lev. 13-14). In the Garden of Eden there were no clothes and no houses. Adam and Eve lived in the open. “Leprous” spots on the skin or the walls of houses are deviations that could occur only after the sin, when Adam and Eve lost their innocence and required clothing to cover their nakedness, and a structure in which to dwell in privacy when shedding their clothing. Therefore clothing and houses are subject to *tum'a*.

Diseases other than “leprous spots” consequently are not subject to *tum'a*. In Biblical times, illness meant death since most ailments had no cure. One either recovered, in which case the heavenly decree of death was considered cancelled, or one died. There were no illnesses, as far as we know, where a person continued to live with his disease, except leprosy (*metsora*) and venereal disease (*zav*).

Creeping things

The *tum'a* of *sheratsim*, insects and creeping things is mentioned in Leviticus 11:24. According to our tradition, in the Garden of Eden there were originally no *sheratsim*. They came into existence only as a result of Adam’s sin. On the verse, “cursed is the ground for thy sake” (Gen. 3:7), Rashi comments,¹⁰ “It [the earth] shall bring up for you cursed things, like flies, fleas and ants” – in short, creatures which are not of benefit to mankind but were created rather to annoy.

Susceptibility to tum'a – hekhsher of foods

Foods cannot be contaminated by *tum'a* unless they are moistened by a liquid such as water (Lev. 11: 34). But when the Torah further elaborates

⁹ See Shabbat 30b:

R. Gamliel sat and lectured: “Woman is destined to bear every-day, for it is said, ‘the woman conceives and bears simultaneously’ (Jer.31:7).” But a certain disciple scoffed at him, saying, “there is no new thing under the sun” (Eccl.1:9) “Come, and I will show you its equal in this world,” R. Gamliel replied. He went forth and showed him a fowl.

¹⁰ Based on *Bereshit Rabbah* 20:8.

on this law of foods contaminated by *tum'a* (Leviticus 11:38), it chooses grain as the prime example, bread being the result of the curse imposed on Adam after he sinned (Genesis 3:19).

Whereas before the primordial sin, Adam and Eve ate only the fruit of trees which were available to them without effort, after the sin they would eat grains and seeds which required effort and sweat in order to develop. Ploughing the ground and making it ready for sowing; harvesting and then preparing the grain for consumption; grinding, kneading, and baking – all of this effort was necessary only after the sin.

The necessity for foods to come in contact with water to become *tamei* can be explained in accordance with our deviation theory. In Eden, nothing needed washing. Since all was perfect, all was clean. Nothing needed *heksheh* or fixing. Therefore, the need for water to *wash* grain is a deviation from the state of grain in Eden. It thus prepares the grain for contamination.

Kohanim

By extension, *kohanim*, the spiritual and educational leaders of the Jewish people, are supposed to realize, even more than ordinary Jews, the extent of the deviation from the original plan of Eden. They are therefore enjoined even from all contact with the dead. As was mentioned above, death was one of the most severe deviations from the original plan of Eden.

Tum'a in Erets Yisrael

Finally, there is one more *tum'a* spoken about in the Torah– the *tum'a* that accrues to the Holy Land as a result of sins such as murder and illicit sexual intercourse: “For all these abominations have the men of the land done, who were before you, and the land hath become defiled.” (Leviticus 18:27)

Prior to the sin in Eden there was no illicit desire. Adam and Eve copulated in the manner in which God chose for them in the plan of creation. It was only after the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge that profane desire entered the heart of man and it was therefore only then that he could be capable of illicit relations with the opposite sex. Thus promiscuity is associated with *tum'a*, and the Land of Israel cannot abide its ungodliness and deviation.

Gentiles

We still must account for the fact that gentiles are not subject to the laws of *tum'a*. Feldman's thesis does not explain this.

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But according to our thesis, the world originally was supposed to consist of only one people and one language, and all the people were supposed to be God's chosen. Then, because of sin, they deviated, became corrupt, and as a result, the Israelites were chosen to lead them to a higher existence. It would be only they who feel the loss of the original plan – it would be revealed to them by the Torah in the laws of *tum'a*. They became committed to bringing the world back to its original, intended state. The people of Israel are the prophets, teachers, models, and messengers sent to bring this lesson to mankind, and thus the life of *tum'a* and *tabarah* is imposed on them.

V. TOWARDS RATIONALIZING THE RITUALS OF PURIFICATION

Tum'a, therefore, is a challenge to man to make amends for the imperfection he caused by sinning. A process of cleansing was given by the torah so that man may make amends for the deviation he caused. This includes *mikveh*, ritual immersion, ashes of a red heifer, and in the case of *metsora*, isolation. Some of the *tum'ot* require sacrifices as a final gesture of purification: leprosy, *metsora*, venereal disease, *zav*, etc. For each deviation there is a corresponding *tabarah*, which is a symbolic rectification for that particular *tum'a*.

We will show how the various details of the rituals of purification are suggestive of a repairing of the imperfections in the world caused by the deviation from the original status of things in the Garden of Eden, namely, a symbolic return to the original state of Paradise.

Purification from Death

Death requires a purification lasting seven days (Lev. 19:11-12) associated with the seven days of creation.¹¹ Within this seven day period, the unclean person is to be sprinkled with a combination of the ashes of a red heifer and “living waters” (from a spring). The ashes of the red heifer symbolize man's effort in this world to create, representing “the sweat of his brow” produced when he uses the cow to plough the earth. Additionally, man uses its skin to clothe his nakedness (in Eden he needed no clothes) and its flesh for food (which until now in Eden was available to him without effort and without the need to slaughter animals).

¹¹ *Midrash Aggadah* (Buber), Numbers 19.

The cow is the all embracing symbol of man's exploitation of animals. Up until modern times man took advantage of the cow more than any other animal. She provides food in the form of milk and meat, and energy as a beast of burden, pulling the plough and threshing grain for bread. She also shelters man from the elements with her skin. To purify himself from death man must now burn the cow to show his negation of what the cow stands for in his present fallen life, for in the plan of creation neither he nor the animals were to be burdened with the need for physical exertion to provide for themselves. Perhaps this is what is hinted at by the requirement that the red heifer was not ever to have had a yoke placed upon it (Lev. 19:2).

In addition, beyond the basic needs that a cow helps to provide, it also generates wealth by producing offspring which can in turn be sold, hired out, or used to provide even more. It is very possible that the word *parah*, which, in verb form means to multiply, alludes to all of the ways it helped biblical man.

Purification from Venereal Disease and Bodily Discharges

The next category of purification is for the category of *tum'a ha-yotset mi-gufo*, the *tum'a* which is due to discharge from the human body. This *tum'a* is closest to the *tum'a* of death in that it requires seven days of purification both for man and woman.

Disease is a state that is nearest to death and in many instances a precursor of death. If left unattended, sickness will most often result in sure death. Since death was the biggest and most fundamental curse upon man, *tum'ot* associated with death, as well as death itself, require the most elaborate rituals for purification.

Purification from Leprosy

Parallel to the elaborate purification ritual for the *tum'a* of death is the process for the *metsora*, described in Leviticus 14. For the duration of the disease, the leper must remain outside the camp. After the leprosy has healed, the leper must bring two birds as an offering. One of the birds is slaughtered and its blood is poured into a basin of "living waters." The waters are then sprinkled on the leper. The second bird is set free to "fly forth into the open field." The leper then shaves, washes himself and his clothes, and waits for a seven day period "outside his tent" (according to Hazal, this last part is a euphemism for the prohibition against sexual relations). After this period, he brings a series of sacrifices, as well as oil from a hallowed flask. The blood of the sacrifices and the oil are sprinkled on

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his right earlobe, his right thumb, and the big toe of his right foot.

This very elaborate ritual exceeds even the ritual of purification of someone who has contact with the dead. How do we explain that? First of all, the state of *metsora* is often compared to death in the Bible. For example, when Moses' sister, Miriam, is struck with leprosy, Aaron pleads with Moses to pray for her, comparing her to "a dead born child" (Numbers 12:12).

In halakha, too, leprosy is compared to death. Just as a corpse inside a house contaminates all that is within the house (*ohel*), so too a *metsora* causes all that is in a house he enters to become *tamei* (*Kelim* 1:4).

Significantly, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were naked. After they sinned, God provided them with clothing (Genesis 3:21). *Metsora*, then, is an imperfection, one of the deviations which God himself laments as He provides clothing to cover the bare skin of Adam and Eve.

Immersion

In almost all cases of *tum'a* there is a requirement of immersion.¹² For some *tum'ot*, immersion by itself is sufficient (*tevul yom, ba'al kerit*), and in others it comes as an additional requirement at the end of the ritual. The rationale for immersion in a *mikveh* is that after the expulsion from Eden, the earth was cursed (Genesis 3:17) but the waters were not cursed. They remained as the waters of Eden and therefore immersion puts the *tamei* person, in some way, in contact with that which existed in Eden. He thus purifies himself and restores contact with his original pristine environment.

In addition, it should be noted that immersion must be done without anything intervening between the waters and the skin. The one immersing must be completely nude, just like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It is a return to the innocence of Paradise. Mircea Eliade¹³ wrote about how "the desire to live in the divine presence and in a perfect world. . . corresponds to the nostalgia for a paradisaical situation."

Thus, in accordance with the above idea of *tum'a* as a deviation from the conditions of Paradise, one may view the rituals of purification, *tabah-rah*, in general, as symbolic acts expressing a petition to God to repair the defects of the world and restore the ideal conditions of the Garden of Eden to mankind.

¹² Lev.14:9, 15:5-27

¹³ *The Sacred and the Profane* (1959, Harper and Row, NY), p. 92.

SUMMARY

We have examined the view of Mary Douglas, that *tum'a* is a lack of conformity to perfection, and that of Emanuel Feldman, that *tum'a* is a desacralization. We have found that there are certain difficulties in each of their explanations of various types of *tum'a*. Our own interpretation, that *tum'a* is a deviation from the conditions of Paradise, solves the problems that arose with their views, and should help rationalize the various rituals of purification.