The Paradox of a Passing

The passing of tzaddikim (righteous people) is compared to the red heifer, whose ashes are used to bring purification for those Jews who have become spiritually contaminated by contact with the dead.

As a source for this equation, Rabbi Ami cites the juxtaposition of two chapters in the Torah. The laws of the red heifer (Bamidbar 19) are followed by an account of the passing of Miriam (Bamidbar 20:1) to teach us that just as the red heifer serves as an atonement (it is referred to in Maharsha) so does the death of a tzaddik act as an atonement.

An interesting explanation of this comparison is offered by Rabbi Yonata.

the Torah makes him pure, those involved in some of the processes connected with those ashes become impure.

A similar paradox exists regarding the impact which the death of a tzaddik for the impure in some mystical way, so too does the tzaddik generation. But regarding the tzaddik

Why Bring the Kids?

Once every seven years, Jews gathered together in the Beit Hamikdash (Devarim 31:12)

The children referred to here are those infants too young to understand what is being read. Older children, who even if they have not yet reached the age of mitzvah responsibility but are at the level of chinuch where they can be trained by their parents to learn, are mentioned in the very next passage as active participants in this massive educational experience. There is therefore no other purpose for bringing the very little ones except for gaining a reward.

Rabbi Yehuda Mintz of Padua (15th century, Italy) provides an explanation of this gemara. Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah never intended to ask rather why it was necessary for the Torah to command parents to bring along their little ones if they would have done so without such a command. The answer he gives is that the Torah wanted the parents to be motivated not just by their concern for the safety of their children, but primarily because having these children nearby would enable them to properly concentrate on listening to the Torah reading. With such motivation, what might have been ordinary child-care is transformed into a mitzvah which earns reward.

Tosefot points out that this gemara is the source for the custom of bringing children to the synagogue. It follows then that this is meaningful only when this will help the parents focus on their prayer. If these children, however, are not watched, disturbing their parents and the other worshippers, their presence in the synagogue is counterproductive.