The immersion-pool, miqveh, containing forty seahs of water unaffected by human intervention, which purifies from certain kinds of uncleanness, bears a considerable paradox. The paradox of water is that it both contracts and also removes uncleanness. It imparts susceptibility to uncleanness when deliberately put onto seed, for example, and among other liquids water also receives uncleanness when touched by a source of uncleanness. But under some conditions, in correct volume, deriving from the appropriate source, water also has the power to diminish or even remove uncleanness, still water the former, flowing water the latter. So, it is clear, we shall deal with diverse classifications of water, on the one side, and with rules governing those classifications of water that bear the power to remove uncleanness but then do not themselves receive uncleanness, on the other.

Of all this Scripture knows nothing, though to such a taxonomy of types of water, Scripture makes its contribution. When Scripture speaks of putting into water—immersing—an unclean person or garment, it further specifies, “and it shall be unclean until evening, then it will be clean.”

So immersion does not purify, but in a measure removes uncleanness. The setting of the sun removes the rest, as we see in the setting of the category-formation Tebul Yom. So Scripture proves remarkably reticent to deal with questions involving how the “put-
ting into water” is carried out, not defining the sort of water that works, as the pertinent verses show. Scripture supplies no information about the character of the water into which the unclean object is to be put, how such water is collected, how much is required, and the like.

Our encounter with the Halakhah of Parah further makes us wonder about such questions as the role of man’s intentionality in the collection and preservation of water for immersion, that is, for an immersion-pool, the use of utensils in that regard, the conduct during the process of collection that is expected of those involved in the work, and other critical questions. The Halakhah of the Oral Torah fills the gap.

When we correlate the three category-formations concerning the use of water for the purpose of purification, Miqvaot, then Tebul Yom, and finally Parah, we see the coherent statement that, in its several components, the Halakhah wishes to make—and there we

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2 The pertinent verses of Scripture are: Lev. 11:31-2: “Any anything upon which any of them [dead creeping things] falls when they are dead shall be unclean... it must be put into water and it shall be unclean until evening, then it shall be clean.” Lev. 15:13: “And when he who has a discharge is cleansed of his discharge, then he shall count for himself seven clean days for his cleansing and wash his clothes and he shall bathe his body in running water and shall be clean.” Lev. 11:32: “What is touched by a dead creeping thing must be put in water and it shall be unclean until evening; then it shall be clean.” Lev. 11:40: “He also who carries the carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.” Lev. 14:8: “And he who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe himself in water and he shall be clean.” Lev. 15:5: “And any one who touches the Zab’s bed shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, and he shall be unclean until evening.” Lev. 15:16: “And if a man has a discharge of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water and be unclean until evening.” Lev. 15:21: “And whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until evening.” Lev. 15:27: “And whoever touches these things shall be unclean and shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until evening.” Lev. 16:28: “And he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body and afterward he may come into the camp.” Lev. 17:15: “And every person that eats what dies of itself... shall wash his clothes in water and be unclean until evening. Then he shall be clean.” Lev. 22:6-7: “The person who touches any such shall be unclean until evening and shall not eat of the holy things unless he has bathed his body in water. When the sun is down, he shall be clean.” Num. 10:7: “Then the priest shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water and afterwards he shall come into the camp. And the priest shall be unclean until evening.” Num. 17:17: “And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean... and he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and at evening he shall be clean.” Deut. 23:11:12: “If there is among you any man who is not clean, but when evening comes, he shall bathe himself in water, and when the sun is down, he may come into the camp.”