



Miriam's Bittersweet Deep Waters: oil 2006
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THE RITUAL OF THE RED HEIFER

Though the title THE RED HEIFER takes its name from the mysterious remedy of the red heifer, whose ashes make clean one who is unclean and sullies the priest who conducts the cleansing (a metaphor for America as the new Hellenism), the most striking story is Jacob's Daughter, which mimes chapter 34 of Genesis, the story of Dina. In place of the Hivites we have a loutish Polish family, whose son makes off with one Feygale (she willingly). The rest of the story about the fate of the Poles who accept circumcision can be read in Genesis or The Red Heifer interchangeably.

On The Red heifer by LEO HABER.
NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001.
Reviewed by Harold Tichtin Judaism Dec 2004

"THIS IS THE STATUTE OF (Numbers XIX, 2). It bears on the text, Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? is it not One (Job XIV , 4) . . . We have learned elsewhere : The persons engaged in any part of the preparation of the Red Heifer from beginning to end defile garments, while the Heifer itself makes garments ritually clean. The Holy One, blessed be He, says : 'I have laid down a statute; I have issued a decree! You cannot transgress My decree.' "

Numbers Rabbah, XIX, 1

"R. Mana of Shaab in Galilee said in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi: In connection with every law which the Holy One, blessed be He, communicated to Moses, He expounded to him its uncleanness and purification; but when he reached the chapter, Speak unto the priests (Leviticus XXI), he [Moses] spoke before Him, 'Lord of the universe, if these [the priests] are defiled wherewith do they regain their state of purity?' He gave no answer, and at that time the face of Moses changed." That is, as we would say idiomatically, Moses' face fell ; he was crestfallen at the thought that he was not worthy to be answered. "When, however, He reached the chapter of the Red Heifer, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, 'Moses, when I made to you the statement "Speak unto the priests" and you asked Me, "If they are defiled wherewith do they regain their state of purity?" I gave you no answer. This is their method of purification, And for the unclean they shall take of the ashes of the burning of the purification from sin (Numbers XIX, 17) He [Moses] spoke before Him, 'Lord of the universe, is this purification ? ' " That is to say, Moses asked of the Lord the very question that kept puzzling the rabbis through the generations, how can ashes, themselves defiling, remove the defilement caused by contact with the dead? And "The Holy One, blessed be He, replied, "Moses, it is a statute, and I have made a decree, and nobody can fathom my decree! "

Ecclesiastes Rabbah VIII, 1, #5

"Concerning all these [ordinances of the Torah] I have stood and investigated [their meaning], but the chapter of the Red Heifer I have been unable to fathom. When I laboured therein and searched deeply into it, 1 SAID : I WILL SEEK WISDOM; BUT IT WAS FAR FROM ME."

Ecclesiastes Rabbah VII, 23, #4

"The work of soul-making requires corrosive acids, heavy earth, ascending birds; there are sweating kings, dogs and bitches, stench, urine and blood ...I know that I am not composed of sulfur and salt, burned in horse dung, putrefying or congealing, turning white or green or yellow, encircled by a tail biting serpent rising on wings. And yet I am! I cannot take any of this literally, even if it is all accurate, descriptively true."

James Hillman 1978 On Alchemy

In Parshas Chukas (Numbers 19), the Torah describes the most enigmatic of rituals, that of the red heifer: the ritual slaughter of a red cow with no blemish, and the burning of the cow together with cedar wood, hyssop, and red thread. The ashes of this cow are mixed with water and used as part of a seven-day ritual to purify those members of the community who have come in contact with death. Those on whom this “water of impurity” (mei niddah) are sprinkled become pure. **Paradoxically** the ashes of the red heifer make the pure impure and the impure pure. Commentators have struggled for millennia to understand this mitzvah.

The midrash recounts the story of a pagan challenging the sage Yochanan ben Zakkai by asking him: “The things you Jews do are magic! A cow is brought, burned up, pounded to ashes, and the ashes are gathered up. Then, when one of you is defiled by contact with a corpse, two or three drops of water mixed with these ashes is sprinkled upon that person, and the person is told: “You are now clean!”

Rabbi Yochanan then asked the pagan about his own people’s practices when someone was possessed by a spirit of madness. The pagan describes a similar custom of sprinkling water mixed with roots on the afflicted person. Rabbi Yochanan then says: “Do not your ears hear what your mouth says? A man defiled is like one possessed by a spirit. The spirit is the spirit of uncleanness, and when the water is sprinkled, the spirit flees.” (Numbers Rabbah 19:8)

The pagan goes away satisfied, but the students of the rabbi are troubled. They don’t like how pagan the rabbi’s answer sounds. They ask Rabbi Yochanan to give them a different answer. Rabbi Yochanan says: “As you live, the corpse does not defile, nor does the water cleanse. The truth is that the rite of the red heifer is a decree of the King of Kings...” Essentially, he says that the details of the ritual are solely a ceremony God has commanded the Jewish people, and have no actual magical power.

But is there a way of reconciling the answer Rabbi Yochanan gives the pagan with the one he gives his students? Is the ritual magical or meaningless? What does the red heifer teach us about the nature of life, death, and the Divine?

Jacob Milgrom¹ has done much recent research into the unique properties of the chattat offering of the red heifer.

“This single postulate of the Red Cow as a chattat suffices to break the back of the paradox. For the unique characteristic of the chattat is that it defiles its handlers. Thus, the one who burns the hattat outside the camp “shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water; after that he may re-enter the camp” (Lev. xvi 28). Here we have a precise parallel to the defilement incurred by the one who burns the Red Cow outside

¹ Jacob Milgrom JPS Torah Commentary Numbers, (Phila 1990), The Paradox of the red heifer V.T. 26 (1976) 333-7. VT 31 (1981) 62-72. see also D P Wright Heifer, Red, Anchor Bible Dictionary III 115-116

the camp and who undergoes a similar purification (y. 8). Furthermore, since the chattat blood now bears the impurity it has absorbed, it contaminates anything it touches (Lev. vi 20b). Hence the laws of impurities prevail in regard to objects touched by the chattat: earthenware must be broken (cf. Lev. vi 21a with Lev. xi 33, 35, xv 12a) and metal ware scoured (cf. Lev. vi 21b with Num. xxxi 22-23).

It is the very mechanism of the purgation that helps clarify the paradox. In effect, the chattat absorbs the impurity it has purged and for that reason, it must be eliminated by incineration. However, this means anyone involved in the incineration of the hattet is infected by it and must undergo purification.

The residual power of ritual detergents is illustrated by a provision in the Hittite Code: "If anyone has performed a rite of purification on a man, he disposes of the remnants (of the offerings) at the place of burning. If he disposes of them in anyone's field or house, it is sorcery and (a case for the) court of the king" (HL 44b). In the Babylonian exorcism Shurpu, the patient is rubbed (kuppuru) and the impurity, purged by the ritual detergent call kupratu⁸, is then removed to the open country (vii, 59-63). The lexical congruence with Hebrew kipper, the exclusive term for "purge" used with the hattet, needs no additional verification. Thus both ancient Near East praxis and vocabulary provide firm precedent for burning or otherwise eliminating the hattet because it absorbs the malefic. The high priest uniquely on the Day of Atonement must bathe after the ritual (Lev. xvi 23-24). The reason cannot be anything else but the fact that in handling the battait which absorbed Israel's pesacim, its brazen, presumptuous sins, he may have become infected and must wash at once. Indeed, the sectaries of the Dead Sea prescribe that the high priest must wash immediately after the blood manipulations and not after the Azazel rite, as in the MT (11Q Temple 26:10) impurity of the object which it has purged. This, then, is the nature of the burnt chattat: it transmits impurity from the purified to the purifier. Hence, it purifies the defiled and defiles the pure."

Milgrom has elaborated an interpretation of the rite based on the premise that explaining it as a sin-offering, chattat, provides the necessary clues for a comprehensive explanation of the ritual and supposedly a satisfying resolution of the attendant paradoxes. The purpose of sin-offerings as a group, according to Milgrom, is to remove contamination, hence these sacrifices should be called "purification offerings". The Red Heifer is an atypical purification offering in that its blood, which infuses the ashes with their power, is not offered on the altar (as we might expect on the basis of the pattern of other purificatory sacrifices), but burned together with all the rest of the animal. All who are involved in preparation of the Red Heifer from the moment of consecration, or of its ashes, or who handle the ashes are thereafter rendered impure. They must cleanse themselves and their garments, and wait until evening before they can rejoin the people, while the person who has contracted corpse uncleanness is rendered pure by sprinkling with these very ashes mixed with water.

But this is the heart of the paradox: the Red Heifer's ashes purify the defiled, but they defile the pure. Milgrom proposes that the key to resolving this dilemma is to be found in the mechanism of purgation. The purification offering absorbs the impurity it has purged, hence it is now contaminated by the residues of the defilement it has eliminated. Milgrom offers a number of ancient Near Eastern parallels for this assertion.

This interpretation, however, contains a major flaw. In the Near Eastern examples cited the ritual detergents are contaminated with the impurity they have removed after they have been used. In modern terms, it is as if some of the dirt we wash off remains adhering to the bar of soap. In the case of the Red Heifer, however, it is explicitly stated that all those involved in preparation of the sacrifice after the consecration of its blood are rendered impure (Num. xix 7-10), even before the ashes are used and have come into contact with the impurity of corpse uncleanness. The case of the Red Heifer is therefore not analogous to the Near Eastern parallels suggested by Milgrom. The mechanism by which its ashes defile cannot be the residual impurity left behind in ritual detergents, since the ashes defile before they are brought into contact with impurity. The Bar Ilan scholar Baumgarten however disagrees since Milgrom does not deal with this point directly in his publications on the Red Heifer.²

Baumgarten then goes on to propose a different theory based on the 16th-century Italian Jewish exegete Obadiah b. Jacob Sforno (1470-1550). Sforno begins by noting that extremes are despised by God, in accordance with the verse in Prov. xxviii 18: "He who walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is perverse will fall into one (extreme position)". In order to restore someone who has strayed to an extreme back to the middle, extreme measures from the other end of the spectrum must be applied, so that the two will balance each other out. These very measures, however, which re-establish the equilibrium in the case of the person being treated, upset the balance of the person rendering the treatment, moving the latter away from the desired norm. Hence, after the treatment has been successfully completed anyone who participated in it is in need of a procedure to counteract the consequences of the remedy and return him to the norm.

In anthropological terms, holiness and purity imply completeness and order: everything being in its proper place at the proper time. Anomaly leads to confusion, the very opposite of holiness or purity, hence the anomalous is regularly considered impure. With regard to the sacred there are two possible anomalous positions: (1) one can either be closer to the sacred than one ought to be, or (2) one can be farther from the sacred than appropriate. Either of these two extremes can appropriately be classified as impure. The person who has come into contact with a corpse has lost some vital sacred power as a result of this experience. Before that person can enter the presence of the Lord in his sanctuary he or she must be raised back up to the "normal" level. This transaction is effected by means of a sprinkling with the ashes of the Red Heifer, which possess this power on account of the special nature of the animal.

² Wright, however, does address this issue, suggesting that the sacrifice defiles from the moment of consecration "prospectively, before actual use in purification" Unfortunately for Milgrom and Wright, the notion of prospective defilement is patently implausible in the instance of the Red Heifer. Even if we concede for the sake of the argument that prospective defilement is possible, impurity can defile prospectively only when it is present or at the very least will soon be present. When the Red Heifer is burned and its ashes prepared, however, the person or things contaminated with corpse uncleanness will be present only at some point in the unknown future. The defilement they bear is so far away that it seems meaningless to talk of them conveying defilement prospectively.

Baumgarten then proposes the following:

"Perhaps, as Milgrom has proposed the animal has this power because it is red, the colour of blood, and the vital force is in the blood (Lev. xvii 11). Moreover, this strength is unattenuated because the animal has never been yoked (Num. xix 2). All those who prepare the sacrifice from the moment of consecration and the ashes thereafter also come into contact with this potent agent, but since they begin at the middle, at the level of "normalcy", they are raised further above the line than they ought to be; hence they are rendered impure. They therefore need to undergo bathing, washing their clothes and waiting until sunset before they are pure, i.e. back at the safe point of lack of anomaly.

"To conclude this part of the discussion, I suggest that there are two overlapping ways of describing what occurs when something holy enters a realm in which it does not belong. That event can be called "sanctification", as in Lev. vi 11 and vi 20. It can also be discussed in the terminology of defilement, as in the case of the Red Heifer, according to the conceptual framework outlined above. In other words, once impurity is understood as deviance from the norm; in either of the two possible directions, the paradox of the Red Heifer is readily resolved.

"If this interpretation of the Red Heifer is accepted it may have far-reaching implications for our understanding of chattat sacrifices, well beyond the limits of this brief article. To mention one example, perhaps these sacrifices as a group should not be understood as offerings which decontaminate, but rather as ones which raise status, by means of adding vital sacred power. This suggestion is not that far from that proposed by Zohar ([n. 8] pp. 616-17), who offers "replace, displace, and transfer", as the basic meanings of the root ht. These sacrifices are therefore employed for purposes of decontamination, such as the rite of the Day of Atonement. In this case, the result of the rites is the purification and (re)sanctification of the holy places: wetziiaroweqidde(Lev. xvi 19); the latter phrase. Whatever the exact etymology of chattat may be, the rite of the Red Heifer provides us with the clues needed to understand the role of these offerings in general, as ones which transform by raising status, in whatever the way needed to be appropriate to the different situations in which they are employed."

This foregoing brief analysis attempts to penetrate the enigmatic ritual of the red heifer using all available etymological philological and comparative tools available to recent scholarship. In reviewing our own inner tradition of commentators besides the seforno we are to find a famous division of opinion between the two great medievalist scholars.

The whole idea of the reasons behind our rituals "taamei mitzvot" forms the basis for the grand debate between the RAMBAM (Maimonides) and the RAMBAN (Nachmanides). Professor Joseph Stern has elegantly articulated the key elements of this very debate as to whether there are possible intrinsic magical properties of certain rituals (such as the Azazel calf and the red heifer) versus a didactic or metaphoric representation of a hidden moral good.³

My discussion here is not to revisit the philosophical claims one way or another, rather to explore other possible approaches to strange commandments that defy moral or logical understanding. For instance one could argue that in biblical myth, impurity (tumah) is associated with the forces of mortality, which are also forces of fertility (childbirth, menstruation, seminal emission, and death), and purity (taharah) with the immortal forces of life (the Temple, the priests). Both of these states are necessary to a complete life. The fact that the heifer's ashes make the impure pure and also the pure impure suggests that these ashes represent a change agent: they bring life into death and allow death to return to life. In other words, they represent the One who causes the living to die and brings the dead to life: who is not fully identified with mortality or immortality, but partakes of both. We see this in shamanic practice whereby the shaman himself takes on the very illness or suffering of the sick villager.⁴

I am not trying to explain away any mitzvot by using this cross cultural approach like some earlier scholars, rather I am attempting to expand our approach more obliquely by comparing ways in which ritual behavior opens up channels to the spirit hitherto inaccessible by the logical mind. There maybe some resonances from which we can learn deeper truths lost to us from ancient times.

Looking to our classical commentators I could not do better than quote Rabbi Chaim Miller who asks the classical question as to why is the red heifer referred to as "the suprarational command of the Torah"? (v. 19:2). He then lists the possible answers:

Rashi: Because Satan and the nations of the world cause grief to the Jewish people, saying, "What is this commandment? What purpose does it have?" Therefore, the Torah uses the term chukah (suprarational command). [G-d says], "It is My personal decree. You do not have permission to ponder over it."

Ramban: The nations taunt the Jewish people about this mitzvah for a reason that is similar to their derision of the scapegoat of Yom Kippur—because it is slaughtered outside the Holy Temple.

³ Joseph Stern: The fall and rise of myth in ritual (Exploring formative influences on the "naturalization" of Judaism in the Middle-Ages: Maimonides versus Nahmanides on the "Huqqim" (rabbinic statutes), astrology, and the war against idolatry) Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy 6/2 1997 185-263

⁴ "Those who carry the pain of others hold the power to heal. It is the price of being a healer. It is an impossible role, but it must be done so that others may survive." Ava Tape Miri, Guarani Shamans Of The Forest, Bradford Keeney, Ph.D., Ringing Rocks Foundation.

Be'er Mayim Chayim: The source of derision is the law that the pure person who performs the process becomes impure, and yet the impure person on whom the procedure is performed becomes pure. Of course, we do find such a phenomenon in nature too (for example, heat softens tin and yet will harden an egg), but one cannot bring proofs from nature to explain the mitzvot of G-d.

Ohr haChayim: Why does the verse use the expression, "This is the suprarational command of the Torah," as if to say that this mitzvah is representative of the entire Torah? Because the laws of ritual purity and impurity discussed here bring to light the effect of the Torah on the Jewish people. By receiving the Torah, the Jewish people became a holy people, and therefore they became an attraction for spiritual impurity. Thus, ironically, a Jewish body becomes ritually impure after the departure of the soul, due to the body's immense holiness which attracts impurity, rather like an empty jar of honey that attracts flies and insects.

An additional explanation: By writing, "This is the suprarational command of the Torah," the verse is hinting that if a person observes this mitzvah, he is credited with observing the entire Torah. For observing a mitzvah which makes no sense at all demonstrates a person's strong faith and commitment to observe all the other mitzvos too.

In all the above citations the very obtruse nature for the law is given meaning only as an external test of faithfulness to the divine commandments. We still have no overt relationship between the ritual itself and an underlying motive.

From The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Teachings on The "Suprarational Command of the Torah"

The rebbe was the foremost interpreter of Rashi in the 20th century and writes as follows:

"In his commentary on Parshas Toldos, Rashi defines chukim (suprarational commands): "Things which the evil inclination and the nations of the world argue against—such as eating pig and wearing shatnez— because they have no reason. Rather, they are decrees of the King, His statutes to His servants" (Rashi to Bereishis 26:5).

"Likewise, in Parshas Acharei, Rashi writes: "They are decrees of the King, against which the evil inclination argues, 'Why should we keep them?' And the nations of the world argue against them. Examples are eating pig, wearing shatnez and ritual purification through the sprinkling water. Therefore the verse says, 'I am G-d—I have decreed upon you, and you have no right to exempt yourselves' (Rashi to Vayikra 18:4). But here Rashi writes: "Satan and the nations of the world cause grief to the Jewish people, saying, 'What is this commandment? What purpose does it have?'....[G-d says,] 'It is My personal decree. You do not have permission to question it.'"

"A number of differences are evident between Rashi's comments:

In the previous instances, the evil inclination was the source of opposition to observing the suprarational commands, whereas here, the evil inclination is not mentioned at all, but rather, the opponents are Satan and the nations of the world.

On previous occasions, the opponents to the suprarational commands had been "arguing against" them, but here, Rashi writes that the Jewish people are "caused grief" by their opponent.

In our parshah, Rashi writes, "You do not have permission to ponder over it," whereas earlier he wrote, "you have no right to exempt yourselves."

What is the reason for these changes, at the literal level?

"Why Is This Mitzvah Suprarational?"

A further question here is why the mitzvah of the red heifer is considered to be suprarational, a matter which Rashi apparently deemed to be self-understood.

Be'er Mayim Chayim writes that this mitzvah is irrational because it causes pure individuals to become impure and the impure to become pure. However, Rashi writes explicitly that there is a logic behind this point, since the red heifer is "an atonement for the Golden Calf... and just as the [Golden] Calf rendered everybody who dealt with it impure, likewise the [red] heifer renders all who deal with it impure" (Rashi, end of ch. 19, in the name of Moshe Hadarshan).

"Why, then, is this mitzvah considered to be suprarational?"

And finally, what problem was troubling Rashi here that prompted him to make his comments? Surely it was not the definition of the term *chok* (suprarational command), for this was clarified by Rashi on numerous other occasions, as cited above.

The Explanation

"Rashi was troubled by the expression, "This is the suprarational command of the Torah," which suggests that the red heifer is the only suprarational command in the entire Torah, and this is clearly not the case.

"What the Torah must be saying, concluded Rashi, is that there are two categories of *chukim*, and the red heifer is unique even among the other suprarational commands. While the other *chukim* (such as the prohibitions against eating pig or wearing *shatnez*) defy comprehension, they are nevertheless not completely incomprehensible. In fact, even sprinkling the water containing the ashes of the red heifer (which Rashi refers to in *Parshas Acharei*) is somewhat understood, for we know from the case of the *mikvah* (ritual bath) that impurity is removed by water, and this is not referred to by Rashi in any place as suprarational.

"Rather, it is the ritual slaughter and offering of the red heifer which appear to be totally irrational. The red heifer could not be considered an animal sacrifice, as it was not offered on the Altar but was prepared entirely outside the camp, in contrast to all other sacrifices which must be offered inside the Holy Temple. But, on the other hand, it does seem to be a holy offering (and not merely a means of preparing ashes for the sprinkling-water), since: a.) It must be offered by the deputy High Priest (Rashi on v. 3); b.) who must face "towards the front of the Tent of Meeting (v. 4); and c.) Rashi himself affirms, "It is like other holy offerings" (v. 9). So the red heifer is a paradox: It has many

signs of being a genuine animal sacrifice to G-d, and yet it may not be offered in the Holy Temple!

"However, the two cases are not entirely similar, since: a.) Some of the procedures concerning the scapegoat are performed inside the Temple [such as its selection via lottery (Vayikra 16:7-10) and the confession of the High Priest that is made upon it (ibid. v. 21).] All the procedures of the red heifer, however, are done entirely outside the Temple. b.) The reason why the scapegoat is taken outside the Temple is documented clearly in scripture—to "carry upon itself all their sins to an uninhabited land" [ibid. v. 22]. No explanation is offered, however, for why the red heifer should be offered specifically outside the Temple, which is totally irrational for a holy offering.)

The Red Heifer and The Evil Inclination

"Based on the above, we can now explain why Rashi did not write that the mitzvah of the red heifer is criticized by the "evil inclination," as he states in the case of other suprarational commands:

"It is quite understandable that G-d, Who cannot be grasped by the human mind, may issue commands that likewise cannot be grasped. What is difficult to understand is a mitzvah that has both rational and irrational elements. In such a case, the evil inclination (or the nations) may argue: "Why would G-d give you a command that appears to make sense, and yet also does not make sense? Does G-d want you to relate to this command or not? Why has He made it so confusing?" And this argument is so strong that a person might want to reject the mitzvah entirely, so Rashi stresses (in Parshas Acharei), "you have no right to exempt yourselves."

However, the slaughter and offering of the red heifer outside the Temple makes no sense at all. Hence, the evil inclination is lacking a solid argument, because everyone understands that G-d's command is likely not to make any sense. The only difficulty that might arise is ridicule from others, as Rashi writes: "Satan and the nations of the world cause grief to the Jewish people, saying, 'What is this commandment? What purpose does it have?'" But since there is no real challenge against the observance of this mitzvah, Rashi was not concerned that a person might "exempt himself" totally from it.

"Rather, Rashi writes that to overcome the taunting of others, one merely needs to bear in mind that it is "My personal decree," and therefore it is unnecessary to ponder the meaning of this mitzvah ("You do not have permission to ponder over it"). It should be carried out simply because it is the will of G-d.⁵

Other midrashim not quoted by Rashi extend the non-rational experience of this ritual.

⁵ Based on Likutei Sichos of the Lubvitcher Rebbe: vol. 8, p. 123ff.

"When G-d taught Moses the laws of spiritual purity, He told him both the manner through which each sort of contamination is contracted, as well its unique process of purification. When G-d relayed the laws of the person who becomes impure through contact with a dead body, Moses' face paled. "Master of the universe!" He exclaimed. "If one is thus contaminated, how will he be purified?"

There are many forms of spiritual impurity, of varying gravity, the most severe type of impurity of which is contracted through contact with a human corpse. In Temple times, one who contracted this impurity needed to be purified by being sprinkled with waters mixed with the ashes of a red heifer.

Rabbi Naftali Silberberg suggests that Moses had a profound understanding of the nature of death, an understanding which led to his bewilderment at the prospect of any sort of purification for an impurity contracted from a corpse. The impurity contracted through association with a corpse is so acute because it is a metaphor for one who has completely severed himself from his lifeline—a person whose life is totally devoid of G-dly purpose. Even Moses couldn't envision a purification process which could counteract such a grave impurity!

But, as G-d gently explained to Moses, life after death does exist. By following the procedure of the Red Heifer, the spiritually lifeless person can begin to enjoy a fulfilling life, rich with meaning and purpose.

The uniqueness of the Red Heifer, its quality which allows it to imbue life within a spiritual carcass, is its absurdity—it is a mitzvah which makes no sense whatsoever. When King Solomon, the wisest of all men, reflected on this mitzvah, he exclaimed, "I said, 'I will become wise,' but it is far from me." Many mitzvot are difficult to comprehend, but this one is beyond all comprehension.

Deepening our approach to this enigma we follow the esoteric tradition as it too struggles with this commandment: In a commentary on the Zohar's interpretation of the ritual Rabbi Simcha-Shmuel Treister suggests the following:

"The Zohar says: the red heifer is the 1st step towards unifying with G-d:

This is the ordinance of the Torah which the Lord has commanded, saying: "Speak to the people of Israel, that they may bring you a completely red heifer that has no blemishes and on which never came a yoke." (Num. 19:2)

This heifer was burnt outside the camp by the deputy High Priest, and its ashes were used to purify the ritually impure, enabling them to take part in Temple activities. Strangely, the one who sprinkles the water with the ashes becomes impure, while the one who is sprinkled becomes pure. It is thus called an "ordinance" (in Hebrew, "chok" - thus the name of the parasha) because it defies logic. This heifer came to purify, and it purifies the impure.

The five Hebrew letters that change form...represent distance from the light of the infinite...

The word "heifer" - in Hebrew "parah" - is made up of three Hebrew letters, peh, reish and hei. Peh and reish spell "par", meaning "heifer", and together their numerical value is 280 (80+200). The number 280 represents the 280 "dinim", strict judgments, the numerical value of the sum of the five Hebrew letters that change form when at the end of a word: mem, nun, tzadi, pei and chaf. Since they signal the end of a word they are equivalent to finality, the opposite of the infinite. They therefore represent distance from the light of the infinite.

This finality is further hinted at by the letter hei in the word "parah", which represents the sefira of malchut. As such, the word "parah" represents the sefira of malchut, removed from the influence of the infinite. It is this state that allows for the external forces, the forces of impurity, to flourish. Malchut also represents the Schechina.

The description of the heifer in the Torah thus teaches that it can be used to purify and bring back those who are not too far removed from the sefira of malchut. This is opposed to those who have fallen into the displeasure of the higher level of judgment of Zeir Anpin. We now see two places from which judgments issue. These are the sefirot of malchut and of gevura of Zeir Anpin. The latter is harsher and more difficult to appease - after all, it is more elevated and removed than the sefira of malchut.

"...that has no blemishes..." (Num. 19:2) is as is written "You are all beautiful, my love, and there is no blemish in you". (Songs 4:7)

"...and on which never came a yoke [in Hebrew, 'ole']". (Ibid.)⁶

King David represents the sefira of malchut, and his activities were all in order to manifest this sefira on earth. Midrash Rabba (18:17) comments on this verse that King David established the "yoke" of repentance and established the requirement to say 100 blessings each day to rectify and sweeten the sefira of malchut.

What is the reason? It is because she [malchut] is the completion of the belief of Israel. The Zohar is asking, "What is the reason for Zeir Anpin to be rectified in its aspect of malchut through these 100 blessings?" The sefira of malchut is found within each of the 10 sefirot of Zeir Anpin. She can thus be seen to complete Zeir Anpin. It is important to note that when the aspect of malchut within Zeir Anpin is rectified, it helps to make whole the partzuf of Nukva, itself a "terrestrial" manifestation of the sefirotic component of malchut.

Nukva...is rectified in the mystery of the red heifer in a way that is unusual...

⁶ The word "yoke" is written in a defective way. It is spelled ayin lamed, without the letter vav in the middle that usually appears. The numerical value of the word "ole" is 100 (ayin, 70 + lamed, 30). This hints at the 10 sefirot of Zeir Anpin each in turn made up of ten (10 X 10 = 100). This influence of Zeir Anpin has not touched the red heifer, as we shall see. The number 100 also hints at the 100 blessings which we say every day as a rectification of the sefira of malchut.

This is as in the verse "And these are the last words of David who spoke as David the son of Jesse, the speech of the man who was raised up on high [in Hebrew, "al", spelled like "ole" above: ayin, lamed]. (Samuel II, 23:1)

The phrase "belief [in Hebrew, 'emunim] of Israel" is a play on words, since "emunim" can be read "amenim" - meaning amens, hinting that the 100 daily blessings, to each of which is answered "amen", completes the sefirot of Zeir Anpin.

"And on which never came a yoke", not on her but with her. This is as is written: "The virgin of Israel has fallen." (Amos 5:2) "A virgin and no man has known her." (Gen. 24:16)

Death and overcoming the most incontrovertable fact of life now has become the focus of these mystical exegetes in their struggle with this enigmatic passage.

Overcoming death in the world forms the basis for Rav Yitzchak Ginsburgh's essay as follows:

"Healing Spiritual Despair

"The Torah portion of Chukat begins with the commandment of the red heifer. When a cow that meets the intricate halachic ("Jewish law") criteria for a red heifer is burned as per the Torah's instructions, and its ashes are mixed with fresh stream water, the resulting mixture purifies a person who has come in contact with death. According to Jewish law, death is considered the "Father of Fathers" of impurity, and a person who has come into contact with death becomes impure. Spiritually, this contact with death means that the person has become affected by the law of entropy. At some level, he has integrated into his own soul that there is no eternity in reality, leading to inner, spiritual despair.

One of the most basic foundations of the Torah is that we must serve God with absolute joy. This can only be accomplished if one is released from the fear of death and all that it implies. What is the Divine power of the ashes of the red heifer that heals us from the despair of death?

"The Rare Red Heifer

In order for the ashes of the red heifer to be fit to purify the impurity caused by death, the Torah tells us that they must be from a cow that is consummately red. The birth of a consummately red heifer is a very rare occurrence. God, in His Divine Providence, sees to it that a red heifer will be born in the generation that needs it. The first red heifer for ritual use was prepared by Moses in the desert. Eight more red heifers were prepared throughout the Temple period. The tenth red heifer will be prepared by the Mashiach. (One of the signs of the imminent arrival of Mashiach is the birth of a red heifer.) Its ashes will prepare us for true eternal life and the resurrection of the dead.

"The Red Heifer and Archetypical Souls

In Kabbalah and Chassidut, the red heifer is identified with three archetypical souls. In Hebrew the heifer is called a parah adumah temimah, a consummately red cow. When we meditate on the connection between each of these descriptions of the red heifer and each of the archetypical souls to which it is connected, we will understand its secret.

"The Consummately Red Cow of Moses

At the beginning of this Torah portion, God commands Moses "...and the Jewish People shall take unto you a consummately red heifer." Our Sages explain that all the red heifers ever prepared are essentially related to Moses.

The red heifer is a paradox. It purifies the impure and renders the pure impure. King Solomon, who was the wisest of all men, grasped the deep spiritual reason for all the commandments -- except for the paradox of the red heifer. In Ecclesiastes he writes of the red heifer, "I thought I was wise, but I see that wisdom is far from me."

Moses was the only person to understand the paradox of the red heifer. God, in an act of grace, revealed this secret exclusively to him, making this commandment more related to Moses than to any other figure. As such, the red heifer is called the cow of Moses.

(The Hebrew word for "cow," parah, also means to be fruitful and multiply. More than any other animal, the cow is essentially related to procreation.)

"The Consummately Red Cow and Eve

The red heifer is the potent life essence that comes to purify spiritual and physical contact with death. It is thus associated with Eve, who was held responsible for having brought death to the world.

Eve's name was originally intended to be Chayah, spelled chet (the letter chet represents the pulsation of life), yud, hei. Chayah means "the living soul" and represents eternal life. After she sinned, Adam called Eve Chavah, spelled chet, vav, hei, which means "the mother of mortal life." (The vav in Eve's name alludes to the snake, called chivya in Aramaic.)

The color red is the color of blood and of life itself. The consummately red cow represents consummate, eternal life and procreation. The feminine form of the Hebrew word for "red" used in relation to the feminine heifer is adumah. This word spells Adam, with a hei at the end, connoting femininity. The feminine soul mate of Adam is Eve. When we meditate on the redness of the cow, we meditate on the soul of Eve before the primordial sin, when she was still Chayah. In the future, when the world will be purified of the touch of death, Eve's name will be Chayah once again.

"The Consummately Red Cow and Sarah

The most severe sin in the history of the Jewish People was the sin of the Golden Calf. Our sages explain that the red heifer is the only commandment that atones for this sin. The image of the red heifer is that of the mother cow coming to clean up the mess left by the sin and impurity of her golden calf. In this respect, the red heifer is associated with motherhood, which is represented by the Matriarchs. In particular, the red heifer relates to the first, greatest of the Matriarchs, Sarah. Rashi explains that at the inauguration of the Tabernacle, the princes of each tribe brought sacrifices of cows, rams and sheep. The cows correspond to Abraham, the rams to Isaac and the sheep to Jacob. Thus, Sarah, Abraham's wife and soul mate, also corresponds to the cow and represents the rectification of the sin of the golden calf.

"The primordial sin of Adam and Eve is like the collective sin of the Jewish People with the Golden Calf. As such, when she rectifies the sin of the golden calf, Sarah rectifies

the original mother figure of all humanity, Eve. The Hebrew word for "consummate" is temimah. The Patriarchs walked with consummate sincerity, temimut, with God. The numerical value of temimah is 495, while the numerical value of Sarah is 505. These two numbers equal 1000, which is the most perfect and consummate of numbers.

"Sarah's Inner Connection to the Red Heifer

A beautiful story illustrates Sarah's inner connection to the red heifer. One of the great tzaddikim who lived approximately 250 years ago was Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl, the author of the book "Maor Einayim." Rabbi Nachum was the disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov and of his successor, the Magid of Mezeritch. The Lubavitcher Rebbe quotes Rabbi Nachum, who wrote in his book that every Jew has a spark of Mashiach -- a spark of eternal life.

Rabbi Nachum dedicated much of his life's work to redeeming imprisoned Jews. In those days, if a Jew could not pay his debts to the local landlord, he was often thrown mercilessly into a dungeon or pit, sometimes with his entire family. Rabbi Nachum raised money to redeem these unfortunate Jews, saving them from sure death. Our sages say that there are two commandments that are called "great mitzvot." The first is the commandment to procreate, and the second is the commandment to redeem imprisoned Jews. When one redeems a Jew, thereby saving his life, it is as if he given birth to his soul.

It came to pass that Rabbi Nachum was also imprisoned. Daily he would bribe the prison warden to let him out of the pit for a short time to pray and to immerse in the mikveh. One day, Rabbi Nachum did not bribe the warden. He explained that he did not need to do so, for he would be released from prison on that very day. When asked how he knew that he would be released, he related that on that night Sarah had come to him in a dream. Rabbi Nachum asked Sarah what he did to deserve being thrown into a pit. Sarah answered that because Rabbi Nachum had devoted his life to redeeming captives, it was necessary for him to experience a taste of captivity so that he could consummately understand the situation and subsequently devote himself to this mitzvah ("commandment") in an even more rectified manner. When a person understands why God has involved him in a certain situation, this releases him from the situation. Thus, as soon as Rabbi Nachum understood the reason for his imprisonment, he knew that he would be released on that very day.

It was Sarah, specifically, who appeared to Rabbi Nachum in his dream. She is essentially related to the important lesson that she wished to impart to Rabbi Nachum: In order to do something consummately, one must taste it. This is the secret of why there is death in the world and why the mother figure of the red heifer comes to purify its touch.

"The purpose of the Jewish People is to rectify the primordial sin, thus redeeming all humanity from death. Sarah teaches us that in order to rectify death, we must first taste it. Sarah herself is the first Jewish person to taste death. As she rectifies Eve, Sarah's purpose in life is to purify and rectify death and transform it to eternal life. Had the Jewish People not sinned with the golden calf, they would have merited eternal life. Sarah, who symbolizes consummate life, the red of the heifer, rectifies that sin with the consummate 1000 of her name with temimah. Just as Moses received the consummate

1000 lights of the Torah at Mount Sinai, so Sarah, through the secret of rectifying the touch of death, endows her children with eternal life.

I have attempted to provide what I thought has been the deepest ideas concerning this law of the red heifer, however the interpretations still leave me short as they seem to project metaphors not inherently in the text itself but outside the text.

A modern painter/writer Nathan Moskowitz writes as follows:

"Right after the description of this ritual, the Torah discusses the Edomites (the red nation) and how the Israelites had to ask their permission to go through their lands. They also promised not to drink their water (Eduma water). The "para aduma", the "red heifer" is clearly symbolic of the "red Esau (Edom)", who has somewhat divine status (Para/ Ox, See description for Moses: rock and rage) and is capable of purifying Jacob, transforming him into Israel when Jacob greets the spirit of Esau in the form of a struggling angel, or depurifying Jacob, transforming him into Esau, when Jacob dons Esau's clothing to fool his father Isaac. The red string and the wooden cedar and hyssop dissolved in the red heifer solution may represent Esau's accompanying bow (wood and string), and arrows (wood). Thus the red heifer water is symbolic of the intra and extra uterine eternal struggle between the two twin titans, Jacob and Esau, locked in fierce battle, Good cloaking himself with Evil, and Evil cloaking himself with Good until no one can distinguish which of the two is Jacob and which is Esau, which one is Good and which one is Evil. In other words the red heifer water defines humanity to a tee, and when sprinkled can turn Jacob {pure} into Esau {impure}, or Esau {impure} into Jacob {pure}. Alternatively, it can turn Jacob {impure} into Israel {pure}, the Esau angel {pure/Pnee El} into Esau {impure/Gdee Ez}.

May I in the end be permitted to suggest a tentative meditation which claims absolutely no truth but merely my own struggle with this text.

The stages of preparing the waters of purification required the three step process of burning the cow, mixing the ashes in flowing stream water and the hyssop. For me the use of the term "zos chukas hatorah" this is the law of the Torah rather than "this is the law of the red heifer" is critical for understanding the importance of this law as the paradigm for all the laws of the Torah. the Kedushat Levi agrees with his previous commentators as to the need to observe the commandments despite their lack of logic, however he adds a layer of Hassidic interpretation described as follows:

"In principle the reasons for the Torah and Mitzvot are totally hidden from mankind and man should fulfill the Torah solely because it is the will of God. this is the (remez) meaning of the verse "This is the law of the Torah" (rather than the red heifer) pointing to all the torah and mitzvot should be viewed by us as lacking any rational reasoning so that we fulfill them solely to observe God's command."

Thus far Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev has expanded the nonrational access to the Torah to all the commandments not merely the "chukim". No he embarks on a theory of ritual impurity "tumah" based on kabbalistic sources.

"From here we can understand how the red heifer may remove the impurity caused by touching a dead person. For the soul of a person and his vitality both originate from the Throne of Glory and are thus desirous only to perform His will and worship Him without interruption for an instant. However the physical body does not allow for this.

The Rebbe clearly has a dualistic view of the basic spiritual anatomy of the human being torn between the desire of the soul whose origin comes from the very throne upon which the Almighty sits, and the body which does not permit it to do the will and worship God continuously.

"So there is an ongoing battle between the soul and its vitality and the body. Now the person who is meritorious is able to win this battle against the body in order to fulfill the will of the soul. Now why does this body not wish to comply with the Torah and Mitzvot? Because it cannot fathom the reasons for all the rituals etc...were it to be able to taste of Torah and mitzvot the body too would desire only to fulfil the mitzvot.

"However the person who is meritorious; his soul is able to vanquish the body in order to fulfil the Torah and Mitzvot.

Rebbe now admits that were the body to taste the sweetness of Torah it too would be a willing partner, but since its phylogeny does not originate from the throne it cannot and resists the demands of the soul.

"Therefore when a person dies the soul returns upwards and the body is left below alone and defiles. Thus the burial sites of the zaddikim do not defile for their bodies were so refined to the point where they too desired to fulfil Torah and mitzvot. So their bodies do not defile"

To the degree a zaddik is able to refine the body and allow it to taste the sweetness of Torah, is the degree to which the body no longer imparts tumah or defilement after death.

This is what is means by the verse zot chukas hatorah: meaning the Torah is a chok (as in hidden) in that it does not reveal its taste to the body so the body has no desire to fulfil the Torah, then after death the body automatically defiles those who come into contact with it.

Rebbe now re-reads the verse to mean this is the law (chok) of the Torah to mean that this is the deepest secret of the Torah, the very word "chok" meaning hidden. The very taste of Torah remains hidden so that the body wishes only to satisfy itself without ever experiencing the sublime taste of the soul.

Therefore God commanded the ritual of the red heifer to purify from the defilement of the body alone which (alone) becomes defiled after death.

This most enigmatic treatise by the Berditchever allows us an insight into his theology and dualistic universe. The battle between the desires of the flesh versus the spirit are alive and well each pulling the person in opposite directions, however, unlike his christian counterparts the body is only this way because something is deliberately hidden from it i.e. Torah. Were it to be exposed to Torah and mitzvot their inherent sweetness would almost compel it to follow the soul.

Defilement and death, impurity and pollution only come about because of the chok, the hiddenness of the divine the schechina. The zaddik is somehow privileged to experience Her in the body as well and thus able to refine the body to receive Her and thus after death his body cannot defile.

I believe that Rabbi Ginsburgh's reference to Sara as temimut as the consummate one refers to this very element of Schechina consciousness. The life we live is marred by death and fear and suffering. The Para Aduma represents the divine schechina as she is in her redness and in Her grief as to the state of the world. The temimah aspect of it the need for a perfect red cow implies the temimut of Sara our matriarch. What is this quality?

The Noam Elimelech teaches us that that element of temima or consummation is critical for understanding the Matriarch Sarah. The polar opposites of death and impurity or tumah is life schechina consciousness temima and taste.

“ The lifetime of Sarah consisted of one hundred years, twenty years and seven years.”
Gen 23:1

According to Rashi “the reason the word year is written at every digit is to tell you that every digit is to be explained by itself. [When she was] 100 years old she was like a 20 year old, regarding sin. Just as when she was 20 she was not considered as having sinned since she was not yet subject to punishment, so, too, at 100 she had not sinned. And when she was 20 she was like a seven-year-old, regarding [her] beauty”

The Noam Elimelech rightly asks as to the need for the second comparison of 20 and 7? Surely at 20 without sin this would have been enough to make her a righteous woman? Merely comparing 100 to 20 was sufficient! He explains that there is one level of observing torah and mitzvot which requires the abstention from all sin and maintenance of a state of purity. All this occurs at the conscious level and at 100 she was like a 20 year old mature woman in this regard. But the Noam Elimelech suggests a higher order of spirituality represented by a seven year old who has no self-consciousness (and for example dresses in her mother's clothes admiring herself! without guile or any self- awareness only to please her mother or look like her).

It is this precise quality of temimut that Sarah represents for the Noam Elimelech that I suggest is the key to understanding the schechina consciousness being demanded of us in the ritual purity of the red heifer and the archetypes of Moses Eve and Sarah outlined above.

Death means the very disconnection from Schechinah and allows for impurity and tumah. By burning the red heifer we are in fact purifying and reducing to essence those forces that disconnect us from Her. In the darkening burning of the cow the ashes emerge as the first stage in this process. In alchemy the process is called nigredo or blackening, finding the darkest point in the reduction of the soul.

Stanton Marlan's work⁷ on the black sun was an exploration of this "blacker than black" realm of the nigredo, beginning with an encounter, with an experience of intellectual and emotional impasse, with what would not go away, dissolve, or be lifted up into the light. It is a process not unlike that described by Goethe in his alchemical masterpiece, Faust . Of course this is only the first step in the four step process of discovering the philosopher's stone.

Goethe begins his magnum opus, Faust , with a reflection on the nigredo of Night:

I've studied now, to my regret,
 Philosophy, Law, Medicine,
 and - what is worst - Theology.
 from end to end with diligence.
 Yet here I am, a wretched fool
 and still no wiser than before.
 I've become master, and Doctor as well,
 and for nearly ten years I have led
 my young students a merry chase.
 up, down, and every which way -
 and find we can't have certitude
 This is too much for heart to bear!
 I well may know more than all those dullards,
 those doctors, teachers, officials and priests,
 be unbothered by scruples or doubts,
 and fear neither hell nor its devils -
 but I get no joy from anything either, know nothing that I think worthwhile, and don't
 imagine that what I teach
 could better mankind or make it godly....
 No dog would want to linger on like this!...
 Alas! I'm still confined to prison

⁷ Stanton Marlan: Archetypal Alchemy ,The Transformation of the Psyche-Matter Continuum
 Presented to the International Alchemy Conference in Las Vegas on Oct. 5-7, 200

Accursed, musty hole of stone
to which the sun's fair light itself
dimly penetrates through the painted glass.

Restricted by this great mass of books
that worms consume, that dust has covered,
and that up to the ceiling-vault
are interspersed with grimy papers....
And still you wonder why your heart
is anxious and you breast constricted,
why a pain you cannot account for
inhibits your vitality completely!
You are surrounded, not by the living world
in which God placed mankind,
but, amid smoke and mustiness,
only by bones of beasts and of the dead ...
Sustained by hope, Imagination once
soared boldly on her boundless flights;
now that our joys are wrecked in time's abyss,
she is content to have a narrow scope.
Deep in our heart Care quickly makes her nest,
there she engenders secret sorrows
and, in that cradle restless, destroys all quiet joy; ...
You empty skull, why bare your teeth at me,
unless to say that once, like mine, your addled brain
sought buoyant light but, in its eagerness for truth,
went wretchedly astray beneath the weight of darkness.
It is only by entering into such darkness, into the nigredo, that 'real' alchemical
transformation can take place.

It is only by entering the niger process, the blackening process whereby the self gets
reduced into the ashes of the ego that real transformation takes place.
The idea of reduction is also mirrored in the Izbica-Radzyn tradition of exegesis as
follows:

From the Mei Hashiloach by Bezalel Edwards

"They shall unto you take a perfect red heifer ..."
(Bamidbar-Numbers, 19:2)

In the future the blessed G-d will reveal His glory to Israel without any separation whatsoever, meaning that with the final redemption, man will behold the revelation of G-d in all things, and G-d will not be concealed, as He is now, for the most part. The ashes of the Red Heifer have been lost for eighteen hundred years, with the possible exception of the Arizal finding them in sixteenth century Safed, Israel, as corroborated by the

CHidda. So the whole exilic state of God being concealed is all caught up in the absence of having a way to be purified from death by the ashes of the Parah Aduma.

So when the Rebbe says, "In the future," he also means in the future when, with the final redemption, the laws of purity and the ability to regain freedom from the debilitating power of death will return to the world. For now this (reality of) life exists in the depths of Israel, yet it is revealed in outer "garments." These garments are the Torah and mitzvot, for one may only enter into the depths of the will of G-d through the Torah and mitzvot .

All commandments, like giving charity, loving your neighbor, learning Torah, putting on Tefilin and not cheating your fellow man (you can go and find the other 608) are Garments for life. This means that just as a person is perceived through the garment of his body, because of course, a person is more than skin and bone, so to is Godliness accessed through behavior, beliefs and rituals that God commanded us. Each time God asks us to do something, he is giving us a little doorway to His desire, and saying, do this, and you will know something of what I want. Though God fills the whole world with His glory, He is only accessed through what we loosely call, "torah and mitzvot," which could actually include a trip to the museum, depending on how it is done and what your agenda is. But simply put, Gods will is only found in Torah and mitzvot.

This is "they shall take unto you a heifer," which stands for life, as is known, a young fresh living cow in its first year, mammash l'chaim! and at the present moment we are commanded that this life be clothed in garments, that is, the Torah and mitzvot. "Perfect red," meaning explicit strengths, without any separation or defect, explicit strengths, or "holy Chutzpah" is the kind of strength a person feels when he knows that God is leading him and protecting him, or even more than this, when he knows that he has purified his behavior and thought to such a level in the service of the Lord that his very actions are determined by God, and then whatever he does will be God's will.

This is the feeling that Adam the first man had in the garden of Eden before the sin, when he knew that he was the handwork of the Deity and everything he did or felt was God's own desire. Before the final redemption, reaching this level of explicit Divinely ordained strength (tekifut, in Heb.) is only accessible through the performance of Mitzvot and the study of the Torah, because only then, in the act of serving God in the way of the Torah and the Code of Jewish law, can one be sure that he is doing the right thing. Provided he knows how to do a mitzvah properly, and this is a major condition.

But after the final redemption, we will see clearly how everything, even things outside of the aegis of Torah and Mitzvot, we do will be according to Divine directive. "with no blemish in it," means that no foolishness would be found in any action (for as the Isbitser later mentions, just as a mentally deficient Cohen, once called a "fool," is disqualified from service, so any action done in foolishness is deficient), living in the exile carries with it a kind of inane "black comedy" subtext. We have been jaded, hardened to the world, and revert to meaningless comedy as a way of laughing at everything. Futile actions often make for good comedy.

But the absence of meaning in all of this black comedy of our lives is really rooted in feelings of despair and hopelessness. "The redemption" means a time when God sees fit, either based on our merit or not, to free us from blindness to the meaning of life. In other words, on that great day, we will all know what is really going on. With the messianic redemption, and for little moments even before, a great God consciousness will fill the world, as the prophet Isaiah said, "and the knowledge of God will fill the world as the waters cover the sea." "which never carried a yoke on it's back," this teaches that Israel (at the depths) never experienced helpless agonizing and effort, as it is said in Zechariah, "two olives" standing solid, on either side of his vision of the menorah, standing for the, "anointed ones standing by the Master of all," moshiach.

Perhaps what the holy Ishbitser is saying is that just as the two olives stand solidly and effortlessly so will it be clear with the redemption that all the toil and strife was as nothing, that we were always receiving G-d's providence and God was always caring for our welfare, something that we are myopic to in the exile when consciousness is greatly limited. All of this is now hidden in the Torah and mitsvot, yet in the future the blessed G-d will show it to us without any separating "garments." In the future with the total redemption, God will break down the barrier between God and man. As it is said in the Midrash and in the Gemara (Nidda 61b), "the mitsvot will be nullified in days to come (of the final redemption)," and the blessed G-d will show us that we never really suffered under the "yoke" of a power in this world since He, may He be blessed, controls them all, yet all is in a state of concealment. This is the meaning of, "that never had upon it a yoke."

All doubt will be erased, all problems of theodicy be solved (meaning we will know the reasons and get the answers to the question of why do bad things happen to good people, why do the righteous suffer, the problems that perplexed even Moses the Lawgiver.) We will completely re-evaluate our understanding of evil, for we will not only have the ability to know the absolute difference between Good and evil, but God will eradicate evil, and "death will be swallowed up forever," and no more shall we die.

In rehearsing these scholars' ideas I have attempted to point us in the direction of images and congruences rather than literal or semantic, moralistic or pietistic interpretations of this unique ritual.

For me the key semantic use of the work "chok" as emblematic of all torah points to the non-rational purpose of all torah and its commandments. Beyond the need to obey the divine the torah allows us a road map of self-discovery and this particular ritual points to the need for Schechina consciousness in all our performances of ritual. That means, like our matriarch Sarah, the putting aside of self consciousness and becoming aware only of the act itself as a divine act, the way she dressed in her mother's clothes at age 7, to see her mother in the mirror not like at age 20 when a young woman is readying herself for a date, looing in the mirror to prune herself.

The Red Heifer is burned like we are burned through life and troubles, we are burnt to a crisp and out of the ashes comes a purifying stream of mayim chayim of the water of life (aqua vitae in alchemical terms) and finally the hyssop ceremony.

I will end with a quote from the passover ceremony in Exodus 12:22,

after the lamb is slaughtered, "ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the basin; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning".

The Israelites are told not only to paint their doorways with blood, but that the fragile hyssop plant must be used to do so. This plant was the very instrument by which the blood would protect them from the angel of death. Hyssop (hîs'öp), is an aromatic, perennial, somewhat woody herb (*Hyssopus officinalis*) of the family Labiatae (mint family), native to the Old World but partially naturalized in North America. The hyssop of the Scriptures (1 Kings 4.33; Ps. 51.7; John 19.29) may have been a similar plant or the name may have referred to different plants. Hyssop is used as a symbol of humility in religious painting.

The combination of metaphors in the triad of Moses/Eve/Sarah with Red Heifer ashes/ Mayim Chayim and Hyssop parallel well the inner work of niger meaning facing the Black Sun of the soul followed by the invigoration of the aqua vita of life itself resurrecting the self in the image of the hyssop. When engaged in Torah and Mitzvot, we are being told through the ritual of the Para Aduma is paradigmatic in its precise resistance to rational explanation and that the images of Schechina, burning, water and hyssop move us to seeing or perceiving the divine through the opacity and resistance.

Our own individual suffering also remains opaque to us (other than the stories of sin and punishment that ring in our ears constantly). When nailed to the cross or travelling the dark night of the soul in pain, when all seems lost, when there appears no rational explanation for what happens to us, we are told "now you have entered the territory of Schechina" so suffer well for her sake and for Her redemption!

Post Script

"In the experience of the self, it is no longer the opposites 'God' and 'man' that are reconciled . . .but rather the opposites within the God-image itself. That is the meaning of divine service, of the service which man can render to God, that light may emerge from the darkness, that the Creator may become conscious of His creation, and man conscious of himself." (C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 338)