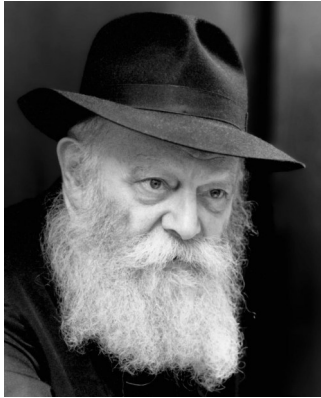




From Ashes to Kindness -by Rabbi Avrohom Lipszyc

Our Sages state (-Sota 17a), "As reward for that which our Patriarch Abraham said (-Genesis 18:27), 'And I am but dust and ashes,' his children merited two mitzvot: The ashes of the red heifer and the dust of the sota." However, we need to understand, we are taught that G-d's format is that of, "Measure for Measure" (-see Sota 8b, "With the measure that a person measures, he is measured with it."), thus, what is the essence (beyond just the terminology of "dust" and "ashes") correlation between Abraham's behaving in a fashion of "dust and ashes," with absolute humility, and these two mitzvot?

More than this, seemingly the essence of the *red heifer* is contrary to the service of Abraham! The measure of Abraham was the emotion of kindness, (-Isaiah 41:8), "Abraham, who loved Me." Abraham was an embodiment of kindness in money, body, and soul, to the point of (-Sefer HaBahir, Simon 191), "The Attribute of Kindness said (before G-d), 'all the days... Abraham stood there in my place,'" meaning that Abraham stood in for the *Attribute of Kindness*, do its job here within the world. Contrary to this, the *red heifer* is absolutely the *Attribute of Strictness*, as the Zohar states (-Vol III, 180b), "Cow receives from the left (mystically speaking, the right side of G-d's throne represents *Kindness* and the left represents *Strictness* (Justice; Might) -In Ezekial's *Vision of the Chariot* the Ox is on the left side). Especially in accordance with the teaching of Ravvi Isaac Luria, the Arizal (-Taamei Mitzvos, Sha'ar HaMitzvos and Sefer HaLikkutim, Parshas Chukim) that the concept of *Par-ah* - פרה (heifer) is with the letter *hai* represents the "Five Strictness's."

Note: The suffix of the Hebrew letter *hai* is feminine, however, we are giving here a mystical teaching. To understand this teaching:

- (i) The primary *Emotion Emanations* are the first five (*Kindness -Love, Strictness -Fear, Beauty -Compassion, Victory -Endurance, Splendor -Gratitude; Acknowledgement*), while the latter two (*Foundation -Commitment, Kingship -Expression; Exaltation*) are that of reproduction and transmission (*Foundation -Commitment* represents the *Male (Giver) Reproductivity, Kingship -Expression; Exaltation* represents the *Female (Receiver) Reproductivity*).
- (ii) Each of the *Emotion Emanation* are a compilation of all *Emotion Emanations*. Thus, there is the 1. *Strictness of Kindness*, 2. *Strictness of Strictness*, 3. *Strictness of Beauty*, 4. *Strictness of Victory*, and 5. *Strictness of Splendor*, within the primary *Emotion Emanations*. These are known as the "Five *Strictness's*," which is the *Fulness* of the *Attribute of Strictness*.
- (iii) The Hebrew letter *hai* carries the numerical value of 5

Additionally, the red heifer needs to be (-Numbers 19:2, "and have them take for you a totally red (haired)") *Red*, and *Completely* so (without even two hairs of any other color)! *Red* is the color of the *Attribute of Strictness*, thus, the red heifer is *Absolute Strictness*!

Even more so, the Sages teach (-Pseket D'Reb Kahanah, Parshas Parah) that the four conditions of the *red heifer* ((i) red, (ii) complete, (iii) has no blemish, (iv) upon which no yoke was laid), correlate to the *Four Exiles* (The first was Babylon, the second Media/Persia, the third Greece, and finally Edom, commonly identified as Rome), again symbolizing the *Attribute of Strictness*.

Now, if the teaching would have spoke of the *Waters* (after the *red heifer* was slaughtered and then completely burned to ashes, "They must take... the ashes of the burnt cow used for purification, and he must mix them with living water in a vessel") of the *Chatos* (lit. *Sin-Offering*, referring to the *red heifer* being a sin-offering) then the question wouldn't be, for water (whose nature it is to descend from above to below (revelation)), in contrast to fire (whose nature it is to ascend from below to above (returning; leaving; concealment)), represents *Kindness*, and especially here where it is "living waters". However, the teaching focuses on the *ashes* which is from the *parah* itself.

Explanation:

Concerning *Kindness* there are different fashions:

Fashion One: "Kindness of Greatness" in which the kindness is preformed from the greatness of the *giver*. As the kindness of a king, minister or the extremely wealthy. It is out of his feeling of his greatness that he is benevolent in an abundant manner. He has the desire to give, "a magnitude of goodness and kindness to all creatures, small and big alike." However, from this fashion of kindness there can evolve and come forth a *Kindness of Impurity*, that "*Kindness of Ishmael*." One that can exist, when Ishmael goes *outside the domain of Abraham*, a kindness that exists of the haughtiness of, "in order to show his welth, splendor, and greatness, and that he carry a fame of splendor."

Fashion Two: "Kindness of Humility" as that of Abraham. This kindness is bound with the, "And I am but dust and ashes." It is precisely because he sees himself as less than others, and he, "for one who regards himself as a remainder (i.e., of only secondary importance)," that he showers kindness upon all.

The virtue of the latter fashion of kindness is not only that he gives others of all that he has, and leaves for himself only from what remains (unlike the prior fashion, which takes primary birk for himself, giving only from what remains afterwards). Rather, more so, that even when, "*he is effected negatively by his acts of kindness*," he does not refrain from doing acts of kindness. This is what we find by Abraham, who's kindness came from, "*And I am but dust and ashes*," that not only was he prepared to sacrifice himself physically --as he went to war against mighty kings to save the prisoners of war that they took, but even to sacrifice himself spiritually --as he told G-d to wait for him as ran to take care of three men who happened across his tent!

Needless to say that for a spiritual man like Abraham, the latter was the greater self-sacrifice just on order to do kindness for others. And for who did he ask G-d to wait, forgoing his receiving the presence of G-d? (-Rashi, Genesis 18:4), "*they were Arabs who worship the dust of their feet*." Not just standard idolators, but of the lowest degree, as low as, "*the dust of their feet*"! Meaning that Abraham forewent the highest spirituality of, "*receiving the presence of G-d*," for doing kindness with the lowest idol-worshippers, the polar-opposite of, "*receiving the presence of G-d*," they were, "*who worship the dust of their feet*"!! Now, where did Abraham learn this from? We, his offspring, learned it from Abraham (-Shabbos 127a), "*Hospitality (toward) guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence, as (when Abraham invited his guests) it is written (-Genesis 18:3), 'And he said: Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please pass (not from Your servant).'*" However, how did Abraham know that this was okay to do*? Only that, as previously explained, Abraham was utterly at the utmost humility and self-negation of, "*And I am but dust and ashes*," that it was clear to him that be it who it may be, all come before him to the extent that he must sacrifice even his essence spirituality for helping another, even that of simple physical help.

*Note: The Rebbe offers a footnote with an amazing answer within the simple meaning of the Scriptures: "*Being that when G-d came to visit him, why was there a need for a change (G-d had made) the heat of the day (unnaturally intense in order not to bother Abraham with travelers) - for if travelers would have come, anyway he would not be able to bother with them since he is receiving the presence of G-d, thus, you must say that, 'Hospitality (toward) guests is greater than....'*"

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This then is the connection between the words of Abraham, "*And I am but dust and ashes*" and the two mitzvot of "*The ashes of the red heifer and the dust of the sota*". For the observance of both these mitzvot are bound with the kindness that emanates from the feeling of "*And I am but dust and ashes*," as they were by Abraham - a self-sacrifice of spirituality in order to help another, which as explained previously, is the true self-sacrifice.

Red Heifer: The law is established (-Parah, Mishnah 4:4) that "*All who are occupied with the preparation of the [red] cow from the beginning until the end*," become impure. Of the *kohain* who's job and essence is to serve in the Holy Temple in purity and holiness, it is demanded that he lower himself from his stature and to become impure, at which time it is denied to him to be able to serve in the Holy Temple, and all this in order to purify another Jew! And for which Jew? For one who has become defiled with the lowest form impurity, impurity of death (one who was impurified by a dead body -touching it, being in the same room with it, etc.), which this impurity of, "*The father of fathers of impurity*"!

Spiritually speaking, this impurity refers, that when one is connected to G-d there can be no "*death*" and "*impurity*", as the verse states (-Deuteronomy 4:4), "*But you who cleave to the Lord your God are alive, all of you, this day*." "*Impurity of the Dead*" alludes to a disconnection from holiness, to the point of the category of *Impurity of Death*. And it is for this Jew that it is demanded of the *kohain* that he should completely not consider his own spirituality, and to become defiled, and all this in order to help this Jew to become purified!

Sota: The novelty of the *dust of sota* is that in order, "*to make peace between a man and a wife the Torah states, My name which was written in holiness be erased upon the water*."

Note: The sota is a woman of who the husband is suspicious and issues her a warning not to be seen alone with a specific man. If the woman is seen alone with that individual, the husband and wife must go to the Holy Temple, where the wife must drink the "*Checking Waters*" which has the ink of the Torah-portion of the sota erased into it. In that portion there is the name of G-d. It is forbidden to erase the name of G-d. However, G-d says to erase His name so that there be clarity and certainty between the wife and husband, and that the peace be returned to them. If the woman did sin, the waters will take her life. If she did not sin, the waters will turn into a blessing.

There is no greater disgrace of the name of G-d than to have it purposely erased. And for who are we erasing G-d's name? For a woman that behaved absolutely contrary to modesty, that even after her husband warned her, she did not adhere, and again ended up hidden with another man. And for this woman the Torah, for the sake of restoring peace between her and her husband, finds it befitting to erase the name of G-d!!

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With this we correlation between "*And I am but dust and ashes*" and the red heifer will understand a story told in the Zohar in connection to the red heifer:

in the Zohar (-Parshat Chukat , 179b) in connection to the red heifer: Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair requested of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to say "*new words*" upon the portion of, "*This is the statute of the Torah* (the opening verse to the portion of the red heifer)." Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai requested of his son Rabbi Elazar to say "*a new word*", and so did Rabbi Elazar do.

The Rebbe's Father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneerson, in his comments on the Zohar explains that the reason why Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair wanted, "*A new word specifically upon the portion of the red heifer*" is because the stature of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, "*Is as that Abraham , our Patriarch,*" and, "*Concerning Abraham it is stated, 'And I am but dust and ashes'*" and therefore, "*he requested that it be said specifically concerning the portion of the heifer.*"

Question: If the concept of the red heifer is connected especially with the stature of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, then why did he himself not say "*a new word*" upon the portion of the heifer? So too, why did not Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai --who Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair asked because the concept of the heifer is connected to him, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, as the Rebbe's father explains there,-- also did not say it, but rather, he asked it of his son, Rabbi Elazar?

Explanation: We explained that the connection between "*And I am but dust and ashes*" and the red heifer is that of kindness that comes through self-negation. The connection between Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair and Abraham is that Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair occupied himself with the redemption of captives, which, as mentioned earlier, is the first story told of Abraham's kindness that he sacrificed himself and went to war against mighty kings to redeem the captives.

Thus, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, in searching to express his connection with the *Kindness of Abraham* in the specific fashion in which merit one merits to the "*ashes of the red heifer,*" specifically in this concept itself, through the novelty of "*a new word*" in the Torah-portion of the red heifer. And he wanted it in that very fashion of kindness. Thus, he forewent the merit to be the one to reveal "*the new word*" within Torah, which, to reveal a new thought within Torah is a wondrous merit! All in order to merit another, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. With this Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair fulfilled a spiritual self-sacrifice for benefitting another Jew. So too, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai forewent on this great merit of revealing a "*new word*" within Torah in order to merit his son, Rabbi Elazar his son. To note: The Rebbe's father explains that the reason as to why it was Rabbi Elazar to say the "*new word*" is as that of the first red heifer service being done Elazar, the deputy priest. This, explains the Rebbe, was Aharon the High Priest, "*And I am but dust and ashes,*" in foregoing on the merit of bringing such a purity which can purify even the impurity of death.

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With this we can understand why the "*And I am but dust and ashes*" is connected with the ashes of the heifer, and not the "Waters of the Sin-Offering" even though *water* represent kindness.

This fashion of kindness of Abraham, in which he sacrifices his own spirituality in order to even help anyone, and even physically, is connected with Abraham engaging also his *Attribute of Strictness* ("*ashes of the red heifer*"). It is known the explanation upon the verse (-Genesis 18:19), "*for I cherish him because he instructs... to do righteousness and justice,*" that Abraham's righteousness is bound with justice. Meaning, that first Abraham judged himself with justice, appraising for himself what is only absolutely necessary for him to have. And this he appraised with absolute justice, with law and judgement, allowing him to take for himself only that which is absolutely necessary. And then he provided the rest to charity.

This is all part-and-parcel of Abraham's total self-abnegation, in which his self-abnegation permeates and dominates of every part of his being, in which his *strictness* becomes subservient to his *kindness*, serving only for the sake of kindness. His strictness is used upon himself, allowing him to give even greater kindness to others. Thus, Abraham's, "*And I am but dust and ashes*" brought about the "*ashes of the red heifer and dust of the sota*", and not the "Waters of the Sin-offering", being that the primary novelty of Abraham's kindness did not express itself in the *kindness* itself ("Waters of the Sin-Offering"), but in the Abraham transformed his *strictness* to serve but his *kindness*. This is the meaning behind the burning of the heifer, the Sweetening of the Strictness, the transformation of the letter *hai* of Parah - פֶּרֶה is through the burning transformed into the letter *aleph* of Aifer - אִיפֶר.

Note: In order to understand what the Rebbe is saying now, we explained earlier the mystical meaning behind the , which is the *Five Strictness's*. Now the Rebbe is explaining the mysticism of the word ashes "*Aifer* - אִיפֶר", in which the *hai* of Parah - פֶּרֶה is transformed into the aleph of Aifer - אִיפֶר. The meaning behind the transformation of the *hai* into the *aleph* is the elevation of the *Five Strictness's* into their *Source* where there is the "*Sweetening of the Strictness*".

And this is also the novelty of the *dust of sota*, which is the transformation of the "*Bitter Waters*" (the "*Checking Waters*" of the sota is called the "*Bitter Waters*," and actually needs to taste bitter, through an added herb) that the Bitter - *Strictness* brings about an act of *Kindness* (-Numbers 5:28), "*she shall be exempted and bear seed,*" as Rashi explains, "'*she shall be exempted*': from [the dire effects of] the curse-bearing water, and moreover, she 'shall bear seed.' If she used to have painful births, she will now have easy births..."