When Rav Dimi came from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia he said in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan: I heard a teaching that there is a distinction between three strips of crimson: One of the red heifer, and one of the scapegoat, and one of the leper. One of them must have the weight of ten zuz; and one of them must have the weight of two selā, which is eight zuz; and one of them must have the weight of a shekel, which is two zuz, but I cannot explain which is which.

When Ravin came from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia he explained in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan which weight each item requires, as follows:

The strip of crimson of the red heifer has the weight of ten zuz; and the strip of the scapegoat has the weight of two selā, which is eight zuz; and the strip of the leper has the weight of a shekel, which is two zuz.

And Rabbi Yoḥanan further said: Rabbi Shimon ben Ḥalafta and the Rabbis disagree with regard to the strip of crimson of the red heifer. One said: It has the weight of ten zuz. And one said: It has the weight of one shekel. And your mnemonic for remembering that while both assume that only one of the extreme values was required no one suggests the middle value of two selā is required, is the aphorism from a mishna: God equally values both the one who gives much and the one who gives little as long as his intention is to Heaven.

Ravina said: The baraita and Rabbi Hanin’s ruling follow different opinions with regard to whether the strip of crimson needs to have weight. The baraita assumes the items must reach the heart of the fire; therefore, they must have weight. Rabbi Hanin assumes the items don’t need to reach the heart of the fire; therefore, they do not need to have weight. The issue of whether the strip of crimson needs to have weight is a dispute between ‘famma im, as it was taught in a baraita. Why does he wrap the cedar wood and the hyssop together using the strip of crimson? So that they will all be in a single bundle and burn simultaneously, as implied by the fact the Torah mentions all three together; this is the statement of Rabbi Yehuda HaNaši. Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, says: So that they will have weight and fall into the burning fire.

The strip of crimson of the red heifer states: “And the priest shall take for the one who is to be purified two live pure birds, cedar wood, a strip of crimson and hyssop” (Leviticus 14:4). The text describing the red heifer states: “And the priest shall take cedar wood, hyssop, and a strip of crimson and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer” (Numbers 19:6).

Weights – בְּשָׂﬠִיר: The methods of measures and weights in ancient times were not uniform, and sometimes different systems were used together. There are therefore many opinions with regard to the value of the weights mentioned by the Sages. The following are the range of estimates in grams for the various weights mentioned here: One shekel, 7.2–9.6 g; Two selā, 28.8–38.4 g; ten zuz, 36–48 g.

HALAKHA

With regard to the scapegoat they disagree – פְּלִיגִי: The reason to require the larger size strip of ten zuz is to ensure that even after it is divided it will still be a significant size, so that people can see it from a distance and know whether it has turned white (Tosafot Yeḥinah).

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So that they will all be in a single bundle – מִשְׁתַּלֵּח: Rashi explains that the purpose is to be able to carry them all together. Rabbeinu Yoṣef writes that bundling the items makes them look better. The Riva connects the binding to the ritual of the Paschal lamb in Egypt, when the objects were tied together. He claims that there too, it is a requirement from the Torah to do so.

The strip of crimson of the red heifer – רָבָא: The strip of crimson of the red heifer weighed five selā, which is twenty zuz (Kesef Mishne; Rambam Sefer Tahara, Hilkhot Para Adumah 3:2).

The strip of the scapegoat – הַמִּשְׁתַּלֵּח: The strip of crimson that was tied to the head of the scapegoat weighed two selā, in accordance with Ravin’s statement (Rambam Sefer Avoda, Hilkhot Avodat Yom Ḥaḥiẓẓunim 3:4).

The strip of the leper – רָבָא: The strip of crimson of the leper weighed one shekel, in accordance with Ravin’s statement (Rambam Sefer Tahara, Hilkhot Kamar Tanurah 11:1).

The strip of crimson of the heifer – מַעַרְבָּה: The strip of crimson of the heifer weighed five selā, which is twenty zuz (Kesef Mishne; Rambam Sefer Tahara, Hilkhot Para Adumah 3:2).

With regard to the scapegoat they disagree – בְּשָׂﬠִיר: The reason to require the larger size strip of ten zuz is to ensure that even after it is divided it will still be a significant size, so that people can see it from a distance and know whether it has turned white (Tosafot Yeḥinah).
The red heifer…has the sanctity of items consecrated for Temple maintenance. The red heifer is not considered an offering. This is evidenced by it not being slaughtered upon the altar in the Temple, but rather on the Mount of Olives. As such, the distinction that generally applies to offerings, between rites that are considered services and must be performed by a priest and those that are not considered services and may be performed by a non-priest, does not exist. Rather, all of the stages of the rite of the red heifer are similar in this regard and must be performed by a priest.

Since the red heifer was consecrated, it certainly has sanctity and a status no lower than that of items consecrated for Temple maintenance. Despite this, unlike other items consecrated for Temple maintenance, it is slaughtered for a sacred purpose, and therefore many of the laws of offerings also apply to it (see M. Bi’a). Appearances of leprosy – amen. When one is afflicted with apparent symptoms of leprosy, a priest examines the change in his skin and declares him to be either ritually pure or impure. The requirement that this declaration be made by a priest is indispensable. Therefore, even in a case in which the priests lacked the expertise to identify leprosy and a non-priest scholar had to be called upon to provide a diagnosis, ultimately, the priest was still required to make the formal declaration. Although the laws of leprosy are not directly associated with the Temple and sacrificial service, they still require the priesthood.

And he shall burn the heifer in his sight – amen. The Ritva asks: Why does Shmuel not derive from the phrase “in his sight” that a priest does not need to do the actual burning in the same way in which the Gemara above derived the phrase “before him,” to indicate that a priest does not need to do the actual slaughtering, just observe it? See the Ritva who provides an answer for Shmuel. However, of note is that in the Sifre the phrase is indeed expounded on in this way.

The Gemara comments: Conclude that it is Rav who said that if the heifer is slaughtered by a non-priest it is invalid, as Rabbi Zeira said: The slaughter of the heifer by a non-priest is invalid. And Rav said concerning this statement of Rabbi Zeira: This is because we learned in the Torah’s description of the slaughter of the red heifer both “Elazar the priest” (Numbers 19:3) and “statute” (Numbers 19:2). Because Elazar is mentioned, it indicates the sacrifice should be performed by a priest, and the use of the term “statute” teaches that one may not deviate from any of the details of the service as delineated in the verses; if one does deviate, the service is invalid. Clearly then, Rav held that if the heifer is slaughtered by a non-priest it is invalid.

The Gemara analyzes Rav’s opinion: And according to Rav, what is different with regard to the red heifer, that if it is slaughtered by a non-priest it is invalid? As Rav explained, it is different in that, with regard to it, it is written “Elazar” and “statute.” But with regard to the bull of the High Priest it is also written “Aaron” the High Priest (Leviticus 16:11) and “statute” (Leviticus 16:34). Based on Rav’s logic, that indicates that the priest is indispensable.

The Gemara explains: The slaughter of the bull by a non-priest is valid because slaughtering is not classified as a sacrificial service; therefore, it does not have to be done by a priest. The Gemara challenges this answer: If so, by the same logic, the red heifer should also be valid when slaughtered by a non-priest. The Gemara concludes: The logic that slaughtering is not classified as a sacrificial service does not apply in the case of the red heifer because the red heifer is different. It has the sanctity of items consecrated for Temple maintenance, and therefore the principles that apply to other offerings do not necessarily apply to it.

But is it not arguable, by an a fortiori inference, that the slaughter of the red heifer by a non-priest is valid? If the slaughter of the bull of the High Priest, which is an actual offering, is valid when performed by a non-priest, then all the more so the slaughter of the red heifer, which is not an offering, should be valid when similarly performed by a non-priest. Rav Shisha, son of Rav Idi, said: The slaughter by of the red heifer a non-priest is invalid. The halakha is just as in the case of appearances of leprosy, which, despite their not being a sacrificial service, still require the priesthood. Only a priest may declare the signs of leprosy to be pure or impure. It is apparent from this case that the logic of the a fortiori inference does not hold.

The Gemara analyzes Shmuel’s opinion: And according to Shmuel, who said that if a non-priest slaughters the bull of the High Priest it is invalid, what is different with regard to his bull that this is the halakha? It is different in that, with regard to it, it is written “Aaron,” indicating that a priest is required, and “statute,” indicating that the requirements of the Yom Kippur service are indispensable. But with regard to the red heifer it is also written: “Elazar” and “statute” which by the same logic should indicate the need for a priest is dispensable. The Gemara concludes: It is different there as it is written: “And he shall slaughter it before him” (Numbers 19:3), i.e., in front of Elazar, which suggests that it could be that a non-priest slaughters and Elazar watches.

And Rav, who assumes the slaughter is performed by the priest himself; how does he interpret the phrase: “Before him”? He understands it to mean that he should not divert his attention from the heifer from the moment of slaughtering until the completion of the process. As with other matters of purification, one is required to maintain his attention on the matter; any distraction can invalidate the process. And from where does Shmuel, who already derived something from this verse, derive that he should not divert his attention from it? He derives it from the verse: “And he shall burn the heifer in his sight” (Numbers 19:5).
And what does Rav learn from this verse? He holds that one verse is needed to teach the requirement to maintain one’s attention with regard to slaughtering, and one verse is needed to teach the requirement with regard to burning.

And it is necessary to have the requirement stated in both cases, since, if the Merciful One had written it only with regard to slaughtering, I might have limited the requirement to that case because it is the start of the Temple service; but with regard to burning, I could say that no, there is no requirement. Therefore, it is necessary to teach the requirement also in the case of burning. And if the Merciful One had written the requirement only with regard to burning, I might have limited it to that case, because it is now that the heifer is actually being made ready to be used; but with regard to slaughtering, I could say that no, there is no requirement. Therefore, it is necessary to teach the requirement also in that case.

As the requirement is mentioned with regard to two stages of the rite of the red heifer, this suggests that it does not exist for every stage. Therefore, the Gemara asks: It is written this way in order to exclude what stage? If we say, to exclude from the requirement the stages of gathering its ashes and filling the water for sanctification, i.e., taking the water in the ashes and mix them together,

this is mistaken because: “And it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of sprinkling” (Numbers 19:9) was written, and the use of the term “shall be kept” indicates that one must maintain attention even during these stages. Rather, it is to exclude from the requirement the stage of casting the cedar wood, and the hyssop, and the strip of crimson into the fire. The requirement does not apply to this stage, as they do not pertain to the heifer itself.

An amoraic dispute was stated with regard to the slaughter of the red heifer by a non-priest: Rabbi Ami said: It is valid. And Rabbi Yitzhak Nappaḥa said: It is invalid. Ulla said: It is valid, but some say that he said: It is invalid.

Rabbi Yehoshua bar Abba raised an objection to the opinion of Shmuel that the slaughter is valid, thereby providing a support for opinion of Rav, who holds that it is invalid: I have a derivation only with regard to the sprinkling of the red heifer’s waters, that they are not valid if sprinkled by a woman as opposed to when sprinkled by a man, and that the sprinkling is valid only during the day. The verse states: “And the pure one shall sprinkle upon the impure on the third day” (Numbers 19:19). The use of the terms “pure one,” in the masculine form, and “day,” indicate that the sprinkling is valid only if performed by a man during the day.

From where is it derived to include the following stages among those stages that must be performed by a man during the day in order to be valid: Its slaughter, and the collection of its blood, and the sprinkling of its blood, and its burning, and the casting of the cedar wood, and the hyssop, and the strip of crimson into the fire? The verse states: “Statute” (Numbers 19:2), at the beginning of the section on the red heifer, to indicate that the same rules govern all stages of the rite.” As such, I might have thought that I should include even the collection of its ashes, and the filling of waters, and the sanctification. Therefore, the verse states: “This is the statute” (Numbers 19:2). The word this limits the scope of the requirement that the rite must be performed by a man and during the day from applying to these stages.
Sprinkling the purification waters – הָלָּכָה

The conditions implied preclude conditions implied by a previous verse, and in other stages the conditions implied stand on their own – וְאֵזוֹב מֵי פָּרָה. Various techniques are employed in biblical hermeneutics. Although usually a particular section employs a consistent approach, in some cases, such as this one, different methods are used for different verses within the same section. In such cases, one must rely on the transmitted tradition of how to understand the text rather than attempt to derive new halakhot based on applying a standard method.

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And if the word “statute” serves to include all stages in the halakha and the word “this” serves to exclude some stages, what did you see to include these stages and to exclude those? After noting that the verse includes some stages and excludes others, you should say the following logical argument: Indeed, we learn all the stages from the sprinkling of its waters: Just as the sprinkling of its waters is not valid if done by a woman as opposed to when done by a man, and it is valid only during the day, so too I will include in the same requirement its slaughter; and the collection of its blood; and the sprinkling of its blood; and its burning; and the casting of the cedar wood, and the hyssop, and the strip of crimson.

Since these stages are not valid if done by a woman as opposed to when done by a man, as indicated by the verses that state that they are to be done by a serving priest, who by definition is a man, then it is logical to also include these cases in the halakha that they are valid only during the day. And I exclude the collection of its ashes, and the filling of water, and the sanctification, since these stages are valid when done by a woman as they are when done by a man, as the verses never suggest a requirement that they be done by a man. Therefore, it is logical that these stages are valid both during the day and during the night.

Rabbi Yehoshua bar Abba originally cited the baraita to challenge Shmuel’s opinion that the slaughter of the red heifer by a non-priest is valid. The Gemara asks: And what is the challenge from this baraita? If we say that since these stages are invalid if done by a woman one should conclude that they are also invalid if done by a non-priest, then let the stage of sprinkling the waters serve as a proof that one should not necessarily connect these two halakhot, because the sprinkling is invalid if done by a woman and yet valid if done by a non-priest.11 If so, what was the basis for the challenge?

Abaye said: This is the challenge: With regard to a woman, what is the reason she may not perform these stages? The verse states “Elazar,” indicating the requirement for a man and not a woman. The same logic should also apply to a non-priest: The verse states: “Elazar,” indicating the requirement for a priest and not a non-priest.

The Gemara considers other aspects of the rite of the red heifer: Ulla said: Throughout the entire passage of the red heifer, certain conditions apply to some stages of the rite, but not to others. These conditions are derived from the phrasing of the verses. In some stages, the conditions implied by the phrasing of the verse preclude the application of conditions that are implied by a previous verse describing a previous stage. A verse describing one stage may imply the existence of a certain condition which applies to that stage but a verse describing a subsequent stage indicates that that condition does not apply to the subsequent stage. However, in other stages, the conditions implied by the phrasing of the verse stand on their own and continue to apply in subsequent stages, i.e., the verses in subsequent stages do not exclude the application of the condition derived from the verses in a previous stage.

The Gemara proceeds to demonstrate Ulla’s claim by expounding the verses throughout the passage of the red heifer: The verse states with regard to the red heifer: “And you shall give it to Elazar the priest and he shall take it out to the outside of the camp, and he shall slaughter it before him” (Numbers 19:3). The word “it” implies that only that red heifer, i.e., the first one, was to be given to Elazar, who was the deputy High Priest, to perform its rite, but that the red heifer in future generations does not need to be given to Elazar, i.e., to a priest of similar rank. If so, who does perform the rite of the red heifer? Some say: In future generations, it should be done by the High Priest. And some say: In future generations, it can be done even by a common priest.
 Granted, according to the one who says that in future generations it can be done even by a common priest, it works out well, since there is no indication to the contrary. But according to the one who says that in future generations it should be done by the High Priest, from where does he derive this requirement? He derives the halakha from the service of Yom Kippur through a verbal analogy between the word "statute" (Numbers 19:2) written with regard to the red heifer and the word "statute" (Leviticus 16:34) written with regard to the Yom Kippur service. Just as on Yom Kippur the entire service is performed by the High Priest, so too, in future generations the rite of the red heifer must be done entirely by the High Priest.

The Gemara expounds the next phrase in the verse: "And he shall take it out to the outside of the camp" (Numbers 19:3). The use of the word "it" implies that only it should be taken out, but he should not take out another heifer with it. As we learned in a mishna: If the heifer did not want to go out by itself, we do not take out a black cow with it in order to encourage it to leave, so that people will not mistakenly say that they slaughtered the black cow. And we do not take out an additional red heifer with it, so that people will not mistakenly say that they slaughtered two heifers. Slaughtering an additional heifer would invalidate the rite, since performing any additional labor during the rite of the red heifer disqualifies it. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says: This is not for that reason, rather it is due to the fact that it is stated "it," which implies only one heifer may be taken out.

And even according to the first tanna, is it not written "it"? Why does he not derive the halakha from the word "it"? The Gemara explains: Who is the first tanna? It is Rabbi Shimon, who interprets the rationale for the mitzva in the verse and draws halakhic conclusions based on that interpretation. Therefore, he accepts that the halakha is derived from the word "it," but he also provides a rationale for the halakha. If so, what is the practical difference between them? The practical difference between them is in a case where one took out a donkey with it. According to the first tanna, this would be permitted, since there is no concern about the wrong cow or cows were slaughtered. However, according to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, who maintains that this rationale is irrelevant, even this case would be excluded by the word "it."