This section of Parshat Chukat is also read as a part of the special four Parshiyot (Shekalim, Zachor, Para and HaChodesh) that are mentioned in the Mishna Megilla that begin on the Shabbat prior to Rosh Chodesh Adar, or if Rosh Chodesh coincides with Shabbat then on Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Adar, and end on the Shabbat prior to Nissan, or if Rosh Chodesh coincides with Shabbat then on Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Nissan. Each one of these special Maftir readings is paired with an appropriately complementary Haftorah. A Braitah quoted in the Gemara indicates that the Haftorah for Parshat HaChodesh is sourced from Yechezkel chapter thirty-six. The thematic link cited for this choice is the verse, “And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be uncircumcised.”

The beginning of Parshat Chukat describes the process by which an individual who has been defiled by a cadaver can become purified. This procedure is more commonly known as the Parshiya of “Para Aduma,” the red heifer, being that this rare cow is the centerpiece of the procedure. Moreover, the ceremony also includes trappings, such as the sprinkling of blood, which would seemingly be more at home within the world of sacrifices and atonement. Lastly, as already has been discussed (see Parshat Tazria-Metzora – A Pot Pourri), the props and the language found here are very similar and parallel to the process for purifying a Metzora. Despite all that, the likely reason that it is found in Sefer Bamidbar is because the impurity caused by contact with or defilement by a corpse prevents the individual from entering the areas where God’s presence is found. This is manifest in the beginning of Parshat Chukat.

The implications of that contamination, precluding entry into the Mishkan and consumption of Kodashim, as well as the method by which to remove it are the subject of the opening of Parshat Chukat, the preface to the conquest that Bnei Yisrael will embark upon.
be clean (מַעֲקַצְתֶּם מִפְּלֵיךְ וְטָהְרְתֶּם); I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your fetishes ([וְהוֹצִיא מִכָּל גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל־גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם].” The commentators note that the Navi is invoking the paradigmatic imagery of sprinkling that purifies. This is the hallmark of the waters of the Para Aduma that remove the defilement of death and is metaphorically utilized to describe God’s commitment that, in a similar fashion to those purifying waters, He will in the future expiate the iniquities of Bnei Yisrael.

This section of Yechezkel describes how Bnei Yisrael through their depravity and improper behavior defiled their land and sullied themselves which resulted in their being exiled and dispersed amongst the other nations. God notes that even though Bnei Yisrael may not warrant absolution, the profaning of His name from Bnei Yisrael’s diminutive state will compel Him to redeem them in order to restore the sanctity of His name. To facilitate this, Bnei Yisrael will undergo a transformative purification by God. He will gather them from their dispersion and return them to the Land of Israel. God will provide them with expiation. The people will be bestowed a new heart and spirit from God (וְהוֹצִיא מִכָּל גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל־גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם); their hearts of stone will be replaced with a heart of flesh. God will revive His spirit within Bnei Yisrael (וְהוֹצִיא מִכָּל־גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם) and they will be inspired to keep His statutes. Then, once the relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael has been repaired (וְהוֹצִיא מִכָּל־גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם), the land will be rejuvenated and its produce once again bountiful. All the destroyed places will be rebuilt and resettled and the land that was known for its desolation will become like the Garden of Eden (וְאֶלֶךְ לְגַן עֵ֑דֶן). Bnei Yisrael will flourish on the land and they will experience a divinely inspired explosion in population.

The next chapter in Yechezkel contains the vision of the valley of the dry bones which is the Haftorah for Shabbat Chol HaMo’ed Pesach. Not surprisingly, the main feature of these bones is that the bones are imbued with a living spirit (בְּקִרְבְּכֶם). Lastly, they are imbued with a living spirit (בְּקִרְבְּכֶם). The next chapter in Yechezkel contains the vision of the valley of the dry bones which is the Haftorah for Shabbat Chol HaMo’ed Pesach. Not surprisingly, the main feature of these bones is that the bones are imbued with a living spirit (בְּקִרְבְּכֶם). Lastly, they are imbued with a living spirit (בְּקִרְבְּכֶם). The preparatory stages of the Para Aduma, includes the slaughtering of the red heifer opposite the Ohel Mo’ed, or on Har HaZeitim in Yerushalayim, and the sprinkling of its blood seven times towards the Ohel Mo’ed, garnering it a quasi-status of a Korban. Then the Para Aduma is burnt completely, its skin, its flesh and its blood. Added to that pyre is also cedar wood, hyssop and a crimson string. It is not clear why these ancillary items are added, but the correlation to Parshat Tazria-Metzora (see Parshat Tazria-Metzora – A Pot Pourri) has the commentators noting similar reasons for their choice here. The Ibn Ezra suggests that the cedar wood (עֵץ אֵרֶץ) and the hyssop (>({v}אֵזֹֽב) were chosen because they represent the span of plant life, from the largest to the smallest. As evidence of this, he marshals the verse in Sefer Melachim that describes the wisdom and compositional creativity of Shlomo HaMelach, “He discussed about trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall (וְאֶל־הַכֹּהֵן וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ וְאֶל־הַכֹּהֵן וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ) and he discussed about beasts, birds, creeping things, and fish.” In that Pasuk, it is clearly utilizing the cedar wood (עֵץ אֵרֶץ) and the hyssop (גּוֹז) as bookends to describe the scope of Shlomo’s command of that which is found in the world of flora. While the Ibn Ezra does not address the meaning of these materials, Rashi and many others point out that the mighty and tall cedar metaphorically represents haughtiness and hubris, which is one of the causes of Tzara’at (See www.swdaf.com)
Tazria-Metzora – Out of Bounds,16 and the cure for that misstep is to humble oneself like a lowly hyssop.17 How that relates to the purification process of the Para Aduma is a little less obvious.

Rav Moshe Yitzchak Ashkenazi suggests that the parallel between the purification of one defiled from contact with a cadaver and the cleansing of the Metzora is that they are both emerging from a state of sin.18 He suggests that the majority of people are defiled by a corpse are the relatives of the individual who passed away. The fact that God has struck down someone in their family should be cause for introspection based on the dictum of Chazal that "if one of the brothers passes away, the entire family should worry."19

It is both natural and blessing from above that one forgets about death and is not constantly obsessing over dying, but one is shocked back to reality when a relative passes away and reminded of their mortality which should cause them to repent lest a similar fate befall them. The use of the cedar wood and hyssop in the purification processes is a reminder that God has the power to raise up (cedar) and degrade (hyssop) the individual; the crimson string is a reminder of the blood of the sinner which can be spilt by God. These poignant and stark reminders will assist the individual emerging from a place of sin and introspection to focus their efforts towards improving their behavior in order to purify both their soul and body. While this might be a common denominator between these two Tahara procedures, it seems that it is a very gloomy perspective on what should be a ceremony of rituals.

Chazal in many places indicate that the colors of materials are significant in the influence of that such an object contributes. For instance, the Gemara notes that there are three partners in the creation of a human being, God, the father and the mother.20 In Kiddushin, the Gemara makes this simple and understandable claim without any further validation. Whereas in Nida, the Gemara continues to substantiate this claim with the following supporting evidence.21 Without delving into the accuracy or meaning of the following statements, the Gemara opines that the father contributes the white semen which is the building block for the (white) bones, sinews, nails, brain and white of the eye. The mother’s contribution of red22 produces the skin, the flesh, and the hair and the pupil of the eye (the items that are associated with blood or have a darker complexion).

Finally, God gives the individual their life force (nfn) and soul (nshm), which facilitate their ability to hear, speak, walk and be an intelligent and thinking being, and the shape of their face or their appearance. When the person’s time to expire arrives, God recalls His bequest and leaves behind the contribution of the mother and father. In other words, death is the ultimate despair, which is caused by the absence of the divine from the individual, and is represented by a dearth of moisnture or something that is parched and dried out.

The Torah specifies that in order to create something with life force for one who has come into contact with a human corpse, the priest must burn to ashes the skin, the flesh and the blood, the entirety of the Para Aduma, as well as the cedar wood, the hyssop and the crimson string. There are two reasons to necessitate that all the “ingredients” must be burned in a pyre until they are ashes. The first of which is that ashes represent something that has been consumed and dehydrated, completely withered and dried out, the absence of life. As noted above, the color red represents blood which the Torah sees as the life force of the being "for the life of all flesh is in his blood (Rb)."23 Similarly, in the colloquial, red meat represents something that is fresh and hydrated. With this in mind, the red

www.swafel.com
the individuals, bones, sinews, flesh and skin, represent the range of plant life or the vivacity of God's contribution to the creation of a human in Yechezkel, after the Navi reconstructs the dry bones metaphorically symbolize the people's loss of hope and their resignation to fate (הנה אפרים...).26

Though, there might be another equally or more important reason for burning these items into ashes. The Torah specifies that all the parts of the red heifer, the blood, the skin and the flesh, must be placed into the pyre.27 The entirety of the animal including the bones will be incinerated into ashes. In the resurrection in Yechezkel, the parts of the body that are mentioned in reconstructing the individuals, bones, sinews, flesh and skin, nearly mimics and is reminiscent of those items that are specified by the red heifer.28 From a broader perspective, as already noted above, all the “ingredients” that are placed on the pyre represent the life force or basic building blocks of a human being. Similar to the way that life emerges after the scourges of a forest fire, in essence, embedded within this pile of desiccated ashes are the raw materials for revival.

In Yechezkel, after the Navi reconstructs the dry bones into human beings, there is still one essential feature that is still missing.29 That is God’s contribution to the creation of a human being, the intangible life-force and soul. Therefore, God instructs Yechezkel to prophesy

That God commands that a life-force be entered into these corpses so that they become living beings. Once that happens, they stand up to become a formidable force. It is the same process by which Adam HaRishon became a living being for “God...blew into his nostrils a breath of life and he became a living being.”30 God indicates that this resurrection should give hope to those in despair, the exiled Bnei Yisrael, that God will once again blow his spirit of life into them and they will return to thrive on their land and host His presence on earth.31 Again here, the Messianic flourishing of Eretz Yisrael is depicted as being similar to the Garden of Eden32 where Adam Rishon is placed after his creation.33 The truth is that the key turning point in all three of the revivals described in Yechezkel’s prophecy is God’s intervention to change the trajectory and to convert that which is “dead,” defiled and dried out into that which is living and thriving. God infuses them with a divine life-force that transforms them from a state of complete desolation to reinvigorated vitality and returns them to their former vibrancy.

It would seem that the vision of the dry bones would have been a better choice for the Haftorah of Parshat Para, yet Chazal chose the previous connection is deepened by the fact that the sins of Bnei Yisrael through sprinkling. That returns them to their former vibrancy.33 The truth is that the key turning point in all three of the revivals described here and elsewhere as defilement.34 Therefore, their expiation is portrayed as a sprinkling of pure waters (בראשית-) similar to the manner in which purification is attained with the regards to the Par Aduma.35 This interrelatedness is reinforced by the verse in Tehilim where David HaMelech treats God to forgive him for the sin of Bat Sheva, he implores God to “Purge me with hyssop (מקוני אב...) and I will be pure; wash me and I will be whiter than snow...Hide Your face from my sins; blot out all my iniquities.”36

Heifer24 and the crimson string could represent the blood or the life of the individual. In a similar vein to the Ibn Ezra, the cedar and the hyssop could represent the range of plant life or the vivacity of living things. It could also be that the tall white cedar symbolizes the unique uprightness of a living human being and/or possibly embodies the “white parts” of the individual.25 Perhaps, the hyssop epitomizes health and vitality and/or purification. The burning of all these items that characterize life to dry ashes represents the life and world that have been snuffed out or wilted by death. It creates and results in a pile of ashes that are synonymous with the finality and despair of death. In a similar fashion, God tells Yechezkel, "white parts" of the individual.25 Perhaps, the cedar symbolizes the unique uprightness of a living things. It could also be that the tall white Cypress tree in the Garden of Eden32 where Adam Rishon is placed again blow his spirit of life into them and they will...
This might be enough of a reason to correlate between Parashat Para and the chosen Haftarah, but there seems to be an even more fundamental relationship between them. As mentioned above, the key turning point in all three of the revivals described in Yechezkel’s prophecy is God’s intervention. If there is a parallel between Para Aduma and Yechezkel, then one would expect to find some similar manifestation of God in the sprinkling of the ashes of the red heiffer. Throughout Parashat Para, the resultant product of the burning pyre is referred to as the “ashes of the Para Aduma.” The one exception to that is the defiled individual or object. Amazingly, there are the same two ingredients, water and earth, associated with the individual who has passed away. As God indicates to Yechezkel, that world of desolation is a place of overwhelming despair and darkness. Those waters, imbued with the divine, are then sprinkled on that defilement, despair and desolation in order to purify, resurrect and reinvigorate. The key ingredient in this case, in creation and in all the cases in Yechezkel is the life-force upon that which it is sprinkled.

Putting this all together, coming into contact with the deceased is to enter a lifeless world devoid of God that is manifest through the defilement associated with the individual who has passed away. As God indicates to Yechezkel, that world of desolation is a place of overwhelming despair and darkness. That state of being and frame of mind is symbolized by the burning to dry ashes all the items that represent life and vitality. At the same time, the burning of these items embeds with these ashes the building blocks and potential for the revitalization and revival when they are reconstituted with “live” spring water. Those waters, imbued with the divine, are then sprinkled on that defilement, despair and desolation to purify, resurrect and reinvigorate. The key ingredient in this case, in creation and in all the cases in Yechezkel is the life-force and lifeline of being connected to the divine. The elixir to life is strengthening one’s connection to God, being linked to and anchored in the eternal. That is the message of the Para Aduma. And similar to the process of the purification of the Para Aduma which takes seven days to accomplish, the same is true of the process of transforming oneself from despair and desolation to hope and vivacity. It takes time, but the path and means to accomplishing this revival is clear. And what is true of defilement is also true of sin.

Tuma and Chet distance one from God and life and Tahara and Teshuva bring one close to God and life. As David HaMelech says in that same Tehillim about his sin with Bat Sheva, “Purge me with hyssop and I will be pure...let me crushed bones rejoice... Fashion a pure heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the defilement of sin.”

The rejuvenation and message of the Para Aduma is expressed in a similar fashion in the Haftarah in Yechezkel. “And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; I will give you a new heart and I will put My spirit into you… I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh; and I will put My spirit into you…”

Putting this all together, coming into contact with the deceased is to enter a lifeless world devoid of God that is manifest through the defilement associated with the individual who has passed away. As God indicates to Yechezkel, that world of desolation is a place of overwhelming despair and darkness. That state of being and frame of mind is symbolized by the burning to dry ashes all the items that represent life and vitality. At the same time, the burning of these items embeds within these ashes the building blocks and potential for the revitalization and revival when they are reconstituted with “live” spring water. Those waters, imbued with the divine, are then sprinkled on that defilement, despair and desolation in order to purify, resurrect and reinvigorate. The key ingredient in this case, in creation and in all the cases in Yechezkel is the life-force and lifeline of being connected to the divine. The elixir to life is strengthening one’s connection to God, being linked to and anchored in the eternal. That is the message of the Para Aduma. And similar to the process of the purification of the Para Aduma which takes seven days to accomplish, the same is true of the process of transforming oneself from despair and desolation to hope and vivacity. It takes time, but the path and means to accomplishing this revival is clear. And what is true of defilement is also true of sin.

Tuma and Chet distance one from God and life and Tahara and Teshuva bring one close to God and life. As David HaMelech says in that same Tehillim about his sin with Bat Sheva, “Purge me with hyssop and I will be pure...let me crushed bones rejoice... Fashion a pure heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the defilement of sin.”

Putting this all together, coming into contact with the deceased is to enter a lifeless world devoid of God that is manifest through the defilement associated with the individual who has passed away. As God indicates to Yechezkel, that world of desolation is a place of overwhelming despair and darkness. That state of being and frame of mind is symbolized by the burning to dry ashes all the items that represent life and vitality. At the same time, the burning of these items embeds within these ashes the building blocks and potential for the revitalization and revival when they are reconstituted with “live” spring water. Those waters, imbued with the divine, are then sprinkled on that defilement, despair and desolation in order to purify, resurrect and reinvigorate. The key ingredient in this case, in creation and in all the cases in Yechezkel is the life-force and lifeline of being connected to the divine. The elixir to life is strengthening one’s connection to God, being linked to and anchored in the eternal. That is the message of the Para Aduma. And similar to the process of the purification of the Para Aduma which takes seven days to accomplish, the same is true of the process of transforming oneself from despair and desolation to hope and vivacity. It takes time, but the path and means to accomplishing this revival is clear. And what is true of defilement is also true of sin.

Shabbat Shalom