

And for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, clean birds, cedar wood, crimson thread and hyssop. (14:4)

The erstwhile sinner must purge himself of the character flaw that led to his sinful behavior. One who slanders, who speaks ill of others, thinks that he is better, smarter, stronger, etc. than they are, can blame his haughtiness. Arrogance breeds contempt for those whom one considers to be beneath him. Thus, the *metzora's* process of purification, which entails repentance to atone for his misdeeds, must address the moral turpitude which brought him here in the first place. The cedar tree, which grows tall above other forms of vegetation, symbolizes haughtiness. The crimson thread is prepared with a dye from a pigment extracted from a lowly creature. The hyssop is a lowly bush. These two symbolize the opposite of arrogance: humility – a character trait that the *metzora* must now acquire.

We find these three articles also used in connection with the *Parah Adumah*, Red Heifer. They are thrown into the pyre of the burning cow. There is a distinction, however, between the two processes in the manner in which these symbolic ingredients are recorded in the Torah. Concerning the purification of the *metzora*, the Torah first lists cedar wood, followed by crimson thread and hyssop. In listing the ingredients to be thrown into the burning cow, the Torah lists cedar wood first, followed by the hyssop, with the crimson wool last. Why the change? Also, concerning the *metzora*, why does the Torah not list the ingredients according to the sequence of their height, with the hyssop preceding the crimson thread? The bush may be low, but it does grow a few inches off the ground. The worm, snail, or whatever creature supplies the red dye crawls along the ground. Sequentially, it should be last.

Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, resolves this anomaly with a principle quoted from the *Rambam Hilchos Deios 2:2*. In order to succeed in correcting a *middah raah*, deficient/faulty character trait, one must go to the opposite extreme and then work his way back to the center. Likewise, the *metzora* has fallen prey to the sins associated with haughtiness. He has arrogated himself above others, much like the tall and imposing cedar tree. He must now revert to the extreme antithesis and lower himself to the stature of the worm. Then, he can slowly return to center court and be like the hyssop. In the case of the *Parah Adumah*, however, the Torah lists the ingredients sequentially, according to their height and significance.