



Volume 3. Issue 28.

Introduction to Sotah

This week we finished *messechet Nazir* and began *messechet Sotah*.¹ The *sotah* procedure is a divine determination of the wife's innocence or guilt regarding suspected adultery after having being caught in seclusion with another man. Once a husband suspects his wife, it is unlikely that he will trust her, even if a *Beit Din* finds that she is innocent. The *sotah* test, whereby the woman drinks the bitter waters and *Hashem* Himself testifies, can convince a husband of his wife's innocence. The *Mishnah* (1:1) teaches us that the *sotah* procedure is only used if the husband first warns his wife not to seclude herself with that particular man. If the woman is guilty, the bitter waters cause her to die an unnatural death. If there is already evidence that the woman is guilty, the *sotah* procedure is not administered. The woman is divorced without receiving her *ketubah* (or executed if she was properly warned).

Hashem allows His sacred name to be dissolved in the water as part of the procedure. To erase even one letter of *Hashem's* name is usually a *d'oirata* prohibition punishable by lashes (*Rambam, Hilchot Yesodai Hatorah* 6:1-2). Nevertheless, an exception is made for the *sotah* procedure² demonstrating the importance of *shalom bayit* between a husband and wife.

The prohibition against adultery is the seventh of the ten commandments. The commentators have pointed out that the first five commandments (which appear on the first tablet) relate to *mitzvot* between man and *Hashem*. The second five commandments (which appear on the second tablet) relate to *mitzvot* between man and man. In addition, each of the first five commandments has a parallel in the second set. Under this system the second commandment (prohibiting idolatry) is parallel with the seventh commandment (prohibiting adultery) (*Mechilta Yitro*).

The connection between adultery and idolatry makes sense. Both sins involve a special, sanctified relationship. An idolater is being unfaithful in the relationship between man and *Hashem*. An adulterer is being unfaithful in the

relationship between man and wife. There are many occasions in the *Tanach* where *Bnei Yisrael* stray after idols and the prophets compare them to an unfaithful wife (e.g. *Yirmiyah* Ch 3; *Hosea* Ch 2).

This connection between idolatry and adultery sheds light on the events that follow the sin of the golden calf.

Firstly, *Moshe* instructed the tribe of *Levi* to go through the camp and execute three thousand of the sinners. According to *Rashi*, these were the idolaters who had been properly warned. This group of idolaters parallels the confirmed adulterer who was properly warned – she does not drink the bitter waters and is executed by the *Beit Din*.

Secondly, *Hashem* sent a plague that killed further idolaters. According to *Rashi*, these were the idolaters who sinned intentionally before witnesses but were not properly warned. The lack of proper warning means that these people could not be executed by the Levites. This group parallels the confirmed adulterer who was not properly warned. She does not drink the bitter waters but the lack of a proper warning means that she cannot be executed by the *Beit Din*. She is forced to divorce her husband and she does not receive her *ketubah*.

Thirdly, *Moshe* ground up the golden calf, added the particles to water and forced *Bnei Yisrael* to drink the water. Those that had sinned without witnesses were punished upon drinking the water. This parallels the *sotah* who secludes herself with a man away from witnesses. Only the divine test of drinking the bitter waters can determine whether or not she is guilty. Similarly, the water that *Moshe* gave *Bnei Yisrael* to drink determined who fell into this third category of idolaters.

Like a husband who warns his wife not to seclude herself with a particular man, *Hashem* warned *Bnei Yisrael* before the sin of the golden calf when he told them the second of the ten commandments – do not commit idolatry.

Alon Ledder

¹ As well as being next to each other in the *mishnayot*, the *parshiyot* of *nazir* and *sotah* are right next to each other in the *Torah* (*Bamidbar* 6-7). From this juxtaposition, the *Chachamim* derive that if someone witnessed a *sotah* being tested they should take upon themselves a *nazirite* vow (*Gemara Sotah* 2a). From this we can learn the powerful effect that a sin can have. Merely being exposed to this sin can have a negative impact and can remind you that it is possible to be overcome by temptation. The

Torah's antidote is to sanctify yourself as a *nazir* and to abstain from wine for a period of time.

² This follows the general rule that where a negative commandment and a positive commandment conflict, the positive commandment takes precedence (*Yevamot* 3b).

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Revision Questions

נזיר ז' א' – ט' ה'

- Can a *nazir* and *kohen gadol* become *tameh met* for a relative? (א': ז')
- If a *nazir* and *kohen gadol* come across a *met mitzvah* who should become *tameh met* to bury the body? (א': ז')
- List some of the forms of *tumat met* which causes a *nazir* to forfeit all the days already observed forcing him to restart? (ז': ב')
- What are the three ways a *nazir* attracts the *tumah* described in the previous question? (ז': ב')
- On which days of the purification process is the *nazir* sprinkled with *mei effer haparah*? (ז': ב')
- From when does the *nazir* restart his count of coming into contact with a *met*? (ז': ב')
- List some of the forms of *tumat met* that do not cause a *nazir* to forfeit all the days already observed? (ז': ג')
- Regarding the previous questions, would the *nazir* be required to bring a *korban* as a result of becoming *tameh met* in those manners? (ז': א')
- If a *nazir* become a *zav*, do those days of *tumat hazav* count towards his *nezirut*? (ז': ג')
- According to R' Eliezer for what other *halacha* is the distinction between forms of *tumat hamet* important? (ז': ד')
- What is the law regarding a case where a person says to two *nazirs*, "I saw that one of you became *tumat hamet* but I'm not sure which one"? (ז': ח')
- Regarding the previous case, what are the two opinions if one of the *nazirs* then dies? (ז': ח')
- What is the law regarding a *nazir* that is *tameh be'safek* and *muchlat be'safek*? (ז': ב')
- Can a *goi* become a *nazir*? (ז': ט')
- What is the difference between where a person is *meifer* his wife's *neder* to become a *nazir* and where a person is *meifer* his servant's *neder* to become a *nazir*? (ז': ט')
- Which form of *tumat hamet* does not forfeit any days, if it is discovered after a the *nazir* has completed his term? Provide an examples of this form of *tumat hamet*. (ז': ט')
- When is an area defined as *shechunat kevarot* and why is it important? (ז': ג')
- What are the seven ways to check a *zav* and after which point do these checks not apply? (ז': ט')
- Aside from *Shimshon* which other *navi* was a *nazir*? (ז': ט')

סוטה א' א' – ג'

- In the first *Mishnah*, about what is the debate R' Eliezer and R' Yehoshua? (ז': א')
- What constitutes a warning for purposes of *sotah*? (ז': ב')
- What are the five cases where a *sotah* does not drink *mei sotah*? (ז': א')

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Sotah 1:4-5	Sotah 1:6-7	Sotah 1:8-9	Sotah 2:1-2	Sotah 2:3-4	Sotah 2:4-5	Sotah 3:1-2

