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Coming Closer to Hashem Through Mitzvot

Since the beginning of *Masechet Sotah*, we have been describing all of the details regarding the process of drinking the bitter waters. In the fourth *Mishnah* of the third chapter, the *Mishnah* describes what happens to the woman as she drinks the water:

She does not contrive to drink before her face turns yellow and her eyes bulge and she is replete with veins.

However, after describing the seemingly painful and traumatic ordeal that the woman who drinks the bitter water undergoes, the *Mishnah* tells us that there is a 'way out':

If she had any merit, it would suspend her punishment.

In other words, despite the fact that she may have sinned, became impure through infidelity, undergone the entire process and caused the name of Hashem to have been erased, there is a possibility that she will not be punished immediately if she has merits.

This possibility creates a great deal of concern and threatens to destroy the whole point of the *Sotah* water¹. *Ben Azai* therefore states that "a man is required to teach his daughter *Torah* so that if she must drink, she will know that the merit suspends it for her," and not that she 'got away with it'.

A further reason why *Ben Azai* might instruct fathers to teach their daughters *Torah* would be so that this *Torah* learning will actually be their merit and save them from punishment should they stray from their future husbands.

The *Rambam* in *Hilchot Talmud Torah* (1:13) explains that although a woman does receive reward for learning *Torah*, her reward cannot be compared to that of a man. The reason for this according to the *Rambam* is that the reward of someone who is commanded to perform *mitzvot* is greater than the reward of someone who chooses to perform *mitzvot*².

Tosfot in *Masechet Avodah Zarah* (3a) state that the reason for this distinction is that a person who is commanded to perform *mitzvot* must constantly conquer and repel his evil inclination. Therefore, due to the fact that this person must work harder, their reward is greater.

Another explanation is offered by the *Maharal*. He explains that although someone who chooses to perform the *mitzvot*, but is not commanded to, does receive a reward, they miss out on the intrinsic connection that is created between the One who commands and the one who acts.

The fact that a person fulfills what Hashem wants them to do, causes their actions to be of greater significance and strengthens their connection with Hashem.

Benzion Hain

¹ This fact is discussed in the following *Mishnah* where *Rabbi Shimon* argues that merit does not delay punishment as this would cause women to see the *Sotah* waters as less severe because their merits would save them and it would also cause the innocent to be given a bad name. People

would say that a woman who survived was in fact guilty but her merit kept her alive and saved her from punishment.

² This is based on the opinion of *Rabbi Channinah* in *Masechet Avodah Zara* 3a (and other places).

Revision Questions

סוטה ג: גי – ה: גי

- Until when can the *sotah* refuse to take part in the procedure? (ג: גי)
- Does the procedure continue if after the point discussed in the previous question the *sotah* admits that she is *temeah*? (ג: גי)
- If the *sotah* pulls out, can the *megillat ha'sotah* be used for another *sotah*? (ג: גי)
- If a *sotah* was guilty, how long would it take for the *mei sotah* to have an effect? (ג: גי)
- Which are the four people that *R' Yehoshua* describes as being *m'chalei olam*? (ג: גי)
- Explain the debate regarding whether *mei sotah* can have a delayed effect. (ה: גי)
- After which point is the *mincha* offering of a *sotah* that became *tameh* burnt? What happens to the *mincha* offering if it became *temeah* before this point? (ג: גי)
- What is different about the *mincha* offering of a *sotah* who is the wife of a *kohen*? (ג: גי)
- What are the four differences listed between a *kohen* and a *kohenet*? (ג: גי)
- What are two differences between men and women when it comes to the laws of *nazir*? (ח: גי)
- What are two differences between men and women when it comes to death penalty? (ח: גי)
- Can an *arusa* become a *sotah*? From which *pasuk* is this law derived? (א: די)
- Can a *gerusha* that married a *kohen* become a *sotah*? (א: די)
- Which four women listed, do not become a *sotah* yet are divorce without receiving a *ketubah*? (ב: די)
- What is the debate between *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel* regarding a *sotah* whose husband dies? (ב: די)
- What is a *meuberet chaveiro* and explain the debate regarding this case? (ג: די)
- Explain the debate regarding whether a *zkeina* can become a *sotah*? (ג: די)
- If a *sotah* who is the wife of a *kohen* is found to be innocent, can she return to her husband? (ג: די)
- Does the *kina* apply to *issurei arayot*? (ד: די)
- In what three cases can the *beit din* provide the *kina* instead of the husband? Would this *kina* make her a *sotah*? (ד: די)
- Who else would the *mei sotah* affect? (ה: די)
- If the *sotah* refused to drink, aside from her husband, who else would she be forbidden from marrying? (ה: די)
- On the day that *R' Elazar ben Azarya* was elected as *nasi* what did *R' Akiva* expound regarding:
 - *Tumah ve'taharah*? (ה: די)
 - *Tchum Shabbat*? (ה: די)

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
4 th March י"ד אדר פורים Sotah 5:4-5	5 th March ט"ו אדר שושן פורים Sotah 6:1-2	6 th March ט"ז אדר Sotah 6:3-4	7 th March י"ז אדר Sotah 7:1-2	8 th March י"ח אדר Sotah 7:3-4	9 th March י"ט אדר Sotah 7:5-6	10 th March כ' אדר Sotah 7:7-8

