

# Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Bamidbar 5785

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The Torah instructs on the wayward woman, the Sotah.

**וְנָקָה הָאִישׁ מֵעֵוֹן וְהָאִשָּׁה הָיְתָה תְּשׂוּאָה אֶת־עֲוֹנָהּ: פ**

“And the man shall be clean from sin and that wife shall suffer (lit. raise up) her guilt.” (Bamidbar 5:31).

The Torah specifically ends off by saying the husband is free from guilt. What guilt would the husband be guilty of? She caused him to be jealous by her conduct. From the reading of this parsha it appears he did not give her any cause to stray. The husband also gives the wife a chance by warning her after he suspects her. And is it not obvious that she bears her own guilt? Who else is responsible for her guilt in this incident? Also, why does it say “that wife” or “that woman” instead of *his wife*.

The pesukim here teach that this is only in a case where a husband does not want to divorce his wife. He has the option to divorce her, bring her the kohen, or to ignore the incident. This parsha (segment) is about a husband trying to remain with his wife and be confident with her fidelity.

When interpreting this pasuk, it is important to keep in mind that this wife is not necessarily guilty. The standards for Sotah are: a woman goes astray and secretly engages in adultery. (Bamidbar 5:13). It is secret, so how did the husband know? “But a fit of jealousy comes over him and he is wrought up about the wife who has defiled herself. Or if a fit of jealousy comes over the husband and he is wrought up about his wife although she has not defiled herself.” (Ibid 5:14). A spirit of jealousy precedes this episode. No actual infidelity was witnessed. However, the wife acted suspiciously. She secluded herself with a man. Then she did it again against the husband’s warnings.

There are two “outs” in this process. First, the husband can just divorce her and be done with the whole incident. However, he would then have to pay her the Kesubah price. That still is a good end and better than when jealousy, mistrust, and suspicions prevail in a marriage. The other option to end this is when the woman fails to comply with the Sotah trial. “The kohen shall now cause the wife to swear with the oath of the curse, and the kohen shall say to the woman, ‘May Hashem give to you for a curse and an oath among your people, when Hashem causes your thigh to rupture and your belly to swell. For these curse-producing waters shall enter your innards, causing the belly to swell and the thigh to rupture.’ And the woman shall say, ‘Amen, amen.’” (Ibid 5:21-22). This pasuk implies that if she refuses to swear or answer amen then she will be absolved from drinking the waters, continuing on with the process, and will then have to leave her husband without a Kesubah payment. She has a choice in this matter.

“This is the Law of jealousies when a wife goes astray to someone other than her husband and is defiled. Or if a spirit of jealousy comes over a husband, and he is jealous

of his wife, and he presents the wife before Hashem, and the kohen shall do to her all of this Law” (Ibid 5:29-30). The husband can know that by going through this process he is not doing the wrong thing or putting guilt on his shoulders. He has a spirit of jealousy, but it his wife that gave him reason to suspect. She secluded herself away from witnesses, but there are witnesses to her seclusion. The Torah condones his bringing his wife to the kohen. It cannot be referring to every time a husband gets jealous about a wife for any reason. There has to be something concrete for him to present her to the kohen. Her behavior has to be suspicious as described. The pasuk said she acted in secret without the husband knowing. However, her other conduct made him jealous. The pasuk says, “or the husband that has a spirit of jealousy” even when she is not guilty. She continues to act in a way to cause that jealousy. Yet, he still wants to remain with her.

It would seem obvious that the husband is free from guilt. First, she gave him reason to be jealous by acting suspiciously. Second, she failed to heed warnings and end her behavior. Third, he is trying to save his marriage. Fourth, the Torah gives a method whereby a husband can know that his wife is innocent and be fully jealous-free. Why does the pasuk free him of guilt?

This teaches that there must be no blame on a husband for still being with her despite her defilement. The Torah teaches a man must not remarry a woman who was with someone else in between. (Devarim 24:4). However, marriages should work and they should be worked on. The husband has the option of not going through this process. However, jealousy can create a wedge of suspicion and mistrust that can eat away at a marriage. The Torah gives a method—albeit an embarrassing one—for spouses to reconcile. The end result for the innocent is children. (Bamidbar 5:28).

Based on the reading of the pesukim it is unclear if the husband even knows who the “other” man is. The woman is acting strangely and now the husband has jealousy. The term “jealousy” connotes infidelity. The Torah doesn’t merely say, “he suspects her.” It is enough that now there is spirit of jealousy.

The one that is “blameless” is the man that secluded himself with the woman. The man owes nothing to the husband. He is not being warned and he may not even know if the woman is married. (Although, the woman would have to hide it from him. The Torah says that married women are indicated by their braided hair. The pasuk says, “Then the kohen...unbraids her head.” (Ibid 5:18)). Obviously, he is guilty of being with a married woman. (Vayikra 18:20). However, if he just secluded and did not sin “the man is clean of guilt.” He is free from guilt; but that wife, that woman—who is guilty of at least secluding herself with the that man—shall suffer the guilt. If she is guilty then she dies. If she did not defile herself, she still suffers the embarrassment of the procedure—for acting suspiciously. The man who she secluded herself with is not liable.

The Torah is teaching that the husband is not to take action against a suspicious man and shall not bring him in front of Hashem. The only party with a legal duty to him is his wife. This parsha of Sotah is not about punishing guilty sinners. If the man sinned, he will ultimately be punished. Sinners will be punished based on other pesukim. (Shemos 20:13; Vayikra 20:10). This Sotah section is about reconciling spouses and making peace among Yisroel. Shalom Bayis is of utmost importance.