

NASO - 1 THE SUSPECTED SOTA - TO REGAIN UNITY OR A REMINDER OF INIQUITY

A suspected Sota is the term cast upon a woman as a result of her improper behavior. A disregarded warning from her husband not to seclude herself with a certain man causes a loosening of their marital bond to such an extent that she is considered a suspected Sota forbidden to her husband. The biblical institution of the Sota ritual is the only method for the couple to recover and re-establish their severed relationship. This option to proceed with the Divine Sota test to determine her guilt or innocence comes with its inherent risks. If it is determined above that she did indeed committed adultery - then not only will this test permanently break their unity - but it will expose her and arouse previous iniquities that will prove fatal for the sinner. She will be forced to endure an unusual divine punishment associated with her current and previous iniquities. As a suspected Sota she stands center court in a pivotal position between a reunification with her husband on one side and the lurking fatal side of arousing previous iniquities on the other. These options are hidden within the Torah's term for the Minha offering of the suspected Sota as either a "meal offering as a means for the husband to reacquire her or a meal offering that exposes her transgression which will also act as a reminder of previous iniquities." 1

REGAIN UNITY - TO REACQUIRE HER

The Talmud teaches that an effective method to unify a man with a woman is for the former to give the latter something of value and for her to receive it for that purpose. A declaration is made "Behold you are unified to me etc." 2 The male advancing his role as the giver and the female the receiver in this new unified relationship. This unity we are taught is severed when she ignores his warning not to seclude herself with another - even if she does not commit infidelity. The only opportunity to re-attach and re-unify is via the Sota ritual which comes with inherent risks. This offering is most commonly translated as an "offering of jealousy" - מנחת קנאות - R. SR Hirsch asserts that etymologically קנאות shares a root with קנה - or to acquire. 3 According to this understanding his desire to proceed with the ritual is his claim that though she is no longer totally legally in his possession he would like to reacquire her. He brings the offering on behalf of his wife 4 and thereby expresses a desire to regain their intimate unity which had previously existed. If God decides favorably - she will not only re-attach to her husband but provide him with exceptional children delivered by her with ease. 5 This being a reference to catapulting herself beyond the limitation and curse set upon Havah and her descendants in Gan Eden. We know that according to our mystical tradition the hair of the head represents the physical expression to receive spiritually. 6 A married woman is required to keep this receptacle concealed from the public. This is due to the fact that her ability and pathway to receive is exclusively via her husband. As a suspected Sota; she has severed the giver/receiver unity established via Kiddushin - hence her hair or what had been his exclusive receptacle is now to be exposed by the Kohen. As the verse instructs "The kohen shall stand the woman before Hashem and uncover her hair". 7

A REMINDER OF A PREVIOUS INIQUITY - ES HADAAT

The Ohr HaHayyim writes that the Torah portion of the Sota is a throwback to the Sin of the Es Hadaat. 8 After Adam Harishon had fallen asleep 9 the Talmud teaches that the serpent seduced Havah casting a pollutant into her which she would pass onto coming generations. 10 Havah recognized this illicit act when she claimed that the serpent -השיאני- deceived me. 11 The word etymologically associated with coupling or נשואין- The relationship between the portion of Sota and the sins at the Es Hadaat are further amplified by what precedes the section of Sota in our parasha. We know that there are three spheres of holiness as it relates to the camps of the nation of Israel. The center point was the sanctuary which was surrounded by the camp of Levi; which in turn was surrounded by the camp of Israel. 12 The parasha discusses three individuals with varying degrees of impurity; - noting where in the national camp they are permitted or not permitted to reside. Each of these has a relationship with those who sinned at the Es Hadaat. The Mesora is infected with the most severe case of impurity and is banned from all three camps. His skin is akin to that of the serpent

who was infected with the most serious pollutant as a result of his instigation in the sin at Es Hadaat. Next is one who has a bodily emission and is thereby excluded from the two inner camps. This type of impurity relates to Havah who was punished as it relates to her bodily emissions and female cycle. Finally there is the Tameh Met who is only banned from the sanctuary, 13 this the Ba'al Haturim writes is associated with Adam who brought death onto the world. 14 Furthermore the Talmud becomes more overt in relating the Sota to the Es Hadaat when it twice notes 15 that one who witnesses a Sota in her disgrace must separate himself from wine. This being a veiled reference to the view of R. Meir that the fruit at the tree of knowledge was associated with wine. 16 Finally the relationship is apparent most in the unusual punishment of the Sota. A close look reveals that it parallels that of the Serpent at Es Hadaat whose legs were cut while being forced to traverse on his belly and to consume the dust of the earth. The confirmed Sota too is destined for a similar fate. As it is written 17 that her thighs will fall as she will experience the result of the iniquity of her sin which is a throwback to the Es Hadaat.

A REMINDER OF A SECOND PREVIOUS INIQUITY - SIN OF THE GOLDEN CALF

The Midrash asserts 18 that the Torah section of Sota is on another level making reference to the sin of Israel at the Egel. While the revelation at Sinai represented the Marraige between Hakadosh Barukh Hu and Knesset Yisrael 19 the sin of the Egel was its disruption. The Talmud describes the damage caused by the Egel in terms of infidelity of a wife instead of in terms of idolatry. The Amora Ulla writes "How shameless is the bride who is unfaithful while still in her bridal chamber". 20 The Sifte Hakhamim basing himself on Rashi and on the Midrash on Shir Hashirim asserts that Moshe was justified in treating Israel as suspected Sotot after the incident of the Egel. 21 The Luhot - Tablets stand side by side with the 5 diberot between Man and the Creator paralleling the 5 between Man and his neighbor. This associates the law regarding Idolatry to that of Adultery. Hence we see Moshe being justified when - He took the calf that the people had made...grinding it into fine powders. He then scattered it on the waters (brook of the mount) and made the Israelites drink. 22 The Talmud teaches in the name of R. Yose that Moshe treated them just like the suspected Sota. 23

THE SOTA - A SUMMARY AND MESSAGE

Since we as a people have prior criminal records with regards to infidelity at Es Hadaat and Het HaEgel, any movement in that direction causes a disruption in ones relationship with their spouse or Creator. The Torah does give the Sota an opportunity to re-attach but not without its risks. The message is that we are subject and somewhat subservient to our previous iniquities as a people and individuals. We must take extreme efforts to insure we never fall back into transgressions that our souls are susceptible to. If one feels he has a weakness in certain areas - he might consider accepting upon himself certain stringencies to assist in distancing himself from these tendencies. This is in accordance with the advice of the Talmud. If one is exposed to the disgrace of the Sota or if one has a weakness in this area of national weakness he should accept upon himself to refrain from wine. Though normally not encouraged to refrain from that what is permitted; here when even exposed via sight to the disgrace of a Sota - it is encouraged - as we need to protect ourselves via an additional stringency. Hence in our parasha - the laws of Nazir follow those of the Sota.

Shabbat Shalom

Victor Bibi