

Parsha Ponders

Nasso | June 5, 2020 | 13 Sivan 5780

*The value of shalom*¹

וּכְתַב אֶת-הָאֵלֶּת הָאֵלֶּה הַכֹּהֵן בְּסֵפֶר וּמַחֵה אֶל-מֵי הַמָּרִים

The Kohen shall write these curses on parchment, and blot it out in the bitter waters²

The Torah describes what's known as the *Sotah* ritual. If a married woman, due to her immoral behavior, becomes a presumed adulteress³, her and her husband cannot live together until the matter is confirmed. If she indeed committed adultery, they have to divorce. If she is in fact innocent, they can resume married life as normal. How can they clear up this scandal? The Torah provides a unique avenue for her to prove her innocence. The woman, now known as a *Sotah*, is taken to the Temple. Various rituals are performed, and offerings brought. This includes writing down on a piece of parchment a set of curses which are to fall on her if she is guilty. This parchment contains instances of the name of Hashem. It is then placed in a cup of bitter water, the writing dissolves, and she is to drink it. Miraculously, after the ceremony, it became clear to everyone if she is innocent or not.

Why does the Torah go out of its way to provide such an avenue for resolution? Why the whole ceremony⁴, when there's the simple solution for them to get divorced? Why the need for a miracle to prove her innocence? Why is this the only instance in the Torah where we find such an idea? There is a myriad of other cases of doubt where there's no method given to remove it. Most of all, it's a grave transgression to erase Hashem's Holy name⁵. Why was it permissible to erase Hashem's name as part of the ritual, in order for this woman to reunite with her husband?

One thing is clear: Hashem knows Human psychology. After all, He created Mankind. As such, Hashem is informing us that He knows the mind of the suspicious husband better than anyone else. Even if he were to be provided with proof of his wife's innocence, such as witnesses who testified under oath to such a fact, he would still have his doubts. He would never trust his wife again. He had reason to suspect her, and the proof presented to him would be insufficient to remove those suspicions. The only thing that would abate his concerns is if Hashem Himself announced that she is innocent.

Therefore, the Torah introduced the *Sotah* ritual, a miraculous method to provide incontrovertible proof of her innocence. With the husband's trust reaffirmed, the couple can peacefully rebuild their almost broken relationship⁶. This explains the need for a miracle, but why was Hashem so concerned with this couple's relationship that He would provide one? We don't find miracles as resolutions to other quandaries. This also doesn't address the other questions.

Chazal make it clear what's behind the *Sotah* ritual. Hashem desires for there to be *shalom* again, a peaceful relationship, between this estranged husband and wife. Hashem is so interested in restoring the peace between them, that it seems He's willing to forgo the sanctity of His name to reestablish it. He

¹ Based on my own collection of sources

² [Numbers 5:23](#)

³ Through קינּוּי and סתירה (see [Sotah 1:2](#)), which creates a דבּר רגלים that she committed adultery. Even though she's really a סוּטָה, we have a rule that ספק כּוּדַאי ספק התורה עשה (Sotah 28a; Sifrei Bamidbar § 7)

⁴ The *gemarra* explains that the reason for the prolonged ceremony in the Temple with all of its steps was to tire out the *Sotah* so that she'll end up confessing her guilt, to avoid any unnecessary erasing of Hashem's name (for example, see [Sotah 1:4](#); [ibid 14a](#))

⁵ [Deuteronomy 12:2](#); [Sefer HaMitzvos Lo Sa'aseh § 65](#)

⁶ [Emes L'Yaakov](#) to [Numbers 5:15](#)

allowed the erasing of His name as part of the *Sotah* ritual, showing how important *shalom* is⁷. Why would this be? In truth, Hashem isn't forgoing any sanctity. One of Hashem's names is itself "Shalom"⁸. By erasing His name, in order to reestablish *shalom* between this couple, Hashem is in fact affirming His name⁹.

We see practical ramifications for how important *shalom* is, even in seemingly unrelated areas. Everyone is familiar with the *mitzvah* to light *Chanukah* candles. It, besides the Pesach Seder, is probably the most practiced Jewish ritual, regardless of the person's level of observance. People take it very seriously. There's also a *mitzvah* to light Shabbos candles on Friday night. When *Chanukah* falls on Shabbos, we light both. What about someone destitute, who can only afford one of the two *mitzvos*, which should they perform? The *halacha* is¹⁰ they should light Shabbos candles, and forgo the *mitzvah* of *Chanukah*.

Furthermore, what if a person can only afford Shabbos candles, or grape juice for Kiddush, but not both? Kiddush is a biblical *mitzvah*¹¹, which should seemingly trump the Rabbinic *mitzvah* of lighting candles¹². However, in this case as well the person should light Shabbos candles, and not make Kiddush. What's the reason? We are taught that Shabbos candles serve multiple purposes, and one of them is it creates *shalom* in the home. Without lights, a person will trip over objects, blame their spouse, and get into a fight. Having candles will keep the peace¹⁰. The Rambam explains¹³ that since we see how important *shalom* is, that for its sake Hashem will even allow His name to be erased, for sure it'll come before the *mitzvah* of Kiddush.

The Rambam adds another point. In truth, the entire Torah was given to bring *shalom*¹⁴. *Shalom* is the same root as *Sheleimus*, perfection¹⁵. A person who has *shalom*, has reached a state of perfection. They're not lacking anything¹⁶. Through the Torah, a person can remove all division and defects. It's no wonder then why Hashem takes it so seriously. This is the most evident with His desire to reunite an estranged husband and wife¹⁷. May we all merit to have *shalom* in our lives. Good Shabbos

⁷ Chullin 141a; Vayikra Rabbah 9:9; Bamidbar Rabbah 11:7; Devarim Rabbah 5:15; Sifrei Bamidbar § 42; Derech Eretz Zuta Perek HaShalom; Mishnas Eliezer p. 57 - 76. See also Nedarim 66b, Shabbos 116a, Tosefta Shabbos 14:4, Yerushalmi Shabbos 16:1, Yerushalmi Sotah 1:2, Bamidbar Rabbah 9:20, 36, Sifrei Bamidbar § 16. For an interesting story relating to this about King David, see Sukkah 53b and Makkos 11a

⁸ Shabbos 10b, based on Judges 6:24; Vayikra Rabbah, Derech Eretz Zuta loc. cit.; Bamidbar Rabbah 11:7; Sifrei Bamidbar § 42

⁹ Nesivos Olam Nesiv HaShalom Chapter 1, by the Maharal. See there

¹⁰ Shabbos 23b; Mishneh Torah Hilchos Megillah VeChanukah 5:14; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 263:3

¹¹ Exodus 20:8; Sefer HaMitzvos Aseh § 155. Although, truthfully Kiddush on grape juice is Rabbinic according to the Rambam (see Mishneh Torah Hilchos Shabbos 29:1,6), as ruled by the Mishneh Berurah 272:1 § 2. Cf. Aruch HaShulchan Orach Chaim 272:2 who brings those who argue

¹² Mishneh Torah Hilchos Shabbos 5:1. Really, it's a *mitzvah midivrei kabbalah*, as it's based off of Isaiah 58:13. Cf. Sefer Yereim Mitzvah 100, who holds lighting Shabbos candles is biblical.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ See Moshav Zekeinim to Exodus 32:19, who connect the erasure of Hashem's creating peace between a couple with the idea of Moshe smashing the tablets to create peace between the Jews and their Father in Heaven

¹⁵ Sefer HaShorashim L'Radak § ש"ל; Gur Aryeh to Exodus 29:22 § 22; Nesivos Olam loc. cit.

¹⁶ Nesivos Olam loc. cit.

¹⁷ For more on the topic of *shalom*, as well as how it relates to marriage, see <https://parshaponders.com/sheva-berachos-6-shalom>