

Parsha Ponders

Nasso | June 9, 2022 | 11 Sivan 5782

The proper understanding of marriage¹

והשקה את-האשה את-מי המרים המאררים וגו'

You shall have the woman drink the cursed, 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, she 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 befall 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 was innocent or not.

This whole *Sotah* ritual demonstrates for us the importance the Torah places upon what's known as *shalom bayis*, marital harmony. A story is told about the Rav of *Teverya*, Rav Kliers, regarding *shalom bayis*, which appropriately also involves a woman drinking water. There was a man living in *Yerushalayim* who was recently married. Unfortunately, they were having a lot of arguments, and their home was full of strife. This man needed a breather from the intensity of the situation, and he decided to go on vacation to *Teverya*. While there, he was looking for a cheap place to lodge. He stumbled upon Rav Kliers, who was known for his generous hospitality. He also didn't take no for an answer.

This visitor didn't realize however what kind of lodging Rav Kliers had available. He lived in a one room apartment, which he partitioned into "sections", using curtains. Even though this was both the kitchen and the dining room, a little section was cordoned off for guests to sleep in. The newly married man tried to back out of the arrangement, but to no avail. Furthermore, he didn't get much sleep. Rav Kliers, in addition to his love for hosting guests, spent a superhuman amount of time learning Torah. He would sleep two to three hours at night, and spend the rest of the evening in the "dining room", learning.

The guest noticed that shortly before sunrise, as part of Rav Kliers' preparations to go pray, he would boil some water. Now, not everyone may remember this device, but Rav Kliers had a Primus stove. It was incredibly time consuming and complicated to get going. He had to pour the kerosene, and fiddle with the knobs, until finally the water boiled. The guest assumed Rav Kliers was planning on making himself some tea before he left to pray, but instead he brought the tea to his wife. The guest thought nothing of this, and tried to go back to sleep.

The next day, the guest noticed again that Rav Kliers made his wife tea before going to pray. This happened again the third day. When Rav Kliers returned from *shul*, the guest told the Rav that he couldn't stay any longer. "How can I burden the Rav, when his wife is so sick?" Rav Kliers was shocked. "My wife isn't sick", he insisted. The guest refused to accept the Rav's excuses, and repeated that he felt uncomfortable staying with them when it would be such a burden. Rav Kliers insisted that his wife

¹ Based on Aleinu LeShabeach to Numbers 5:24, a collection of Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein

² Numbers *loc. cit.*

³ Through קיטוי and סתירה (see Sotah 1:2), which creates a רגלים לדבר that she committed adultery. Even though she's really a ספק סוטה, we have a rule that ספק כודאי (Sotah 28a; Sifrei Bamidbar § 7)

wasn't sick, and that it was no burden at all to host this man. He then asked the guest where he got the idea that his wife was sick?

The guest exclaimed that he wasn't oblivious that Rav Kliers was making his wife tea every morning. Had it happened once or twice, he wouldn't have thought much of it. However, since it's been three days in a row, it must be that she's very sick. Rav Kliers face lit up with a big smile. This was the moment he was waiting for. He intuited exactly what his guest's issue was, and the solution to his problems. Rav Kliers told his guest that it is quite surprising that this was the conclusion he came up with. There's no other explanation for why Rav Kliers was making his wife tea? Maybe it's because he wants to show her how much she means to him!

Rav Kliers told his guest that the Arizal says⁴ to start the day by committing oneself to loving his fellow like himself. The guest may wonder how Rav Kliers fulfills this. He fulfills it with his wife! His wife is no worse than his friend, and is even better than a friend. The fact that his guest could only think that giving tea to one's wife is because she is sick, shows his attitude towards marriage is flawed. This perhaps is underlying his marital strife and preventing his *shalom bayis*.

The guest took these words to heart and committed to going home and improving. He followed Rav Klier's example, and his marital harmony was renewed. He finally had achieved *shalom bayis*, by committing to giving to his wife like he would himself.

Good Shabbos

⁴ Pri Eitz Chaim Sha'ar HaAsiya Chapter 1 (end). See Nefesh HaChaim 2:18 (end)