

## Naso Mysteries

### I. Searching for Connection

#### The Structure of Parshat Naso

1. Continued counting of the *Leviim*
2. The temporary exile of individuals afflicted with specific forms of *tuma*, ritual impurity, from various sections of the camp.
3. Laws concerning theft and false denial of financial obligation.
4. The regulations governing a *sota*, a married woman suspected of adultery.
5. The laws of a *nazir*, an individual who vows to undertake more rigorous religious observance.
6. The rules of *Birchat Kohanim*, the priestly blessing.
7. The *korbanot* of the *nessi'im*, tribal leaders.

### II. Sota: A Troubling Trial by Ordeal?

#### A. The Case

#### במדבר ה:יב-יד

דבר אל־בני ישראל ואמרת אלהם איש איש כִּי־תשטה אשתו ומעלה בו מעל  
 ושכב איש אתה שכבת־זרע ונעלם מעיני אישה ונסתרה והיא נטמאה ועד אין בה והוא לא נתפשה  
 ועבר עליו רוח־קנאה וקנא את־אשתו והוא נטמאה או־עבר עליו רוח־קנאה וקנא את־אשתו והיא לא  
 נטמאה

Any man whose wife shall go astray and commit treachery against him.

And a man lie with her carnally, and it be hidden from the eyes of her husband, and she was secluded and defiled- but there is no witness against her-and she was not forced

And the spirit of jealousy passed over him and he warned his wife and she became defiled;  
 or a spirit of jealousy passed over him and he warned his wife and she did not become defiled...

#### B. The Facts [Rambam: Hilchot Sota 1:1-2]

- A husband is seized by a "spirit of jealousy"; suspecting his wife of infidelity, based upon her actions in connection with another man.
- Confronting his wife in the presence of two reliable witnesses, the husband objects to the relationship in question. He demands, in clear terms, that his wife not seclude herself in the future with this particular man.
- Two reliable witnesses appear, testifying that, subsequent to her husband's warning, the wife secluded herself with the individual in question in a fashion that provided for the opportunity for an adulterous act. The witnesses, however, are unable to testify as to whether or not such an act actually occurred.

#### C. Recognition of the Imbalance.... Partial Corrections

רמבם: הלכות סוטה ב:ח

כל איש שבא ביאה אסורה מימיו אחר שהגדיל אין המים המאררים בודקין את אשתו.

ג:ז

באותה שעה שתמות היא ימות הנואף שהשקה על ידו בכל מקום שהוא

The husband must be above reproach in the same arena; If the adulteress is punished, the adulterer will receive the same fate...

#### D. Additional Caveats {Sources in the Rambam and Mishna}

- A husband who warns his wife in the presence of witnesses may recant his warning at any time, as long as his wife has not yet secluded herself again with the man in question.
- A woman cannot be forced to drink the waters of the Sota ceremony. If the parchment containing the Torah passage has not yet been dissolved in the water (see above), she can refuse to continue with the ritual and still proclaim her innocence. Once the parchment has been dissolved, she must admit her guilt. In either case, she is divorced without receiving her ketuba payment.
- A husband may relent at the last moment of the process and insist that his wife not drink the waters of the Sota ritual. In this case, because the husband prevented the administration of the Sota ritual, he must divorce his wife but pay her the Ketuba payment

**Summary to this point:** The Sota ritual and the steps that lead to it emerge as an action plan designed to discourage questionable behavior and, failing that, to deal with the corrosive doubt created by such behavior. No one is forced along the “Sota path.” *Each step of the way choices are offered.*

#### E. But what is the nature of the “trial” itself?

1. Ramban and most others: Exceptional case where God breaks His own “Not in Heaven” rules.
2. Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim): Risk of humiliating ritual serves as effective deterrent
3. Rabbi Moshe Chafetz (Melech Machshevet): Power of suggestion in the face of her own culpability causes the result

#### F. According to the majority approach: What could possibly cause God to break his own rules?

Shalom Bayit; challenges; never fully attained-must be sustained; destroyed by loss of trust; corrosive nature of doubt

## III: The Nazir: Sinner or Saint?

## A. The Strange Source and the Talmudic Debate

במדבר ו' ג-י"ד

וזאת תורת הנזיר ביום מלאת ימי נזרו יביא אתו אל־פתח אהל מועד  
והקריב את־קרבנו ליקוק כבש בן־שנתו תמים אחד לעלה וכבשה אחת בת־שנתה תמימה לחטאת  
ואיל־אחד תמים לשלמים

Why does the nazir bring a חטאת?

תלמוד בבלי תענית י"א

דתניא ר' אלעזר הקפר ברבי אומר מה תלמוד לומר וכפר עליו מאשר חטא על הנפש וכי באיזה נפש  
חטא זה אלא שציער עצמו מן היין  
והלא דברים קל וחומר ומה זה שלא ציער עצמו אלא מן היין נקרא חוטא המצער עצמו מכל דבר ודבר  
על אחת כמה וכמה  
ר' אלעזר אומר נקרא קדוש שנאמר קדוש יהיה גדל פרע שער ראשו ומה זה שלא ציער עצמו אלא  
מדבר אחד נקרא קדוש המצער עצמו מכל דבר על אחת כמה וכמה

Rabbi Elazar Hakapar-Verdict: Sinner

Rabbi Elazar (ben Shammua)- Verdict: Sanctified

## B. Why allowed? Controlled Safety Valve

## IV. Priestly Blessing: Why are the Kohanim Needed?

במדבר ו' כז

ושמו את־שמי על־בני ישראל ואני אברכם

....לברך את עמו ישראל באהבה

Conveyers or Creators?