

Lessons from the Sota II

This week's Parsha, Nasso, tells us the laws of the Sota. If a husband has a feeling of jealousy, and says to his wife, "do not seclude yourself [hide] with that man..."¹ It then continues with the details of what happens if, in fact, she was alone with that man.²

Aside from the simple meaning of the passages, which discuss a husband and wife, on a deeper level, it is talking about the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish People. He is, so to speak, the husband, and every one of us is the wife.

On Mount Sinai, He said, "You should not have any gods before Me"³ – that was His statement of warning to us. In a way, He is saying, "do not seclude yourself [hide] with that man."

We have to ask: How is it possible to hide from Hashem? He is everywhere, as the Zohar⁴ says, "There is no place that is void of Him," and as Hashem says, "If a man hides in hidden places, will I not see him?"⁵ So how is it possible to be hidden from Him?

The answer is that Hashem says about a person with an inflated ego, "he and I can't dwell in the same place."⁶ In a way, the big shot is hiding himself from Hashem. It is only that way because Hashem wants it to be that way, He really doesn't like a big ego. It is as if He is not there.

As the Baal Shem Tov interprets the verse as a statement, "If a man hides in hidden places, and [he is an] I,⁷ I will not see him."

The Talmud⁸ says, "A husband who took back his jealous statement, his statement is void." This only works if she hadn't secluded herself with the man prior to the husband taking back his statement. If, however, she has already secluded herself, it isn't in his power to retract it anymore.

The Talmud Yerushalmi⁹ says that he can still take it back, even if she had been secluded, "as long as the Megillah has not been erased." This was the end of the process that the Sota went through. First, they would write the passage of the Sota on parchment, which was called the Megillah, next, it would be erased in water, and then, the Sota would drink it.

There seems to be a difference of opinion between the Talmud Bavli and the Talmud Yerushalmi. How can we reconcile the two?

The Rogechever answers this dilemma.¹⁰ He says that the Yerushalmi is talking about a specific case, when the seclusion would normally be appropriate, and it is only inappropriate because of the husband's jealous statement. For example, if he said, "I don't want you to be alone with your father," which is normally allowed.¹¹

Since it is only based on his own words, he could take it back at any time.

The truth is that Hashem really sees everything and there is no hiding from Him. The only reason we are able to be hidden from Him ever is because Hashem chose it to be that way. "Every big ego is disgusting to Hashem,"¹² and "he and I can't dwell in the same place."

Since Hashem imposed this on Himself, He can always change His mind and take it back, even after the so-called seclusion.

¹ Verbiage used to activate the Sota restrictions.

² Bamidbar, Chap. 5.

³ Shemos, 20:2.

⁴ *Tikunei Zohar*, 457. Tanya, "*Shaar Hayichud V'haEmunah*," Chap. 7.

⁵ Yirmiyahu, 23:24. See Tehillim, 139:7–12.

⁶ Talmud, Sota, 5a.

⁷ I.e., he is self-centered and egocentric.

⁸ Ibid., 25a.

⁹ Tractate Sanhedrin, 8:6.

¹⁰ *Tzafnas Paneiach* on Rambam; Laws of Sota, 1:7.

¹¹ See Yerushalmi, Sota, 1:2.

¹² Mishlei, 16:5.

In the case of the Sota, she goes through a process that ends with the erasing of the Megillah. They erased the ink from the parchment using water. This is only possible with parchment and ink or the like, because they are two separate entities that became attached at some point, so they can be separated. However, if the words are engraved, then there is no erasing them.

When one studies Torah in a way that it is engraved into the person, then although he secluded himself from Hashem, by having a big ego, when he finds humility, he will immediately be forgiven. He doesn't have to go through a process, because the words can't be erased. However, when he studies Torah in the way of ink-on-parchment, then, as in the Sota's case, she had to offer a sacrifice of barley, which is animal fodder,¹³ and a very small amount of it, which is considered a poor person's offering.¹⁴ So, too, does the one who has a big ego have to realize that he is acting like an animal, which only thinks of himself, and is poor, as in, poor in judgment.

And when he goes through this process, he doesn't remain the same, but becomes much better than before¹⁵ – just as the Sota was healed, even if she wasn't previously able to have children, she now was able to have children.¹⁶

May we merit to come closer to Hashem and see a miraculous healing for all of us. And may we merit the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.¹⁷

¹³ Talmud, Sota, 14a.

¹⁴ Vayikra, 5:11.

¹⁵ See Tractate Brachos, 34b: "In the place where penitents stand, even the full-fledged righteous do not stand."

¹⁶ Bamidbar, 5:28. Talmud, Sota, 26a.

¹⁷ Based on *Likutei Sichos*, vol. 4, pp. 1032–1035.