



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 18 | Nasso | Sichah 2

The Explanations for Nazir and Sotah's Proximity:

In *parshas Naso*, the laws of the nazirite (one who vows not to consume grape products, cut his hair, or contract impurity) appear immediately before the laws of the *sotah* (the suspected adulteress). In the *Mishnah* these laws also follow each other. Tractate *Nazir* is followed by Tractate *Sotah*. *Sotah* opens with an explanation for the order:

Why is the law of a nazirite placed adjacent to the law of a *sotah*? This was done to tell you that anyone who sees a *sotah* in her disgrace as she undergoes the rite of the bitter water should renounce wine, (as it loosens inhibitions).

Rambam, however, in his Introduction to the *Mishnah*, writes that *sotah* follows tractate *Gittin* (the laws of divorce) which follows tractate *Nazir*. Rambam explains the reason for this order:

Sotah is similar in theme to *Gittin* because when a woman is suspected of adultery, the couple should be pressured to divorce.

As for the Talmud's explanation of the proximity of *Nazir* and *Sotah*, the Meiri explains that according to Rambam, in this regard, *Sotah* and *Gittin* are one and the same: They both deal with the fallout from promiscuity, which is a result of excessive intoxication.

The Questions:

- 1) If, in the *Mishnah*, *Sotah* follows *Nazir* for the same reason as it does in the Written Torah, why would the laws of *Gittin* be interposed between them in the *Mishnah*?
- 2) What is the reasoning behind the dispute whether *Sotah* follows *Nazir* immediately, as the literal reading of the *Talmud* suggests, or *Gittin*, as Rambam claims?

The Groundwork for the Explanation:

In a *Beraisa*, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael disagree whether there is an obligation for a husband to issue a warning to his wife not to seclude herself with another man. Rabbi Akiva maintains that this is an obligation; Rabbi Yishmael maintains that it is optional. (*Sotah* 3a) Rambam rules like Rabbi Akiva. (*Ishus*, 15:17)

An anonymous *Mishnah*, however, rules that it is “forbidden to issue a warning at the outset.” (*Sotah* 2a) The general halachic principle is that we follow an anonymous *Mishnah* over a *Beraisa*. How, then, can Rambam rule like Rabbi Akiva against the anonymous *Mishnah*?

Rambam understands the *Mishnah* and *Beraisa* to be discussing two different scenarios. The *Mishnah* discusses warning a woman whose behavior is suspect, whereas the *Beraisa* discusses a woman of upright behavior whose husband “warns” her in the sense of moral education, a preemptive instruction.

Rambam sides with Rabbi Akiva in the *Beraisa*, that moral instruction is an obligation. This is unrelated to the *Mishnah* that says warning is forbidden, because this concerns an already suspected woman.

Why, though, would issuing a warning be forbidden in the *Mishnah*’s scenario? Seemingly, when there are grounds to assume that adultery occurred, there should be an obligation to warn and ascertain the truth.

To explain this we need to preface with two statements of the Sages.

- 1) The *sotah* waters only expose a woman's behavior when her husband is pure from sin. If her husband engaged in an illicit relationship, even before marriage, the water would not have any effect. (*Sotah* 28a)
- 2) "Anyone who commits adultery, his wife commits adultery against him." Meaning, that if we find improper behavior in a woman, it is likely that the husband is similarly guilty of improper behavior. (*Sotah* 10a)

It follows that when a woman's behavior is suspect, it is likely that the bitter water will not reveal her impropriety because her husband's infidelity prevents the water's effectiveness. If this is the case, G-d's name will have been erased for naught, and the public will doubt and deny the miraculous properties of the *sotah* waters. Therefore, the *Mishnah* rules that it is not advisable for a (suspect) husband to warn his suspect wife. In this scenario, it would be better for the couple to divorce.

Answering the Original Questions:

We can now understand why Rambam places *Gittin* before *Sotah*. According to Rambam, the woman described in the opening of the tractate is disgraced and disreputable. The solution for this couple's strife is not to perform the *sotah* ritual, but to divorce. Thus, *Gittin* leads to *Sotah* because both tractates deal with the disgrace of disreputable behavior that leads to divorce. And both of these follow *Nazir* as a cautionary tale, warning of the dangers of intoxication.

Rashi, however, believes that the *sotah* in the opening *Mishnah* does not have a bad reputation. There is no relevance, therefore, between *Gittin* and *Sotah*. Rashi thus places *Sotah* directly after *Nazir*.

The Thematic Connection between the End and the Opening:

The tractate concludes: "Rav Nachman said... do not teach that fear of sin ceased, for there is me (who still fears sin)."

To “close” and prevent the possibility of a disgraced *sotah*, a person must possess “fear of sin.”

According to Rashi, the woman discussed at the beginning of the tractate is innocent. Of what relevance is fear of sin to her? Even though she is indeed innocent of adultery, she still placed herself in an inappropriate situation. If she feared sin, if she developed a healthy disdain for any improper behavior — incriminating or not — she would not have entered into that situation in the first place.