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Sotah Daf 20

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**Moshe Raphael ben Yehoshua (Morris Stadtmauer) o”h**  
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May the studying of the Daf Notes be a zechus for their neshamot and may their souls find peace in Gan Eden and be bound up in the Bond of life

The question was asked: How is it if she said, “I refuse to drink” through defiance and she retracts and says, “I am willing to drink”? Is it that since she said, “I refuse to drink” she admitted “I am defiled,” and having presumed herself to be defiled, she is unable to retract; or perhaps, since she says, “I am willing to drink,” she reveals that she first spoke in terror? — The question remains unanswered. (20a)

**Bitter**

The father of Shmuel said: Something bitter should be placed into the water because the verse states: *The bitter waters*. This implies that it should be bitter before the scroll is erased into them. (20a1)

**Mishnah**

If before the scroll has been erased she said: “I will not drink,” her scroll is hidden away and her *minchah* offering is scattered on the ashes. Her scroll is not valid to give to another *sotah* to drink. If the scroll has been erased and she says: “I am defiled,” the water is spilled out and her *minchah* offering is scattered on the ashes. If the scroll has been erased and she says: “I will not drink,” they force her to drink against her will.

As she finishes drinking, her face turns yellow and her eyes bulge and she becomes full of veins (*her veins swell and protrude*), and they (*the onlookers*) call out: Take her out! in order that she doesn’t cause the Temple Courtyard to become *tamei*.

If she had any merit, it would suspend her punishment. Certain merits suspend it for one year; others can suspend it for two years; and others suspend it for three years. From here Ben Azzai said: A man is required to teach his daughter Torah, so that if she drinks, she will know that her merits may suspend it for her. Rabbi Eliezer says: Whoever teaches his daughter Torah has taught her lewdness. Rabbi Yehoshua says: A woman prefers one *kav* and lewdness rather than nine *kavs* and abstinence.

He used to say: A foolish pious person, a cunning evildoer, a self-righteous woman and the blows of the self-righteous - these ruin the world. (20a1 – 20a3)

**Kankantom**

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel: Rabbi Meir said: When I studied by Rabbi Akiva, he would put *kankantom*, an ingredient that makes the ink indelible, into the ink that he used for writing a Sefer Torah. Rabbi Akiva did not object to this practice. When I went to study by Rabbi Yishmael, Rabbi Yishmael told me to be meticulous as a scribe, because a scribe performs the work of Heaven, and adding or subtracting one letter could cause the destruction of the whole world. [*This means to say that people could be led astray if the words of the Torah are not written entirely correct.*] I told Rabbi Yishmael that I put *kankantom* in the ink. Rabbi Yishmael objected to this, because regarding the writing that is necessary for a *sotah*, the Torah states ... *umachah ... and he shall erase...* and we derive from this that the writing has to be of an ink that is capable of being erased. [*Kankantom, which makes the ink indelible, cannot be used.*]



The *Gemora* asks: What did he [Rabbi Yishmael] say to him [Rabbi Meir] and what did he [Rabbi Meir] reply to him [Rabbi Yishmael]?

The *Gemora* explains the meaning of Rabbi Meir's statement: Rabbi Meir informed Rabbi Yishmael that he is an expert in spelling every word correctly, so he would not err in adding or subtracting letters, but Rabbi Meir was concerned about a fly landing on the crown of the letter *dalet* and erase the crown, causing it to look like the letter *reish*. For this reason, Rabbi Meir told Rabbi Yishmael that he puts *kankantom* in the ink (*so even if the ink becomes rubbed out, some of the original writing would still exist, and one will not confuse the letter dalet for the letter reish*).

The *Gemora* asks: Is this so? But we learned in a *Baraisa*: Rabbi Meir said: When I studied by Rabbi Yishmael, I put *kankantom* in the ink, and he did not object. However, when I went to study by Rabbi Akiva, he forbade me to do so.

The *Gemora* explains its question: There is an inconsistency regarding the order of teachers under whom Rabbi Meir studied (*Shmuel cited a Baraisa which stated that Rabbi Meir initially studied by Rabbi Akiva and then by Rabbi Yishmael; the second Baraisa states exactly the opposite*) and there is an inconsistency regarding who forbade it (*Shmuel cited a Baraisa which stated that Rabbi Yishmael forbade the placing of kankantom into the ink; the second Baraisa states that it was Rabbi Akiva who forbade it*)!?

The *Gemora* answers: It is understandable that regarding the inconsistency pertaining to the order of teachers under whom Rabbi Meir studied – that is not difficult, for originally, Rabbi Meir studied by Rabbi Akiva, but Rabbi Meir was not able to ascertain his true opinion (*whether Rabbi Akiva was stating the actual halachah or if he was*

*stating the opposite of the halachah with the intent of analyzing the possible rationale for that position*). Rabbi Meir then went to study by Rabbi Yishmael, and after learning the traditions from Rabbi Yishmael, Rabbi Meir went back to study and analyze the laws under Rabbi Akiva. However, the question regarding who forbade the placing of the *kankantom* into the ink is indeed a difficulty. (20a3 – 20a4)

#### **Written Specifically for her**

The *Gemora* cites a *Baraisa*: Rabbi Yehudah said: Rabbi Meir used to say: For all writing of Scripture, one may place *kankantom* in the ink used for writing, except for *Parashas Sotah* (*the portion in the Torah that discusses the details of the suspected adulteress*). Rabbi Yaakov, however, maintains that Rabbi Meir said that for all writing of Scripture (*including Parashas Sotah*) one may place *kankantom* in the ink used for writing, except for the portion of *Parashas Sotah* that was written specifically for use in the Bais HaMikdash.

What is the difference between them? Rabbi Yirmiyah states that the difference between the version of Rabbi Yehudah and the version of Rabbi Yaakov is using a regular Torah scroll for the *sotah* procedure. [*According to Rabbi Yehudah, the verses of Parasha Sotah that are written in the Torah scroll itself can be used to erase in the bitter waters that the Sotah is given to drink. This portion cannot be written in indelible ink, since the verses must be erased into the water. According to the version of Rabbi Yaakov, however, the verses of Parashas Sotah must be written specifically for the Sotah, so indelible ink cannot be used for the Parashas Sotah, as the verses must dissolve in the water. Indelible ink can be used, however, for any part of a Torah scroll, because according to the version of Rabbi Yaakov, a Torah scroll was not used for the Parashas Sotah.*]

The *Gemora* compares this *Tannaic* argument with a different one. For we learned in a *Baraisa*: The *sotah* scroll

cannot be used for a different *sotah*. [Seemingly, he would agree with Rabbi Yaakov that a Torah scroll is not valid to be used for a *sotah*, since it was not written for that particular *sotah*.] Rabbi Achai bar Yoshiyah said: It may be used for another *sotah*. [He would agree with Rabbi Yehudah that a Torah scroll may be used for a *sotah* to drink, for it does not have to be written specifically for that particular woman.]

Rav Pappa disagrees: Perhaps the *Tanna Kamma* (of the second *Baraisa*) holds that only there, where the scroll was written for one specific woman, it cannot be redesignated to be used for a different woman; however, a Torah scroll may be used, for it was not written for any particular woman.

Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak suggests another reason (*why the two arguments are not parallel*): Perhaps Rabbi Achai bar Yoshiyah only said that a scroll which was written for one *sotah* can be used for another because it was written for the purpose of a curse; however, a Torah scroll, which was written to study from, cannot be used for a *sotah*.

The *Gemora* asks: Does Rabbi Achai bar Yoshiyah not hold by the following *Mishnah*: If one writes a bill of divorce with the intention to divorce his wife, and then he changed his mind and decided that he will not divorce her, and a resident of the same city met him and said, “Your name and my name are the same, and your wife’s name and my wife’s name are the same, so let me use this bill of divorce,” the bill of divorce is invalid for the second man.

The *Gemora* answers: There it is because the Torah states *vekasav lah*, and he shall write unto her, and this teaches that the bill of divorce must be written specifically for her.

The *Gemora* asks: But here it says *veasah lah*, and he shall do for her?

The *Gemora* answers: The verse only means that the erasing of the scroll must be for that particular *sotah*. (20a4 – 20b2)

The *Mishnah* had stated: She had scarcely finished drinking when her face etc. Whose [teaching] is this? — It is Rabbi Shimon's, because he said that [the Kohen] sacrifices her minchah offering and then gives her to drink, since the water does not affect her so long as her minchah offering is not sacrificed, as it is written: A minchah offering of remembrance, bringing iniquity to remembrance. But cite the continuation [of the *Mishnah*]: If she possessed a merit, it [causes the water] to suspend its effect upon her — this accords with the view of the Rabbis; because if [it be supposed that it accords with the view of] Rabbi Shimon, behold he has declared: Merit does not cause the water of bitterness to suspend its effect! — Rav Chisda said: Whose is it, then? It is Rabbi Akiva's, because he said: He sacrifices her minchah offering and then gives her to drink, and on the question of [the effect of] merit he agrees with the Rabbis. (20b2)

### **Take her Out!**

The *Mishnah* stated: And they (*the onlookers*) call out: Take her out! in order that she doesn’t cause the Temple Courtyard to become *tamei*.

What is the reason for this? It would seem that we are concerned that perhaps she will die. Does this mean to say that a corpse is forbidden in the Levite camp? But we did not learn like that in a *Baraisa*: One who is *tamei* with corpse *tumah* is allowed to enter the Levite camp. And even a corpse itself is allowed to be brought in, as it is written: *And Moshe brought the bones of Yosef with him*. The words “with him” mean that they were within his boundary (*in the Levite camp, the place where Moshe lived*).

Abaye answers: We are concerned that she will menstruate (*because she is afraid of the bitter waters; and a niddah is forbidden in the Levite camp*).

Does this mean that fright loosens a woman? Yes! The *Gemora* cites proof for this from the Megillah, where it is written: *And the Queen became sorely afraid*. Rav explained this to mean that she began to menstruate (*we see that fright can lead to menstruation*).

The *Gemora* asks: But we have learned in a *Mishnah* that trembling can hold back a woman from menstruating!

The *Gemora* answers: Fear holds it back, but a sudden fright can cause a woman to menstruate prematurely. (20b2 – 20b3)

### **Delaying the Punishment**

The *Mishnah* had stated: If she had any merit, it would suspend her punishment. Certain merits suspend it for one year; others can suspend it for two years; and others suspend it for three years.

The *Gemora* asks: Who is our *Mishnah* going according to? It cannot be Abba Yosi ben Chanan, nor Rabbi Elozar ben Yitzchak of Kefar Darom, nor Rabbi Yishmael! For it has been taught in the following *Baraisa*: If she possesses a merit, it can suspend the punishment for three months, which is the amount of time for a pregnancy to become recognizable. These are the words of Abba Yosi ben Chanan. Rabbi Elozar ben Yitzchak of Kefar Darom says: It can prevent the punishment from taking effect for nine months, as it is stated: Then she shall be free and shall conceive seed, and elsewhere it declares: A seed shall serve him, it shall be related — i.e., a seed which is fit to be related. Rabbi Yishmael says: For twelve months, and although there is no proof of this, yet there is some indication; because it is written: Nevertheless, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you, and redeem your sins with charity, and your iniquities with graciousness to the

poor, if there may be a lengthening of your tranquility, and it is written: All this came upon King Nevuchadnezzar, and it is written: At the end of twelve months! — The *Gemora* answers: [The teaching is] certainly Rabbi Yishmael's and he found a verse which mentions [the period] and repeats it; for it is written: Thus said Hashem: For three transgressions of Edom. - But why [was it said] that although there is no proof of this, yet there is some indication? — It may be different with idolaters upon whom [God] does not execute judgment immediately. (20b3 – 21a1)

### **INSIGHTS TO THE DAF**

#### **Hidden Away**

The *Mishnah* had stated: If before the scroll has been erased she said: "I will not drink," her scroll is hidden away and her *minchah* offering is scattered on the ashes.

Rashi learns that they are hidden away at the sides of the Sanctuary, for all sacred writings which cannot be used any longer are hidden away in a place that they will not be treated with disrespect.

In the sefer Torah Haohel, he asks, why did the *sotah* scroll have to be hidden away? Couldn't they have given it to a child in order for him to learn the portion in the Torah dealing with the *sotah*?

He answers that since it was written with sanctity, and it contains the Name of Hashem, they were concerned that the children will not treat the scroll with the proper respect, and therefore it was required to be hidden away.

Furthermore, he says that it would be degrading for the woman, for everyone would say that this is the scroll that was prepared for So-and-So the *sotah*.

Tosfos cites a Yerushalmi (*and some understand that this is what Rashi means as well*) that the scroll is hidden away

in the hinges of the Sanctuary door. The opening and closing of the door will cause that it will be worn away.

The Minchas Kenaos asks: How would it be permitted to erase Hashem's Name by opening and closing the door? The *Gemora* Makkos (22a) rules that one who erases Hashem's Name receives lashes! Since the opening and closing of the door will certainly result in the erasure of His Name, it should be regarded as a "direct erasing," and should be forbidden!

The Ridvaz answers: Since the Name of Hashem was written on this scroll with the intention that it will be erased (*in the bitter waters*), there is no prohibition to erase this Name. It is not regarded as a permanent inscription, and therefore it would be permitted to erase it.

## DAILY MASHAL

### *Merits*

The *Mishnah* had stated: If she had any merit, it would suspend her punishment. Certain merits suspend it for one year; others can suspend it for two years; and others suspend it for three years.

Ben Yehoyadah explains: There are certain *mitzvos* that can only be fulfilled during the day. If the woman performed such a *mitzvah*, the merit can delay her punishment for one year, i.e. twelve months, which corresponds to the twelve hours of the day. There are some *mitzvos*, such as the reading of the Megillah, which apply by day and by night. Performance of such a *mitzvah* can postpone her punishment for two years, twenty-four months, corresponding to the twenty-four hours of the day and night. There are *mitzvos* that are applicable for a day, night and a day, such as the *mitzvah* of fasting on *Yom Kippur*. The *Gemora* tells us that one who eats on the ninth day is regarded as if he fasted on the ninth and the tenth (*of Tishrei*). According to many poskim, the *mitzvah*

of eating on *Erev Yom Kippur* can only be fulfilled during the day; not the night before. The *mitzvah* of *Shabbos* is also a *mitzvah* which comprises thirty-six hours, since there is a *mitzvah* to prepare for *Shabbos* on Friday. If the woman performed these *mitzvos*, the merits can hold back her punishment for thirty-six months, three years.