

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Naso

Numbers 4:21 - 7:89

Torah Reading for Week of June 8-14, 2003

The Parshah of Naso opens with G-d's instruction to Moses to "raise the heads" (the Torah's idiom for "take a count") of the Levite families of Gershon, who were charged with the task of transporting the doorway-curtains, tent-coverings and tapestries of the Tabernacle (the portable Sanctuary which the children of Israel erected in their encampments in the desert). The Gershonites were one of the three Levite clans, which carried the names of Levi's three sons: Gershon, Kehat and Merrari.

The previous Parshah of Bamidbar recorded the figures for the census taken of all Levite males from the age of one month and up (altogether, they numbered 22,300). In Naso, a second count is taken, of those who will be doing the actual work of transporting the Sanctuary—the Levite men between the ages of 30 and 50.

The results of this census were: Kehat — 2,750; Gershon —

2,630; Merrari — 3,200. Total of the Levite "work force": 8,580.80.

Having thus concluded its census of the families and tribes of Israel and its designation of their camping places around the Sanctuary, the Torah now commands to "Send out of the camp all who are afflicted with *tzaraat*, who are contaminated by a bodily discharge, and those contaminated by contact with the dead" until such time as they are cleansed of their ritual impurity.

The Wayward Wife

The "Sotah" is a woman who acts in a way that makes her strongly suspect of adultery (i.e., she is warned by her husband, in front of witnesses, regarding her relations with another man, and subsequently "hides herself" with that man, again before witnesses). The Torah instructs that she be tested with "bitter waters":

If a man's wife go astray, and commit a betrayal against him... and the spirit of jealousy come upon him...

Then shall the man bring his wife to the priest. And he shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense on it, for it is an offering of jealousy, an offering bringing iniquity to remembrance...

Commentary

IF A MAN'S WIFE GO ASTRAY (5:12)

A person does not sin unless a spirit of folly enters into him. (The word the Torah uses for the Sotah's "going astray", *shetut*, also means "folly" and "insanity".)

(Talmud, Sotah 3a)

AND HE SHALL BRING HER OFFERING FOR HER, THE TENTH PART OF AN EFAH OF BARLEY MEAL (5:15)

She acted like an animal, therefore her offering is of animal feed.

(Talmud, Sotah 14b)

Every Jew, whether righteous or wicked, has two souls... One soul... clothes itself in the person's blood to animate the body [and is the source of its egocentric drives and desires]... and the second soul of a Jew is literally a part of G-d above [and is the source of the person's striving to unite with G-d]...

The body is called a "small city": as two kings wage war over a city, each wishing to capture it and rule over it, that is to say, to govern its inhabitants according to his will so that they obey him in all that he decrees for them, so do the two souls the G-dly [soul] and the vitalizing animal [soul] that derives from *kelipah*, wage war against each other over the body and all its organs and limbs.

The desire and will of the G-dly soul is that it alone should rule over the

person and direct him, and that all his limbs should obey it and surrender themselves completely to it and become a vehicle for it, and serve as a vehicle for its ten faculties [of intellect and emotion] and three "garments" [thought, speech and action]... and the entire body should be permeated with them alone, to the exclusion of any alien influence, G-d forbid... While the animal soul desires the very opposite...

(Tanya)

AND THE PRIEST SHALL WRITE THESE OATHS IN A SCROLL, AND HE SHALL BLOT THEM OUT WITH THE BITTER WATER (5:23)

Great is peace! For to make peace between husband and wife, the Torah instructs that the name of G-d, written in holiness, should be blotted out in water (the text of the oath administered to the Sotah include the Divine name).

(Talmud, Chulin 141a)

AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS: IF THE WOMAN HAD BEEN DEFILED... HER BELLY SHALL SWELL, AND HER THIGH SHALL FALL AWAY (5:27)

Just as the waters test her, they also test him (i.e., if she is guilty, the same happens to the adulterer).

(Talmud, Sotah 27b)

AND IF THE WOMAN HAD NOT BEEN DEFILED, BUT BE CLEAN; THEN SHE SHALL BE CLEANSED, AND SHALL CONCEIVE SEED (5:28)

G-d compensates her for her humiliation. If she was barren, she will now conceive; if she gave birth painfully, she will now give birth with

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And the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and of the earth that is on the floor of the Tabernacle shall the priest take, and put it into the water.

And the priest shall set the woman before G-d, and loosen the hair of the woman's head, and put the offering of memorial in her hands...

The Sotah is then administered the following oath:

"If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness with another instead of your husband, you shall be clean of these bitter accursed waters.

"But if you have gone astray to another instead of your husband, and if you have been defiled... G-d shall set you as a curse and an oath among your people.... This accursed

water shall go into your bowels, to make your belly to swell and your thigh to fall away."

And the woman shall say: "Amen, amen."

The oath is then inscribed in a parchment scroll, which is then placed in the "bitter waters" until the writing is erased. The wayward wife is then given the water to drink.

And it shall come to pass: if the woman had been defiled and had committed a betrayal against her husband, the accursed waters shall enter into her, and become bitter; and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall fall away, and the woman shall be a curse among her people.

And if the woman had not been defiled, but be clean; then she shall be cleansed, and shall conceive seed.

The Nazir

A Nazir is a man or woman who, out of a desire to "separate themselves to G-d," takes a vow of *nezirut* ("abstinence") from certain worldly pleasures and involvements, either for a set period of time or for their entire lifetime. One who takes this vow is forbidden to drink wine, cut his or her hair, or to become *tameh* (ritually impure) through contact with a dead body—even for a close relative—for the duration of the *nezirut*.

filth.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

AND MAKE ATONEMENT FOR HIM, FOR THAT HE SINNED BY HIS SOUL (6:11)

Whoever fasts is termed a sinner... For it has been taught: ... What is the Torah referring to when it says, "And make atonement for him, for that he sinned by his soul." Against which soul did he sin? That he denied himself wine. Now, if this man who denied himself wine only is termed "sinner", how much more so he who denies himself the enjoyment of ever so many things!

Rabbi Eleazar says: He is termed holy. For it is written (ibid., v. 5), "He shall be holy, he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long." Now, if this man who denied himself wine only is termed "holy", how much more so he who denies himself the enjoyment of ever so many things!

(Talmud, Taanit 11a)

Simon the Just said: In the whole of my life, I never ate of the guilt-offering of a Nazir, except for in one instance. There was this man who came to me from the South, had beautiful eyes and handsome features with his locks heaped into curls. I asked him: "Why, my son, did you resolve to destroy such beautiful hair?" He answered: "In my native town, I was my father's shepherd, and, on going down to draw water from the well, I saw my reflection [in its waters]. My heart leaped within me and my evil inclination assailed me, seeking to compass my ruin, and so I said to it: 'Evil one! Why do you plume yourself over on a world that is not your own? For your end is but worms and maggots. I

Commentary

ease; if she used to give birth to unattractive children, she will now give birth to beautiful children...

(Jerusalem Talmud, Sotah 3:4)

HE SHALL EAT NOTHING THAT IS MADE OF THE GRAPE VINE, FROM THE SEEDS TO THE SKIN (6:4)

Though the vine be supported by straight reeds and forked reeds, it cannot stand up under the weight of the wine in the grapes. So if wine's own mother cannot bear its burden, how then can you?

(Midrash Rabbah)

When Noah took to planting, Satan came and stood before him and said to him: "What are you planting?" Said he: "A vineyard." Said Satan to him: "What is its nature?" Said he: "Its fruits are sweet, whether moist or dry, and one makes from them wine which brings joy to the heart." Said Satan to Noah: "Do you desire that we should plant it together, you and I?" Said Noah: "Yes."

What did Satan do? He brought a lamb and slaughtered it over the vine; then he brought a lion, and slaughtered it over it; then he brought a monkey, and slaughtered it over it; then he brought a swine, and slaughtered it over it; and he watered the vine with their blood. Thus he alluded to Noah: When a person drinks one cup, he is like a lamb, modest and meek. When he drinks two cups, he becomes mighty as a lion and begins to speak with pride, saying: Who compares with me! As soon as he drinks three or four cups he becomes a monkey, dancing and frolicking and profaning his mouth, and knowing not what he does. When he becomes drunk, he becomes a pig, dirtied by mud and wallowing in

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The prohibition against wine is all-encompassing:

He shall abstain from wine and wine-brandy, and shall drink no vinegar... nor shall he drink any beverage of grapes, nor eat grapes, moist or dried.... He shall eat nothing that is made of the grape vine, from the seeds to the skin.

At the conclusion of the period of *nezirut*, the Nazir brings a series of offerings—a male lamb as an “ascending offering,” an ewe lamb as a “sin offering,” and a ram as a “peace offering” (for the definitions of the different types of offerings see summary for the [Parshah of Vayikra](#) </article.asp?AID=39682>). The Nazir’s hair, which had grown freely throughout the *nezirut*, is now completely shorn and burned in the fire beneath the peace offering.

The Priestly Blessing

Commentary

swear that I shall shear these locks to the glory of Heaven!” Then I rose, and kissed him upon his head. and said to him: “Such as you, may there be many Nazirites in Israel. Of one such as yourself does the verse (Numbers 6:2) say: ‘A man or a woman who shall pronounce a special vow of a Nazir, to consecrate themselves to G-d.’”

(Talmud, Nazir 4b; Sifri)

THIS IS THE LAW OF THE NAZIR, ON THE DAY THAT THE DAYS OF HIS ABSTENTION ARE COMPLETED... (6:13)

Why does the Torah section dealing with the laws of the Nazir follow immediately after the section dealing with the laws of the Sotah? To tell you that whoever sees a Sotah’s ruin should forswear wine.

(Rashi)

Once, in the early days of Chassidism, a learned Jew happened upon a farbrengen (a Chassidic gathering). Taking in the sight of half-empty vodka bottles on the table, of Jews singing and dancing instead of studying Torah, he cried: “Jews! The Holy Temple is in ruins, Israel is in exile, and you dance and drink?!”

Present at the farbrengen was Rabbi Dovid Ferkus, a senior disciple of the Baal Shem Tov. “I have a question for you,” said Rabbi Dovid to the visitor. “In one place, Rashi writes that a Nazir’s vow to abstain from wine is an appropriate reaction for one who witnesses human susceptibility to corruption by physical appetites. But only a few verses later, Rashi quotes the Talmudic opinion which regards the Nazir’s

And G-d spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying: Thus shall you bless the children of Israel; say to them:

“May G-d bless you and keep you. May G-d make His face shine upon you, and give you grace. May G-d lift up His face to you and give you peace.”

And they shall set My name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.

Wagons and Oxen

The Torah now resumes its account (which it left off in the 10th chapter of Leviticus, back in the Parshah of Shemini) of the dedication of the Sanctuary on the 1st of Nissan, one year (less two weeks) after the Exodus.

And it came to pass on the day that Moses had finished setting up the Tabernacle, and had anointed and sanctified it, and all its vessels, and the altar and all its vessels...

The nesi'im of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes... approached; and they brought their offering before G-d

The first gift brought by the tribal heads was “six covered wagons and twelve oxen—a wagon for two *nessi'im*, and an

abstinence as a sin. Which is it? Is drinking wine a positive or a negative thing to do?

“I’ll tell you the difference between the two cases,” continued Rabbi Dovid. “The first statement by Rashi is addressed to one who ‘sees a Sotah’s ruin.’ A person who is capable of seeing the negative in a fellow Jew, had better not drink wine. Wine will agitate his heart, and he’ll probably be roused to discover more failings and deficiencies in his fellows. But someone who is blessed with the ability to see only the good in his fellow for him to avoid getting together with other Jews for a lechaim! is nothing less than sinful. An infusion of wine into his heart will stimulate it to uncover the hidden good in the hearts of his fellows.”

(Reshimat Devarim)

MAY G-D BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU (6:24)

With G-d’s blessing comes His protection of the blessing. A mortal king has a servant in Syria while he himself lives in Rome. The king sends for him. He sets out and comes to him. He gives him a hundred pounds of gold. He packs it up and sets out on his journey. Robbers fall upon him and take away all that he had given him and all that he had with him... But when G-d blesses with riches, He also guards them from robbers.

(Midrash Rabbah)

MAY G-D MAKE HIS FACE SHINE UPON YOU, AND GIVE YOU GRACE (6:25)

He will give you the wisdom to be gracious to each other and merciful

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ox by each one of them." G-d instructs Moses to accept this gift, and that the wagons and oxen should be used by the Levites to transport the Sanctuary.

Two wagons and four oxen were given to the Gershonites, who transported the Sanctuary's tent-coverings and tapestries. The remaining four wagons and eight oxen were given to the Levite families of Merrari, who transported the Sanctuary's 48 wall panels, 167 foundation sockets, 69 posts and other structural components. "But to the sons of Kehat he gave none; because the service of the most holy belonged to them, they bore [the Sanctuary's vessels] on their shoulders."

Commentary

to each other.

(Midrash Rabbah)

MAY G-D LIFT UP HIS FACE TO YOU (6:26)

He will turn His face towards you; for it is not the same thing for a man to greet his neighbor while looking him in the face as to greet him with his head turned to one side.

(Midrash Rabbah)

...AND GIVE YOU PEACE (6:26)

If there is no peace, there is nothing.

(Torat Kohanim)

AND THEY SHALL SET MY NAME UPON THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL; AND I WILL BLESS THEM (6:27)

I would have thought that if the Kohanim desire to bless Israel, then Israel is blessed, but if they do not they are not; comes the verse to tell me: "I will bless them." In either case, says G-d, I will bless them from heaven.

The Kohanim bless Israel, but who blesses the Kohanim? Comes the verse to tell me: "I will bless them."

(Sifri Zuta)

The one who offered his offering on the first day was Nachshon the son of Aminadav, of the tribe of Judah. And his offering was: One silver dish, weighing 130 shekels. One silver bowl of 70 shekels... On the second day offered Nethanel the son of Tzuar, of the tribe of Issachar. And his offering was: One silver dish, weighing 130 shekels. One silver bowl of 70 shekels... (7:12-23)

Twelve Times Thirty-Five

In addition, each *nassi* brought a separate offering of his own as "a dedication of the altar." Regarding these offerings, G-d instructed: "One *nassi* each day, one *nassi* each day, shall bring near their offering for the dedication of the altar."

And he that offered his offering the first day was Nachshon the son of Aminadav, of the tribe of Judah.

And his offering was: One silver dish, the weight of which was a hundred and thirty shekel, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meal offering. One spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense. One young bullock, one ram, one yearling lamb, for a burnt offering. One kid of the goats for a sin offering. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year. This was the offering of Nachshon the son of Aminadav.

The Torah is very mincing with words: many a complex chapter of Torah law is derived from a choice of context, a turn of language, even an extra letter. Yet in our Parshah, the Torah seemingly "squanders" dozens of verses by itemizing the gifts brought by the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel on the occasion of the inauguration of the Sanctuary. Each tribe brought its offering on a different day, but the gifts they each brought were identical in every respect, down to the weight of the silver plate and the age of the five lambs. Nevertheless, the Torah recounts each tribe's gift separately, repeating the 35-item list twelve times in succession.

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 13 & 14) implies that while the twelve tribes made identical offerings, each experienced the event in a different manner. Each of the 35 items in the offering symbolized something—a personality or event in Jewish history, or a concept in Jewish faith or practice—but to each tribe, they symbolized different things, relating to that tribe's role. For the twelve tribes represent the various vocations amongst the people of Israel—Judah produced Israel's kings, leaders and legislators; Issachar its scholars; Zebulun its seafarers and merchants, and so on. All conform to the same Divinely ordained guidelines, all order their lives by the same Torah; yet each flavors the very same deeds with his individual nature and approach.

Often, we tend to see a tension between conformity and creativity, between tradition and innovation. On the one hand, we recognize the bedrock of absolutes upon which a meaningful existence must rest, the time-tested truths which transcend cultures and generations; on the other, we are faced with the powerful drive to create, to personalize, to grow and soar with our individualized talents and tools.

Our daily prayers, for example, follow the basic text instituted by the prophets and sages of the Great Assembly more than 2,400 years ago; as such, their content and wording optimally express the manner in which man relates to G-d. Yet how is the individual in man to be satisfied with a common formula for every person?

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The same gift was brought the next day, by Nethanel the son of Zu'ar, prince of the tribe of Issachar:

One silver dish, the weight of which was a hundred and thirty shekel, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meal offering. One spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense. One young bullock, one ram, one yearling lamb, for a burnt offering. One kid of the goats for a sin offering. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year. This was the offering of Nethanel the son of Zu'ar.

The Torah then proceeds to itemize each tribe's gift separately, although each *nassi* brought the very same 35 items as his offering.

After listing the twelve tribes' offerings on the first twelve days of Nissan, the Torah summarizes:

This was the dedication of the altar, in the day when it was anointed, by the princes of Israel: twelve dishes of silver, twelve silver bowls, twelve spoons of gold... All the silver vessels weighed two thousand four hundred shekels... all the gold of the spoons was a hundred and twenty shekels.

All the oxen for the burnt offerings were twelve bullocks, the rams twelve, the yearling lambs twelve, with their meal offering. The kids of the goats for sin offerings twelve. And all the oxen for the sacrifice of the peace offerings were twenty four bullocks, the rams sixty, the he goats sixty, the yearling lambs sixty.

"And when Moses would go into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, then he heard the voice speaking to him from off the covering that was upon the Ark of Testimony, from between the two cherubim; and it spoke to him."

Commentary

Is monotony the price we must pay for perfection? Does creativity compromise truth? Not so, say the 72 "repetitious" verses in our Parshah. An entire nation, including individuals of every conceivable character and calling, can do the very same deed, down to every last detail, and still imbue them with their uniquely personal input. Even as they relate to the ultimate common denominator of their bond with G-d, and they each bring to the experience the richness of their own creative souls.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND WHEN MOSES WOULD ENTER THE SANCTUARY TO SPEAK WITH [G-D], HE WOULD HEAR THE VOICE SPEAKING TO HIM FROM ABOVE THE COVER OF THE ARK OF TESTIMONY... AND IT SPOKE TO HIM (7:89)

One might think that this (the fact that only Moses heard the voice of G-d) was because the voice was low. So the verse stresses that it was the voice — the same voice that spoke to him at Sinai. But when it reached the doorway it stopped, and did not extend outside of the Sanctuary.

(Rashi)

A basic tenet of the Jewish faith is that man has been granted the freedom to choose between good and evil, between adherence to his divinely ordained mission in life and rebellion against, or even denial of, his Creator. As Maimonides writes, "Were G-d to decree that a person be righteous or wicked, of if there were to exist something in the essence of a person's nature which would compel him toward a specific path, a

specific conviction, a specific character trait or a specific deed...how could G-d command us through the prophets 'do this' and 'do not do this'...? What place would the entire Torah have? And by what measure of justice would G-d punish the wicked and reward the righteous...?"

This is the deeper significance of the "short stop" made by the divine voice at the doorway of the Sanctuary. At Sinai, the words "I Am G-d your G-d" resounded throughout the universe, permeating every creature and creation. At that moment, there was no possibility of doubt in G-d's reality or of nonconformity to His will. But then the world fell silent, and the voice retreated to hover over the "Ark of Testimony" that contains G-d's Torah and confine itself to the four walls of the Sanctuary that houses it.

The volume was not lowered—the voice is no less infinite and omnipotent than it was at Sinai. One who enters the Sanctuary hears a voice that penetrates and permeates all, a voice that knows no bounds or equivocations. But one can choose to remain outside of the domain of Torah, to deny himself the knowledge and the way of life in which G-d makes Himself heard. One can choose to remain outside, in the field of G-d's self-imposed silence.

It is this choice that creates the challenge of life, making our every moral victory a true and significant achievement.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

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From the Chassidic Masters

THE HIDING WIFE

The Prophets speak of the bond between G-d and Israel as a marriage, and of Israel's sins as a wife's betrayal of her husband. Following this model, the sages of the Talmud see the Sotah — the "wayward wife" discussed in our Parshah — as the prototype of all transgression of the Divine will. The Chassidic masters further investigate this prototype, finding in the particulars of the laws of Sotah insight into the deeper significance of transgression.

The Sotah is not a woman who is known to have actually committed adultery, but rather one whose behavior makes her suspect of having done so. Her faithfulness to her husband must therefore be established before the marriage relationship can be resumed.

A woman becomes a Sotah through a two-stage process: "jealousy" (*kinui*) and "hiding" (*setirah*). The first stage occurs when a husband suspects his wife of an improper relationship with another man and warns her, before two witnesses, not to be found alone with that individual. If the woman disregards this warning and proceeds to seclude herself with this person, she becomes a Sotah, forbidden to live with her husband unless she agrees to be tested with the "bitter waters." The woman is warned that if she has indeed committed adultery, the "bitter waters" will kill her; if, however, she has not actually been unfaithful, the drinking of these waters exonerates her completely. In fact, the Torah promises that, having subjected herself to this ordeal, her marriage will now be even more rewarding and fruitful than before her "going astray."

As applied to the marriage between G-d and His people:

Israel can never truly betray her G-d; at worst, she can only be as a Sotah, a wife whose behavior gives the *appearance* of unfaithfulness and causes a temporary rift between herself and her husband. The process by which this happens was begun at Mount Sinai, where G-d, like a "jealous" husband, warned:

"Do not have any other gods before Me." But no matter how far the Jewish soul strays, she never truly gives herself to these "other gods"; she is only "hiding" from G-d, indulging the illusion that there exists a dimension of reality that is outside of G-d's all-pervading presence and providence.

Even this she can do only because G-d has "set her up" to it by His "jealousy." In the case of the Sotah, simply secluding herself with another man does not make her a "wayward wife" — unless such seclusion has been preceded by a warning from her husband; in other words, it is the husband's "jealousy" which makes her act a betrayal, not the act in and of itself. By the same token, a soul's "hiding herself" from G-d is possible only because G-d has allowed for this possibility by proclaiming "Do not have any other gods before Me," thereby giving credence to the illusion that there can be anything other. Were it not for this Divine contrivance, sin — that is, a denial of the Divine reality — would not be possible.

To continue the analogy: When the Jewish people act as a Sotah, they are tested with the bitter waters of *galut* (thus: "Because of our sins we were exiled from our land"). Indeed, two thousand years of exile have proven that, despite all appearances, the Jewish soul is inseparable from her G-d. The Jew may be persecuted for centuries, may assimilate for generations, but ultimately there comes a moment of truth, a moment which lays bare the question of who and what we are stripped of all distortion and self-delusion, and our innate faithfulness to G-d comes to light.

And like the bitter waters of the Sotah, *galut* is more than just a test. It is a "descent for the sake of ascent," a crisis in the marriage which ultimately deepens and enhances it by unearthing deep wells of loyalty and commitment which remain untapped in an unchallenged relationship. The trials of *galut* call forth the quintessential powers of the Jewish soul, intensifying the bond between G-d and His people.

EARTHEN VESSEL

And G-d spoke to Moses, saying: A man whose wife shall stray and commit a betrayal against him... that man shall bring his wife to the Kohen... And the Kohen shall take holy water in an earthen vessel...

Numbers 5:11-23

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From the Chassidic Masters

Life, as described by the Kabbalists, is a marriage of body and soul. The soul — the active, vital force in the relationship — is its “male” component. The body — the vessel that receives the soul and channels and focuses its energies — is the “female” element in the relationship.

Common wisdom has it that spirit is loftier than matter and the soul superior to the body. Indeed, the soul of man maintains a perpetual awareness of its Creator and Source, while the body, susceptible to the enticements of the material, is often the culprit in man’s tendency to forget, stray and betray.

But this is a “male” vision of life. There also exists another perspective on reality — a perspective in which passivity is superior to activity, being is greater than doing, and earthiness is truer than abstraction. A perspective in which the body is not no more than, at best, a servant of the soul (and at worst, its antagonist), but is itself a matrix of the divine.

Our sages tell us that there will come a time when the supremacy of the female will come to light. A time when the physical will equal and surpass the spiritual as a vehicle of connection to G-d. A time when “the soul shall draw its nourishment from the body.”

Therein lies the deeper significance of the laws of the Sotah (the “wayward wife”), legislated in the fifth chapter of Numbers.

The law of the Sotah dictates that a man who suspects his wife of unfaithfulness (and had evidence that substantiated his suspicions) should bring her to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. There the Kohen (priest) should fill an earthen vessel with water from a Temple well and mix in earth from the Temple ground. He should then inscribe the oath of faithfulness (Numbers 5:19-22) upon a parchment scroll, which he also placed in the “bitter waters” until the words were dissolved in the water. The “wayward wife” would then drink of the water.

If the woman had been indeed guilty of adultery, the “bitter waters” would spell her end. In the case in

which her husband’s suspicions were unjustified, they not only exonerated her, but actually enhanced her relationship with her husband and the productivity of her marriage.

It is significant that the “wayward wife” was vindicated by means of holy water placed in an earthen vessel. This is in contrast to a law regarding the kindling of the Chanukah lights, which instructs that one should avoid kindling them in a clay lamp or other earthen vessel, as the placement of oil in such utensils yields unaesthetic results. Indeed, the lights in the Holy Temple, after which the Chanukah lights are modeled, were lit with the finest olive oil in a candelabrum of pure gold. While the Chanukah lights are not held to such a high standard of purity and refinement, they require a clean-burning fuel (oil or wax) and a utensil of metal or other “clean” material.

The Chanukah lights proclaim the supremacy of spirit over matter. It is only natural, therefore, that something of such a “spiritual” and “male” character would shun the earthen vessel. The spirituality of Chanukah is also expressed in its oil, whose nature is not to mix with other liquids but to rise above them, as spirit holds itself aloof from the physical and the earthly.

But there is also a fluid of another sort. “The Torah has been compared to water,” writes Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi in his Tanya, “because just as water tends to descend from a higher place to a lower place, so has the Torah descended from its place of glory, which is the will and wisdom of G-d... until it has clothed itself in physical things and in matters of this world.”

When a soul contemplates his body and finds her a “wayward wife” contentious to his spiritual goals, his wont may be to lay the blame on her femininity, on her physicality and earthiness. But if he truly desires to achieve harmony between them, he must learn to incorporate her feminine vision into their marriage. He must learn that life is more than spiritual oil flickering in vessels of purest gold. He must learn that it is also water — water that gravitates earthward to fill the most material containers with its divine essence.