

# A Taste of Torah - Nourishment in the Parasha

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## Parashat Naso: Cultivating Commitment

### What Does the Suspected Adulteress Teach Us About Nourishing Marriages?

#### What is My Secret to Staying Married to the Same Man Long-Term?

My husband and I are blessed – so far – with a 45-year marriage. None of our parents or grandparents from either side has ever divorced. Nevertheless, one of our two sons is sadly divorced – after 18 years of marriage. Although it’s a friendly divorce, it breaks my heart to see the children having to alternate between living in their two separate homes. This kind of joint custody, where each parent cares for the children for 3½ days a week, seems more and more common.

We live in a time when the breakdown of traditional marriage has become increasingly common. In the Western world, nearly half of all marriages end in divorce, highlighting the increasing fragility of long-term marital commitment. Many people marry later, fewer marry at all, and divorce has risen dramatically over recent generations. In several Western countries, divorce rates have more than tripled in the last few decades, while alternative family structures have become increasingly widespread.

I’m not exactly sure what our secret is to a long-lasting marriage. Perhaps it is the balance between continually working through problems together and giving each other space – maintaining an equilibrium between commitment and independence. In my experience, many people in our generation are not conditioned for long-term commitment.

In the modern world of material overflow, people have become accustomed to simply throwing things away rather than repairing what is broken. This habit can carry over into relationships. When confronted with interpersonal challenges, people are more prone to give up on a relationship and move on to someone else. Just as a broken item is thrown into the trash and replaced by a new one, so too a spouse may be discarded in the hope of finding a new one.

Against this backdrop, the Torah’s discussion of the *sotah* in *Parashat Naso* feels surprisingly relevant, confronting the painful realities of suspicion, betrayal, and the fragility of trust within marriage.

#### How Do Distrust and Betrayal Deplete the Nourishment of Marriage?

*Parashat Naso* contains the only discussion in the Five Books of Moshe concerning a woman suspected by her husband of adultery – the *sotah* (*Bamidbar* 5:11–31). Legally, a *sotah* refers not simply to an adulteress, but to a woman whose husband warned her not to seclude herself with a specific man. Nevertheless, she disregarded the warning and secluded herself with that man, leading to suspicion about her faithfulness.

**ספר במדבר פרק ה פסוקים יב-יד**

דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי תִשָּׂה אִשְׁתּוֹ וּמַעַלָּה בּוֹ מַעַל:  
וְשָׁכַב אִישׁ אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה שָׁכַבְתָּ זָרַע וְנִגְעַלְמִי מֵעֵינֵי אִישָׁה וְנִסְתַּרְתָּ וְהִיא נִטְמָאָה וְעַד אֵין בָּהּ וְהוּא לֹא נִתְפָּשָׁה:  
וְעָבַר עָלָיו רוּחַ קִנְיָאָה וְקִנְיָאָה אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ...

“Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: Should any man’s wife go astray and deal treacherously with him... and a spirit of jealousy comes upon him, and he becomes jealous of his wife...” (*Bamidbar* 5:12–14).

On the surface, this section appears to focus solely on the wife’s suspected wrongdoing. Yet several commentaries suggest a more complex possibility – marital breakdown rarely arises in isolation. Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz explains that Chava’s sin was preceded by a stumbling block when Adam added a protective fence around Hashem’s command, extending the prohibition from eating of the Tree to

even touching it. While intended to safeguard, this additional restriction ultimately contributed to their downfall. When the serpent pushed Chava against the Tree and she saw that touching it brought no death, she became more susceptible to believing that eating from it would likewise carry no consequence (*Kli Yakar, Bereishit* 3:1). Just as a husband's excessive fences, misplaced boundaries, or conduct contributed to the first marital rupture in history, so too a husband's own actions may at times contribute to the atmosphere in which distrust, resentment, and betrayal emerge.

Rabbi Mordechai HaKohen similarly suggests that a husband's behavior may partially contribute to his wife's straying. If he himself has neglected holiness, broken trust, or acted improperly, he may create conditions in which suspicion gradually flourishes (*Siftei Kohen, Bamidbar* 5:12). Rabbi Luntschitz develops this idea further in his commentary on the sotah, explaining that a husband's own actions may contribute either to his wife's behavior or to the suspicions arising between them. Significantly, the Torah states: וְנִקְּהָ הָאִישׁ וְנִטְוָה /venika ha'ish m'avon - "The man shall be free of sin..." (*Bamidbar* 5:31; *Kli Yakar, Bamidbar* 5:12).

From this, the sages derive that the bitter waters test the wife only when the husband himself is free from comparable wrongdoing (*Babylonian Talmud, Sotah* 28a). If he committed similar behavior, then she cannot be judged guilty. This is a striking lesson. The Torah does not present betrayal merely as an isolated personal failure but hints toward the broader spiritual atmosphere within a relationship. While each person remains accountable for her own choices, sustaining holiness within marriage appears to require ongoing mutual responsibility, integrity, humility, and trust.

### **How Do We Learn from the Sotah to Develop Mutual Trust Within Marriage?**

In a world where people are increasingly quick to discard what is broken, the Torah presents a radically different vision of marriage. According to Rabbi Aviner, the husband and wife are meant to become a sanctuary for one another – a place of unconditional acceptance, forgiveness, and refuge from the many wounds inflicted by the outside world. We all need supportive relationships to help us recuperate from the wear and tear of daily life. Marriage is not sustained by perfection but by acceptance despite our failings, rebuilding trust, so that we can choose the relationship again and again (Rav Shlomo Aviner, *Parshat Hashavua from Tal Chermon*). Such unconditional love may be one of the deepest forms of nourishment. Beyond food, we are nourished by knowing there is someone who continues to choose us, forgive us, and make room for our imperfections. Perhaps this is one reason why *Parashat Naso* reveals how precious marital harmony is in the Torah. Peace between husband and wife is so precious that Hashem permits His own Name to be erased in the bitter waters of the sotah ritual to restore peace between them (*Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah* 11:15).

Just as healthy food strengthens the body, healthy marriages nourish the soul through faithfulness, emotional safety, forgiveness, and shared holiness. When these qualities become depleted, suspicion and distance may gradually take their place. Yet, in a nourishing marriage, husband and wife are continually sustained, restored, and elevated.

### **What does the Name 'Naso' Teach About Rectified Marriage Relationships?**

Rabbi Susskind explores why the discussion of the sotah appears specifically in *Parashat Naso*, the root of the word נָסָה/naso commonly means to 'elevate' and also relates to marriage – נִישׁוּאִין/nisu'in.' He cites a teaching that pairing husband and wife is "as difficult as the splitting of the Reed Sea" (*Babylonian Talmud, Sotah* 2a). Unlike the common understanding, Rabbi Susskind explains that it's not because anything is difficult for Hashem in a literal sense, but because an enduring relationship requires maintaining closeness, gratitude, and appreciation over time.

Just as the Jewish people cried out to Hashem in moments of crisis yet often struggled to preserve the same intimacy with Him once their hardship had passed, spouses, too, may easily begin to take one another for

granted. Perhaps this reveals another hidden dimension of nourishment within marriage. At the beginning of a relationship, affection, excitement, and gratitude often flow naturally. Yet over years of routine, responsibilities, disappointments, and familiarity, that initial nourishment can slowly diminish. A long-lasting marriage may depend upon continually renewing appreciation for the gift of our spouse. Just as our relationship with Hashem deepens through gratitude and conscious recognition of His kindness, a marriage remains nourishing when husband and wife continue seeing one another with fresh eyes rather than as something expected or owed.

In this sense, gratitude itself becomes nourishment – sustaining emotional intimacy, softening resentment, and continually replenishing the bond of marriage. Perhaps this ongoing renewal is part of the deeper elevation hinted at in the very name Naso.

After 45 years of marriage, I have come to believe that commitment, trust, gratitude, and giving each other space are among the deepest foundations of long-lasting relationships. In a generation accustomed to replacing what is broken, one of the greatest acts of holiness is learning how to nourish, repair, and elevate the relationships entrusted to us. A healthy marriage may become one of life's deepest sources of nourishment, where husband and wife sustain one another through the seasons of life.

*Midreshet Berot Bat Ayin: Holistic Torah for Women on the Land is for women who seek to delve deeply into their souls through intensive textual study and creative expression. We engage women of all ages and nationalities in intense Torah study and sustainable living. Drawing on creativity and life experience, students participate in art & drama workshops, authentic movement, and organic gardening, and take turns cooking wholesome meals for each other. Our Holistic Torah involves connecting to Torah of the land, to our Creator, and to personal growth. Dormitory facilities are available in the peaceful, rural setting of Bat Ayin, nestled in the Judean Hills and located just 20 minutes south of Jerusalem.*