

"Any man whose wife deviates from the right path and commits an act of disloyalty towards him." (5:12)

The word "vya" means to deviate from a prescribed direction. In this posuk "vya" means to turn aside from the correct moral path. Consequently, we understand *Chazal's* statement "*One does not commit a sin unless there has entered into him a spirit of foolishness has entered in him (Sotah 3a)*" in the following way: Every moral lapse is simultaneously a lapse of reasoning. Moral truth and logical truth coincide; man sins when he has lost sight of this connection.

The behavior of the wife described in these *pesukim* does not yet actually imply adultery. It refers to a deviation from the prescribed moral path of conduct appropriate to the Jewish woman. An irreverent attitude towards the *Torah's* concepts of modesty and purity may have caused this woman to act in a manner which dictates that her husband warn her. The bitter waters which are administered to the woman are only given in the event "*If the husband is free from guilt.*" At the time that the husband wants the guilt or innocence of his wife to be decided before Hashem, only when he knows himself to be completely free of this same moral misbehavior can he then seek Hashem's decision regarding his wife. If the husband himself has been overly indulgent in those areas of morality where restraint should have been practiced, however, he cannot hand the bitter waters to his wife. Hashem's laws regarding morality do not grant men greater license for deviation than they grant women.

In his commentary, the *Ramban* pertinently remarks that the laws of *sotah* constitute the one institution in Jewish Law which routinely seeks Divine intervention by way of a miracle. This is the set of laws in which Hashem is depicted as the author of the institution of marriage and as the guardian over each individual Jewish matrimonial union. The laws of *sotah* recognize the presence of the Divine in every Jewish marriage. Hashem's special attention is focused upon the faithfulness of the husband and wife to one another. *Halacha* underlines moral purity as the root of spirituality and human happiness.