

“And a man will have lain with her...and she became secluded and she was defiled...and a spirit of jealousy had passed over him and he warned his wife.” (5:13-14)

Regarding the phrase, “and a spirit of jealousy had passed over him,” Rashi explains that this occurred prior to the seclusion. If he had become jealous after the seclusion, however, this law would not apply. In other words, the Torah writes about the seclusion and defilement prior to the jealousy, even though, in reality, the jealousy must precede the seclusion. We must endeavor to understand why the Torah changes the sequence of events. Why not record the events in their sequence: first kinui, jealousy and warning, followed by setirah, seclusion? Horav Yitzchok Goldwasser, Shlita, cites Chazal in the Talmud Sotah 3 who say, “Rabbi Meir says, since a man (or woman) sins in private (such as a promiscuous woman who secludes herself with a man other than her husband), Hashem will exact punishment in public.” The sotah attempts to conceal her infidelity; Hashem exposes her licentiousness.

We derive from here that although the husband’s jealousy and warning preceded the wife’s seclusion, chronologically, from the perspective of cause and effect, the seclusion and subsequent defilement preceded the jealousy. Since this woman was destined to sin, Hashem preempted her defilement and put the notion of jealousy into the mind of her husband, causing him to warn her concerning her inappropriate behavior. The Torah is teaching a lesson regarding the reality of the sequence: What occurs is not reality; it only seems that way. One does not escape punishment by concealing his sin. Hashem prepares the scenario for the sin’s exposure even before it has occurred. To sin is wrong; to think that one can get away with it is foolish.