

For it is a meal-offering of resentments, a meal-offering of remembrance, a reminder of iniquity. (5:15)

The *Midrash* notes that while the word, "*zikaron*", remembrance, usually indicates a memorial for good, in this *pasuk* it serves as a reminder of evil. This reflects Rabbi Tarfon's view. Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, disagrees, contending that this meal-offering can also be considered a remembrance of something good, invoking the memory of the woman's good deeds. Rabbi Yishmael gives an example of the category of good deeds that could possibly delay the woman's punishment for up to a period of twelve months. Indeed, she may drink bitter waters and appear to be innocent, when actually she is not. What unique merit can delay her punishment? We are taught that a woman may accumulate merit because she is accustomed to accompanying her children to their *Torah* studies -- or awaits her husband until he returns from learning *Torah*. This seems absolutely incredible! A woman enables her husband to study *Torah* and her children to go to *yeshivah*, yet she has no qualms about committing adultery! Is there a greater double-standard than this? Obviously, her attitude towards *Torah* study had been sincere, because it is applied as a merit in her behalf. How are we to rationalize her hypocritical behavior?

We suggest that, regrettably, the prevalent attitude towards infidelity was not as negative as it should have been. When society denigrates, the first institutions the people debase are those that address morality. We have only to look around in contemporary society to see how promiscuity, adultery and licentiousness have become a way of life from the common citizen all the way up to those officials who sit in the citadels of power. Does anyone believe that it will not be transmitted to us? Reading and hearing about the immoral escapades of those who live a secular lifestyle will have its effect in due time. This woman probably felt justified in her extra-marital attraction. She accepted the usual excuses expounded by those who maintain a hedonistic existence. Yet, it did not influence her established spiritual values. By all means, her husband should study *Torah*; she even encourages him by waiting for him to come home. Her children should study in *yeshivah* and become *talmidei chachamim*. She, however, deserves a life of her own!

This inane sense of ethics, this erosion of values, is the result of over-exposure to secularism and an insincere attitude to *Torah*. Perhaps this is why the punishment for the *sotah*, wayward wife, is so terrifying and demeaning. By reflecting upon the punishment incurred by the *sotah*, one can realize the ultimate evil of adultery.