

Any man whose wife shall go astray and commit treachery against him. (5:12)

The *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, mentions adultery as one of the cardinal sins for which one must sacrifice his life rather than transgress it. Yet, surprisingly, throughout the *parshah* of *sotah*, the wayward wife, no mention is made of the woman's transgression against Hashem. Never is the phrase, *mo'alah maal b'Hashem*, mentioned. It is against the husband. This leads us to suggest that the egregious nature of the sin of adultery is its destruction of the marriage bond. As a result, it is a transgression against Hashem. First and foremost is what the *sotah* does to the institution of holy matrimony. Her act of infidelity defines her base character.

When two people marry, it is the start of something new, a life in which both dedicate themselves to *kedushah*, in which their goal is on building a life, a family based upon the tenets of the Torah. They plan everything together: their goals and experiences; their lives, physical/material, as well as spiritual. Marriage is a commitment to shared aspirations, to creating a future together. Without trust, there is no marriage; without fidelity, there is no covenant between husband and wife; without sanctity, the relationship is purely physical, essentially non-human. Adultery is the flagrant violation of the covenant between husband and wife. The purity of the Jewish people, its future and destiny, are intricately bound with the harmony that should reign between husband and wife. When an act of infidelity shatters the tranquility of a home, when immorality contravenes the marriage bond, a pall is cast over the people. Morality is our standard of living. The sacred ideal of moral purity is placing a crucial role in shaping the identity and values of the Jewish people. Thus, the severity of the *sotah's* punishment is determined by the woman's adulterous act, which is an irreparable breach in the marriage. [While the generic term adultery applies to both man and woman who commit an act of infidelity, a man is *halachically* punished as an adulterer only if his sinful behavior is committed with a married woman.]

The *Maharik*, *Horav Yosef Colon, zl* (early *Acharon*) (*Shut Maharik shoresh 163*), writes concerning a *she'alah*, *halachic* query, that was brought to him. A woman had committed adultery, and, as a result, her husband divorced her. Yet, despite the fact that an adulteress does not receive her *kesubah* (the marriage contract in which the husband promises to give a certain amount of money when their marriage ends as a result of death or divorce), she claimed that she was unaware that the Torah prohibits adultery. She thought she was doing no wrong. [Clearly, this woman must not have hailed from a background that placed much significance on knowing and understanding the value of maintaining a moral compass. One would have to be clueless and uncouth concerning the moral expectations of any decent human being – let alone a Jew.]

The *Maharik* ruled that her actions are not considered unintentional. Even if it is true that she was so removed from religion that she was unaware that the Torah prohibits adultery, she should have realized that she was egregiously transgressing against her husband. He buttresses his ruling with the Torah's opening *pasuk* concerning the *Sotah's* sin. *Ish ish ki sisteh ishto u'mo'alah bo mo'al*;

“Any man whose wife shall go astray and commit treachery against him.” The Torah makes no mention of disloyalty against Hashem – only faithlessness vis-à-vis her husband. She is a *moredes*, *halachically* insubordinate /rebellious, wife who does not receive her *kesubah*.

As mentioned earlier, the sin of adultery is a Heavenly-dictated transgression which is first mentioned in the *Aseres HaDibros*. The nature of the sin, however, is an infraction of *bein adam l'chaveiro*, between man and his fellowman, because it destroys the inherent trust crucial for maintaining a marriage. Even when the Jews were enslaved by the Egyptians, and their spiritual status had plummeted to the forty-nine levels of *tumah*, ritual contamination, we find only one instance of infidelity (Shlomis bas Divri), and that incident took place when the woman was unaware. We are a holy people. While it is true that *shemiras ha'mitzvos* is not at the level it should be, and, as a result of the secular streams many of our people have become assimilated, the Jew who has the least sense of pride, who understands that Judaism is not simply a culture, but a religion, will maintain a sense of moral purity as well as human decency. One who does not is still biologically Jewish, but far removed from its sacred beliefs and values.

The crucial factor is respect among husband and wife. Relationships are predicated upon the respect each person manifests towards the other. This is especially true in marital relationships. Valuing each other's opinions, appreciating differences, and open communication and trust are the foundations of lasting harmony. The *tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, *Horav Aryeh Levin, zl*, and his *Rebbetzin* merited to establish a family that has produced *Klal Yisrael's* greatest Torah giants. While one cannot ignore that warranting the *nom de plume*, “*Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim,” is in and of itself a reason for meriting such a family, we must remember that children are not raised in a vacuum. One cannot become the *tzaddik* of Yerushalayim without a wife who supports his every endeavor. Furthermore, “support” goes beyond tolerance. It means enthusiastic encouragement and, at times, partnering with the spouse, lending a hand with a smile when necessary. To this end, *Rav Aryeh* was blessed with a wife that would accept her husband's *Shabbos* schedule – every single *Shabbos* – waiting patiently, lovingly, until he returned home from his weekly *chesed* visits.

Every *Shabbos* morning, *Rav Aryeh* trudged off to Yerushalayim's central prison to conduct *Shabbos* services with the inmates. *Davening* was followed by an unhurried, private conversation with each inmate. He brought them messages from home, and he returned their messages. His brilliant mind allowed him to record everything conveyed – since writing on *Shabbos* is prohibited. When he left prison, he first went to the homes of the families of the inmates to calm their fears concerning their relatives' treatment and condition. Finally, after having walked the length and breadth of Yerushalayim, he came home in time to eat and leave for *Minchah*. This became the accepted fare for *Shabbos* morning at the Levin home: Mother and children waiting patiently (and reverently) for their husband/father to come home. It is no wonder that, after his wife had passed onto her eternal rest, *Rav Aryeh* commented, “I no longer have a home. I have an address.” With her departure from life, a permanent pall of sorrow seemed to settle of *Rav Aryeh's* heart. He said, “Physical appearances had become blurred, but, to some extent, her qualities of character appear to shine brighter every day.”

Rav Aryeh was noticed leaving the cemetery one day. A friend asked what had brought him to *Har HaZeisim*. He said, "A grandson of mine just became engaged. I wanted to share the wonderful news with Chanah (his wife)." One vignette inspired me. One of his close students visited him on *Purim*. When he noticed the picture of a charming young girl on the mantle, he assumed it was a picture of *Rav Aryeh's* granddaughter. He was slightly taken aback when *Rav Aryeh* informed him that it was a picture of his dear departed wife. "Why is her picture on the mantle today?" "Today is *Purim*," he replied. "Everyone is happy and rejoicing. I, too, when I gaze at her portrait, have pleasure and joy." That comment should answer our original question. When husband and wife live in such harmony, it is no wonder that they are the progenitors of such extraordinary descendants.