

SPEECH ON MESECHES SOTA

This is one of the 63 books of the Talmud. It is entitled "Sota". It contains discussions among rabbis who lived between the years 0 and 500, in their own words, about the Sota ritual. The Sota ritual is a Temple ritual initiated by a jealous husband to determine whether his wife committed adultery.

According to this book of the Talmud, the ritual includes the following 11 steps:

- 1) **Husband prohibits** his wife from secluding herself with a particular man
- 2) **Wife secludes** herself with that man anyway
- 3) **Husband brings his wife** to the Temple along with a sacrifice offering of barley
- 4) **Priest uncovers** the wife's hair
- 5) **Wife gives the barley offering** to the priest, who burns a handful of it on the altar
- 6) **Priest explains** to her that if she is **innocent** of adultery then she will survive the ordeal and her survival will prove her innocence, but if she is **guilty** then the ritual will magically result in her death
- 7) **Priest urges her** that if she DID commit adultery, to back out of the ritual and accept a divorce
- 8) **Wife verbally agrees** to proceed with the ritual by saying "amen amen"
- 9) **Priest writes** the relevant Torah passage, describing this ritual, onto parchment with soluble ink
- 10) **Priest takes a cup**, fills it with water and then dust, and dunks the parchment into the water so ink (of the Torah passage) dissolves into the water
- 11) **Wife drinks** the water (with the dust and ink in it).

At the end of this frightening and demeaning ordeal:

If the wife miraculously dies, then the husband knows she is guilty of adultery.

But if she lives, then she is proven innocent and is rewarded by becoming pregnant.

The Talmud asks: Since the Torah promises a child to every woman who passes this morality-test ordeal, then why doesn't every woman who has difficulty getting pregnant ask her husband to submit her to this ordeal, so that when she passes the test she is guaranteed by Torah to become pregnant?

The Talmud says the magic of this ritual will not work if the husband is himself promiscuous, which is why the rabbis discontinued this ritual 2000 years ago, since husbands were often promiscuous.

The rabbis in the Talmud argue about many details of this ritual, such as:

- How many witnesses must there be that the wife was warned (against secluding) and then secluded?
- How much time must she be secluded with a man for it to be considered significant?
- Up to which point in the procedure can the husband change his mind and back out?
- Up to which point in the procedure can the wife back out?
- If the wife is guilty, how long after the ritual does it take for her to die?
(immediately accordingly to one rabbi, and up to several years according to others)
- What men may the husband prohibit his wife from secluding with? even her father and brother? even a child too young for relations? even an animal?
- If the husband is out of town, may the court warn the wife on the husband's behalf?
- If a woman backs out, is that evidence she is guilty, or does it just mean she is scared.
- If, after the woman passes the test, she secludes herself with the same guy again, does she have to submit to the test all over again?
- When a husband warns his wife against secluding with another man -- is he doing a **good** deed (by imposing morality in his family), or is he doing a **bad** deed (by introducing hostility in the family)?

The Talmud notes that the pronouncements in this Temple ritual must be said only in Hebrew language, and then the Talmud describes other rituals that are said only in Hebrew, such as:

- duchaning in the ancient Temple and duchaning nowadays in shul
- the Jewish nation standing on Mt Grizim and Mt Aival in Joshua's time
- the Jewish king publicly laining the book of Devarim in the Temple every 7 years
- speech in ancient times that the priest delivered to Jewish army before going off to battle
- pronouncement that Jews recited in ancient times when bringing first fruits and tithes to Temple