



# GROWTH

## At The

# SHABBAT TABLE

## PARSHAT NASO

### The Sotah Paradox

In this week's parshah, we read about the laws of the Sotah – a woman suspected of adultery. The Torah states that if she is found innocent: "וְנִקְתָּ וְנִרְדְּמָה – she is cleared and will conceive." This means that if the woman had not in fact committed adultery, the Sotah waters would not only prove her innocence but also bless her with the ability to bear children.

At first glance, this verse and its implications are puzzling. Can she truly be called "clean"? After all, she did seclude herself with a man other than her husband—yichud—which is the very act that led to her being suspected in the first place. While she may not be guilty of actual adultery, her behavior still raises moral and halachic concerns. Why, then, is she rewarded with such a powerful blessing?

I once heard a profound answer from R' Aharon Mashitz that sheds light on this. He explained that when one comes into contact with holiness, it creates a powerful spiritual energy. That energy must go somewhere. It will either elevate a person, bringing blessing and growth, or, if mishandled, it can have the opposite effect, causing harm or destruction.

We see this principle illustrated in Tanach: when Oved-Edom brought the Aron into his home, he was blessed. But when Uzzah tried to steady the Ark with his hand to prevent it from falling, he died on the spot. How could such a seemingly noble act result in death? Because interacting with kedushah requires precise conduct; any deviation carries profound consequences. Similarly, the Kohen Gadol entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur with a rope tied around his ankle – not out of superstition, but because if he wasn't worthy, he could die in the presence of such holiness, and the rope would be the only way to retrieve him.

This same principle applies to the Sotah. Even though the woman may have violated yichud, she did not commit adultery. She did not misuse kedushah to its fullest destructive potential. And when it comes to holiness, there is rarely a neutral outcome – it either elevates or breaks. In contrast to the guilty Sotah, who is physically destroyed by the waters she is given to drink, the woman who is found innocent is elevated. She receives a blessing: fertility and the opportunity to build a future.

May we all merit not only to bring tremendous kedushah into our lives, but also to be clean receptacles of that kedushah, and therefore allow it to lead us on the road of berachah.

### True Healing

*The son of the great Ba'al HaTanya, R' Dov-Ber [1], would often have individualized meetings with people, which served as very intense, spiritually-healing sessions. There was a point, however, when he suddenly stopped conducting such meetings. He quarantined himself for three whole days; no one was able to see him. During this interval, he was fasting; his students even heard him crying and sobbing. Finally, after three days had passed, he once again resumed his one-on-one sessions, as if nothing had happened.*

*Riddled with curiosity, his son inquired what had happened. "A Jew came to me," R' Dov-Ber explained, "And he had a serious issue – he had done something so terrible, crossing all moral boundaries, and now he was looking for help. I know that I cannot help anyone, ever, if I don't first find that story, crisis, struggle, or pain in myself. With this individual, though, the story was overwhelmingly horrific and illogical. I searched and searched within myself but couldn't find it in me. I was puzzled; I knew that if G-d had sent him to me, I could help him – but how could I help him if it's not inside me? I realized that it must be some form of trauma and spiritual infection hidden deep in my subconscious, so I needed three days for introspection. I finally found what it was inside of me; I called the man back to see me and I gave him advice and hope."*

While the tremendous self-sacrifice of this great tzaddik seems other-worldly, there is deep relevance and practicality for each of us to derive. We are all put in situations where Hashem sets the stage for us to help individuals and impact lives in profound ways. However, such an awesome privilege and sacred duty comes with powerful realities that R' Dov-Ber in the story above knew well, principles that he had lived by. First: *if I can never find it within myself, I'll never be able to understand another.* Second: *if I can't find it within me, I won't be able to appropriately empathize with another.* And third, *how can I really hold space and subconsciously offer hope if I don't find it within myself and I know that there is true hope and healing?*

A wise man once said, "I will only change somebody else to the extent that I am ready to change myself." Herein lays the most authentic form of connection and healing. Only through changing oneself can one genuinely change another person. [2]

[1] Also known as the Mitler Rebbe, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chabad Rebbe (1773-1827)

[2] Recounted by R' YY Jacobson