

NASO (NUMBERS 4:28-7:89)

How to Spell 'I Love You'

2010 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

Nothing is more essential to the survival of a marriage than trust. If a husband and wife don't trust each other, there can be no peace and harmony in their home. This problem is especially acute when there are suspicions of infidelity.

The Torah provides a litmus test designed to restore harmony to a troubled relationship. We are presented with the scenario of a husband who suspects his wife of being unfaithful. He has warned her to stay away from a particular man, and she has ignored the warning. She has been seen in the company of this man, and her husband suspects the worst.

Can this marriage be saved? SHOULD this marriage be saved?

If, in fact, she has committed adultery, she is no longer permitted to remain married to her husband. (Nor is she permitted to marry "the bum" who destroyed her marriage.)

But what if she is innocent? How can we satisfy the jealous husband that his wife has not abandoned her "wedding vows?" (I wrote "wedding vows" in quotation marks because at a Jewish wedding, there are no vows; our commitment to marital faithfulness was made when we swore at Mt. Sinai to accept the Torah.) How can we restore love and trust to this turbulent marriage?

This week's Torah Portion prescribes a solution to this dilemma. Numbers 5:11-31 describes a process that miraculously revealed the truth about what had happened. The couple went to the Temple, where the wife brought an offering. The Kohain -- priest warned her that if she had been unfaithful and would not admit the truth, there would be dire consequences. She would drink a specially prepared potion that, if she had been faithful, would bring blessings to her and her family. If, however, she had committed this sin, a miracle would occur and end the lives of the woman and her "partner."

The intention of this examination was not to punish the sinner. The purpose was to remove the cloud of suspicion from the innocent.

How often does it occur that we are given the opportunity to find out the absolute truth? G-d usually makes us find out ourselves. In fact, when Joshua wanted to know who had plundered the spoils of Jericho, G-d asked him, "Am I a gossip?" (Sanhedrin, 43b)

Yet, when it comes to bringing peace to a quarreling couple, G-d "breaks the rules" and supernaturally gives us information.

What were the ingredients of this truth serum? *The priest will take sacred water in an earthenware container, and dust from the floor of the Tabernacle ...and he will write (this section from the Torah*) on a scroll, and erase it in the bitter waters**. (Numbers, 5:17, 23)

An abbreviated Torah scroll is written, with parchment, ink, and quill. All of the sanctity of a Torah will be invested into that little scroll. G-d's name, in Hebrew, will be written on this scroll seven times and then erased by soaking in water.

Erased?! What happened to the respect that we're supposed to have for G-d's name? Are we actually expected to erase the holy name of G-d?

Normally, books with G-d's name written in them become holy; they may not be erased or disposed of in the trash. Holy books must be respectfully buried. (This is why many people, this writer included, have the practice of abbreviating G-d's name, even in English. (G-D, without the "O.")

What justification could there be for erasing G-d's name?

The message here is that G-d is very concerned about *Shalom Bayis*, domestic tranquility. As long as the husband thinks that his wife has been disloyal, there will never be peace in that home. G-d is willing to allow His name to be erased, rather than view a home filled with rancor and distrust

There is a very profound lesson to be learned here.

At first glance, it is surprising that such a process would be permitted. Why should we show such dishonor to G-d's name? We normally go to great lengths to avoid such a thing. Why is His name suddenly expendable?

Upon closer examination, however, it makes a lot of sense. G-d has several names. One of those names is "Shalom"--"Peace." In fact, some authorities rule that the Hebrew word "Shalom" should be written in abbreviated form, to avoid erasing G-d's name. (*Keses HaSofer*, 12:17)

G-d is the third partner (actually, the first!) in a marriage. When there is conflict in a home, G-d's name, "Shalom," is compromised. When there is friction between a husband and wife, the name "Shalom" is, in effect, erased. G-d looks at the case of the suspicious husband and his possibly adulterous wife. Shalom has been destroyed. G-d says, "This is unacceptable. It can't work! My name 'Shalom' is too important to be erased. Erase My other name, so that Shalom can be restored!"

What is the main cause of disharmony in a relationship? In many, if not most cases, it is due to emphasis on self. We ask, what's in it for me? Instead, we should ask, what can I do for you?

G-d won't tolerate a lack of harmony, so He is willing to erase His name. Are we willing to erase OUR name, our sense of "what's in it for me," in order to keep the peace? Are we willing to put the other person first in order to welcome Shalom and G-d back into our relationships?

Did you ever notice when you are introduced to someone at a meeting or wedding, etc, that the only name you hear during the introduction is your own? (That's why we ask, at the end of the discussion, "what was your name again?")

Isn't it interesting that the only pronoun that is capitalized is the word, "I?" (Whenever I try to refer to G-d as "He" with a capital H, the spellchecker on my computer tells me that there is no such word. It also thinks that there is no such word as "i.") Could it be that from our perspective, the most important person in the relationship, "I," am more important than "you?"

It is time for a spelling lesson. We have been misspelling the three magic words in a relationship.

No more "I love you." The Torah's version is "**i** love **YOU**!"

Have a great Shabbos.

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