

# Haftarot Unrolled: Naso

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## How it could have ended

The Haftarah tells the story of Shimshon's birth. Shimshon's mother, Mrs. Manoach, was barren until she was visited by an angel. This is how she tells her husband what happened:

וַתֹּאמֶר לְאִישָׁהּ לֵאמֹר אִישׁ הַאֱלֹהִים בָּא אֵלַי וּמְרִאָהוּ כְּמִרְאֵה מַלְאָךְ הַאֱלֹהִים נֹרָא מְאֹד וְלֹא שָׁאַלְתִּיהוּ אִי מִנָּה הוּא וְאֵת שְׁמוֹ לֹא הִגִּיד לִי : וַיֹּאמֶר לִי הִנֵּךְ הָרָה וְיִלְדֶתְךָ בֵּן  
She spoke to her husband, saying: "A Man of G-d came to me, he looked like an angel of G-d, very frightening, and I did not ask him where he comes from, and he did not tell me his name. He said to me, 'You are going to be pregnant and give birth to a son...' (Shoftim 13:6-7)

If the story were told by a neighborhood "yenta", it might have looked like this:

"You know that Mrs. Manoach, the one who's barren, nebech? Did you hear, she's pregnant! And do you know what she says? She was out in the field, and an angel came to her. Yeah, sure, an "angel"... Poor Manoach. You know, he really should throw her out..."

In the ancient world, there were many fables of women "visited" by divine beings, and the supernatural children that they bore. If Manoach had doubted his wife's fidelity, nobody would have held it against him.

Parshat Naso offers a solution for a husband whose wife has been compromised and there is no way to know what happened: the Sotah ritual. Her husband can take her to the Temple, where she is made to drink a potion that kills her if she is guilty, or blesses her with fertility if she is innocent. It is an ordeal, in every sense of the word, but at least it provides closure. It is a way for him to prove to himself and to society that she was in fact innocent, a way to stop the rumors and the pitying looks, a way to repair their relationship.

But Manoach did not take his wife to the Sotah ritual. Their relationship did not need to be repaired.

In the conditions for the ritual, we find the following:

וְעִבֵּר עָלָיו רוּחַ קִנְיָה וְקִנְיָה אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ וְהוּא נִטְמָאָה אוֹ עִבֵּר עָלָיו רוּחַ קִנְיָה וְקִנְיָה אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ וְהִיא לֹא נִטְמָאָה  
And he was seized by jealousy, and was jealous over his wife, and she had become impure; or, he was seized by jealousy and was jealous over his wife, and she did not become impure. (Bamidbar 5:14)

It is not enough for the woman to have appeared to stray. The husband must also be seized by jealousy. If he is not, then the ritual is not necessary.

What was Manoach's reaction to hearing that "a man of G-d came to" his wife? He begs G-d to send him again, to hear what else he has to say. What was Manoach's reaction when he shows up again, not to him as requested, but again to his wife, out alone in the field? Does he question her, or blame her, or wonder what the Man of G-d wants with her? None of that. When she runs in and tells him, "He is here again, the man that came to me the other day" -

וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ מִנּוּחַ אַחֲרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ

Manoach got up and went after his wife (Shoftim 13:11)

Manoach is nothing like the husband in the Sotah ritual. Not only is he not consumed by jealousy, but the thought does not even cross his mind. She is his wife; he goes where she leads.

So that we don't miss this point, the Haftarah's twenty-four verses use the phrase, אִשְׁתּוֹ "his wife", seven times. Instead of saying, "he said to her," it says, "Manoach said to his wife." Instead of saying, "she answered," it says, "his wife answered." Similarly, in the Parsha of Sotah, the phrase, "his wife", is repeated four times. Additionally, both sets of text use the somewhat rare term, אִישָׁהּ "her man", three times in close proximity. This linguistic mechanism is meant to highlight that what is at stake here is the idea of "man and wife".

The relationship known as "man and wife" goes back to Creation. We know that betrayal is destructive to it; that is in the 10 Commandments. The Parsha tells us that jealousy might be equally destructive, yet offers a way out. The Haftarah tells us that jealousy is not the only possible reaction to these circumstances.

If Mr. and Mrs. Manoach had not thought of each other as "man and wife", if he had not believed in her, if his faith in her had been affected by slander and sinister glances, than he might have taken her to be a Sotah.

If the husband of the Sotah had been more like Manoach, and had trusted his wife and stood by her even when things looked bad, then he would not have had to put her through the ordeal.

It could have ended differently.

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In memory of my father, Peter Rozenberg, z"l

לעילוי נשמת אבי מורי פנחס בן נתן נטע ז"ל