

## A Taste of Torah Hidden Potential

by Rabbi Yosef Melamed

The parsha of the *sotah* (adulteress) is not a pretty one. The shameful ways of an unfaithful wife and her disgrace are revealed to all as her stomach swells in a most destructive manner. Her evil actions, as well as her miraculous death, become the talk of the nation. The words of Rashi are therefore puzzling. Rashi states that the juxtaposition of the parsha of the *sotah* and that of the *nazir* (nazirite) - one who vows to abstain from wine, impurity from a corpse, and cutting of hair - is intended to tell us that "anyone who sees a *sotah* in her disgrace will become a *nazir* and abstain from wine, as wine leads to licentiousness."

One who would see the disgrace and terrible end of a *sotah* would seem to be the last person who would entertain the idea of getting involved in such behavior. Wouldn't witnessing the shame and punishment of such conduct act as the greatest deterrence against repeating it?

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (1873-1936) explains that when one sees the *sotah* being punished, he might automatically think, "What a terrible person. What a crazy thing. Who could fathom doing such a shameful act?! Look at the painful end of this woman." However, explains Rabbi Levovitz, one who carefully thinks things through will realize that this is a mistake. No one is born a *sotah*; one does not become a *sotah* in a day. The sinful act of the *sotah* began much more innocuously. A little bit of drinking here, a little bit of bad company there, until very slowly and subtly, these small and simple things

led the *sotah* to bigger and worse things, eventually leading her to such an awful sin.

One who realizes this will not wave off the actions of the *sotah* as crazy and irrelevant. One who sees the *sotah* will instead think, "The *sotah* began as a regular person, just like me. I can actually end up in the same place if I don't keep myself in check when it comes to minor infractions of proper behavior. I must heed the wake-up call and work on myself to stay away from the ways of the *sotah*, small at the beginning yet explosive at the end." Thus, one should resolve to stay away from wine, the beginning of the end.

This is a powerful lesson, but it is one that applies in the other direction, as well. Sometimes, we have the opportunity to meet a *gadol*, a spiritual giant. Sometimes, we have the privilege to witness or hear of the actions which make that person truly great. One may initially think, "That was so inspiring to see. However, it is not relevant to me, as I am not a *gadol*. G-d simply did not make me that great."

This is a mistake. Nobody was born a *gadol*. They may have been granted special qualities, but at the end of the day, they started off just like you and me. The difference is that they took the initiative to be diligent. They took the call to constantly grow and to work on themselves. And slowly but surely, one thing led to the next, until eventually, they came to the place of greatness that they occupy. That is definitely relevant to each and every one of us!

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## Stories for the Soul

### Short and Sweet

One of the disciples of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1809-1883) disciples invited him for the Shabbos night meal. The student assured his great teacher that in his home, all the laws of *kashrus* were observed with utmost stringency. His cook was an honest, G-d fearing woman, the widow of a Torah scholar, and his own wife kept an eye on the kitchen, as well. The Friday night meal featured much Torah discussion and Shabbos *zemiros*, and lasted for many hours.

Rabbi Salanter accepted the invitation, but stipulated that the meal be shortened by two hours. The student, wanting to have the honor of hosting his rebbi, of course agreed.

At the meal, one course followed another without interruption, and the meal was over in under an hour.

Before reciting *Birchas Hamazon*, the host turned to Rabbi Salanter and asked, "Rebbi, can you please explain what was wrong with my Shabbos table that you rushed through it?"

Rabbi Salanter, instead of answering, asked that the widow responsible for the cooking come to the room.

"Please forgive me for having inconvenienced you this evening," said Rabbi Salanter to the cook. "You were forced to serve one course after another - not as you are used to do."

"Bless you, rabbi," the woman

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## Kollel Happenings

### LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING THIS MEMORIAL DAY

Start your day off on the right foot with Torah study! Join the Kollel for learning at three locations around Denver: At the Kollel West Denver Bais Medrash and Aish Denver, shacharis at 8 am followed by breakfast and learning, and at EDOS, shacharis at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning. The study session will focus on Take the High Road: The Origins and Laws of Tefilas Haderech (Traveler's Prayer).

### SFAS EMES: A PIERCING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

It is one of the most widely-studied works of our time. Sfas Emes gives us a glimpse into the infinite depths of Torah and Jewish thought. Kollel Scholar Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky is an expert in this great work, and a master in bringing its timeless lessons into daily life. Join Rabbi Karnowsky on Thursdays, 8:15-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St.

### THE LETTERS OF THE LAW: THE MELACHOS OF SHABBOS

Rabbi Shmuel Halpern received *semicha* (ordination) from Beth Medrash Govoha in 2016 and has spent the past four years receiving *shimush* (training in practical halacha) from Rabbi Micha Cohn of Lakewood. Rabbi Halpern now shares his halachic expertise in this weekly class that will help familiarize you with the laws of Shabbos. Monday evenings 8-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St.

# Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** There is a halachic concept of *bitul*, nullification of forbidden item when it is mixed with permissible item(s). When do we not apply *bitul*, and the entire mixture remains forbidden?

**A:** 1. *Chametz*, when mixed in on Pesach (as opposed to when it was mixed in prior to Pesach). 2. *Davar sheyesh lo matirin*: An item which will be permitted at, or after, a certain time is never nullified 3. *Avidi litama*: A forbidden item which gives flavor. 4. *Ma'amad*: A non-kosher ingredient

that gives a product its form, e.g., cheese made with with non-kosher rennet. 5. A whole creature or very significant item is not nullified. *Sources:* 1. *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 447:1*. 2. *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 102:1*. 3. *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 98:8*. 4. *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 87:11*. 5. *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 100,101,110*

**This week's question:** What are the ratios for *bitul* (nullification of forbidden items)?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email [ryz@denverkollel.org](mailto:ryz@denverkollel.org).

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Noda BiYehuda Part VIII

Despite his strong opposition to *Haskalah*, Rabbi Landau was nonetheless not opposed to secular knowledge. He himself was quite knowledgeable in many areas, and he gave approbations to works of science, history and mathematics.

Rabbi Landau also spoke out against Sabbatean and Frankist groups, Jewish heretical movements that were popular during his time. He also opposed the rise of the Chassidic movement; in some of his responsa, he writes his opposition to some of the practices the movement advanced.

## A Taste of Torah

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The ways of the *sotah* are shameful but they serves as a powerful lesson for us. Never underestimate the potential of one person. Never underestimate the potential to fall terribly low, and never underestimate the power and ability

to rise up to the greatest heights. Small steps will lead up to much greater and bigger things. May we all merit living up to the great responsibility that we have, to stay away from evil, and to accomplish true greatness!

## Stories for the Soul

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answered. "I wish that you would be a guest here every Friday evening. Most weeks, the meal takes a long time, and I am so tired I can barely remain on my feet. By the time I return home, it is very late and I am exhausted. Thanks to you, they hurried this evening, and I am already free to go home and rest." Rabbi Salanter now turned to his disciple. "The poor widow's remark

is the answer to your question. Your *kashrus* and Shabbos table are wonderful, but only as long as it does not adversely affect others."

Our Sages, in the discussion of the nazirite, teach that abstention from worldly pleasures is admirable only if done properly. Stringencies without boundaries are frowned upon.