The Gemara asks: But one could just as easily say the opposite: “Thereto” should be understood specifically, and the ashes must be placed first. The phrase “running water shall be put... in a vessel,” should indicate only that the water must run directly into the vessel and that it may not be brought from the spring by means of another vessel.

The Gemara answers: Just as we find in every instance that the facilitating item goes above the primary item, e.g., in the case of a sota the dust goes on top of the water, so too here, in the case of the red heifer, the facilitating item must go above the primary item. The water must be placed first, and only then the ashes.

MISHNA When the priest comes to write the scroll of the sota that is to be placed in the water, from what place in the Torah passage concerning the sota (Numbers 5:11–31) does he write?

He starts from the verse: “If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to defilement while under your husband, you shall be free from this water of bitterness that causes the curse” (Numbers 5:19); and continues: “But if you have gone astray while under your husband, and if you are defiled, and some man has lain with you besides your husband” (Numbers 5:20).

And then he does not write the beginning of the following verse, which states: “Then the priest shall cause the woman to swear with the oath of cursing, and the priest shall say to the woman” (Numbers 5:21), but he does write the oath recorded in the continuation of the verse: “The Lord shall make you a curse and an oath among your people when the Lord will cause your thigh to fall away, and your belly to swell. And this water that causes the curse shall go into your bowels, and cause your belly to swell, and your thigh to fall away” (Numbers 5:21–23); but he does not write the conclusion of the verse: “And the woman shall say: Amen, amen” (Numbers 5:22).

Rabbi Yosei says: He does not interrupt the verses but rather writes the entire passage without any omissions.

Rabbi Yehuda says: He writes nothing other than curses recorded in the final verses cited above: “The Lord shall make you a curse and an oath among your people when the Lord will cause your thigh to fall away, and your belly to swell. And this water that causes the curse shall go into your bowels, and cause your belly to swell, and your thigh to fall away.” And he does not write the conclusion of the verse: “And the woman shall say: Amen, amen.”

GEMARA With regard to what issue do the Sages in the mishna disagree? What is the source of their disagreement? They disagree concerning the proper interpretation of the verse: “And the priest shall write these [ḥāʾelḥ curses] curses [et haʾalot] in a scroll” (Numbers 5:23).

From what place does he write – ḥāʾelḥ curses [et haʾalot] in a scroll. The priest writes the scroll of the sota from the verse: “If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to defilement while under your husband, you shall be free from this water of bitterness that causes the curse” (Numbers 5:19); and continues: “But if you have gone astray while under your husband, and if you are defiled, and some man has lain with you besides your husband” (Numbers 5:20). And then he skips the beginning of the verse that follows: “Then the priest shall cause the woman to swear with the oath of cursing, and the priest shall say to the woman” (Numbers 5:21). But he does write the oath recorded in the continuation: “The Lord shall make you a curse and an oath among your people when the Lord will cause your thigh to fall away, and your belly to swell. And this water that causes the curse shall go into your bowels, and cause your belly to swell, and your thigh to fall away” (Numbers 5:21–23). But he does not write the conclusion of the verse: “And the woman shall say: Amen, amen.” (Numbers 5:22), in accordance with the first tanna of the mishna (Rambam Sefer Nachum, Hilkhot Sota 3:8).
Rabbi Meir, the first tanna of the mishna, reasons: The word “alot,” curses, is referring to actual curses. The prefix ha, meaning: "The, in the additional article "ha’alot" serves to include curses that come on account of the blessings, i.e., the curses that are inferred from the phrase: “You shall be free from this water of bitterness that causes the curse” (5:19). The word “eleh,” meaning these, is a limiting term that serves to exclude the long list of curses that are recorded in Mishne Torah,” the book of Deuteronomy (chapter 28). Although these curses are also referred to as “alot,” the priest does not write them. The addition of the definite article in the word “ha’eleh” serves to exclude the commands recorded in the sota passage and the acceptances by the word “amen” recorded there as well. The priest need not write these sections of the passage.

And Rabbi Yosei interprets it: It would all be as you, Rabbi Meir, said; however, the additional word “et” in the verse amplifies its scope. It serves to include both commands and acceptances, as they must be written in the scroll as well.

And why does Rabbi Meir disagree? As a rule, he does not interpret the additional word et as amplifying a verse’s scope.

And as for Rabbi Yehuda, he interprets all of the terms in the verse as exclusionary: The word “alot” is referring specifically to the actual curses recorded in the verses. The definite article in the word “ha’alot” serves to exclude curses that come on account of blessings. The word “eleh” serves to exclude the curses recorded in the Mishne Torah. And the definite article in the word “ha’eleh” serves to exclude the commands and acceptances recorded in the verses.

The Gemara asks: But according to Rabbi Meir, what is different about this letter heh at the beginning of the word “ha’alot” such that it amplifies the halakha to include curses that come on account of the blessings, and what is different about that letter heh in the word “ha’eleh” such that it excludes the commands and acceptances by the word “amen”? Why should one amplify while the other excludes?

The Gemara answers: The letter heh when written near an amplifier is an amplifier. The word “alot” itself amplifies the halakha, and the definite article extends that amplification; and a heh when written near a restrictor is a restrictor. The word “eleh” itself restricts the halakha, and the definite article before it extends that restriction.

The Gemara asks: But Rabbi Meir does not accept the principle that from a negative statement you can infer a positive statement. What is to be gained by writing the blessings if one cannot infer the curses from them?

Rabbi Tanhum says: It is written: “If no man has lain with you… you shall be free [hinnaki]” (Numbers 5:19). The word “hinnaki” should be interpreted as if it were in fact hinnaki, meaning: You shall choke. When read with the beginning of the next verse, it then forms the sentence: You shall choke… if you have gone astray while under your husband. Therefore, Rabbi Meir understands the blessings themselves to have a dimension of a curse.

Rabbi Akiva taught: If a man [ish] and woman [ishah] merit reward through a faithful marriage, the Divine Presence rests between them. The words ish and isha are almost identical; the difference between them is the middle letter yod in ish, and the final letter heh in isha. These two letters can be joined to form the name of God spelled yod, heh. But if due to licentiousness they do not merit reward, the Divine Presence departs, leaving in each word only the letters alif and shin, which spell ish, fire. Therefore, fire consumes them.
And the fire that consumes the woman is stronger – rosis ha’isha. According to the Yyun Yisakov, this means that the fire that consumes the woman expiates her sins more than that of the man. This is because from the time of Eve’s curse, a woman undergoes much physical suffering through menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. This suffering serves as an additional expiating force.

Dust for the symbolism of the scroll of the to the beginning of one’s formation. The scroll represents the accounting one must provide before God. These are the three will have to give an accounting.

Divine Presence (his modesty; the Divine Presence rests with those who are modest. God provided mitzvot that ensure that the Divine eradicate impurity and adultery, both of which banish the elements that one must contemplate so as to avoid sin, as as the dye from which the color is made. Various suggestions have been made as to the identity of the color.

Sky-blue wool (tekhelet) – tekhelet. The Torah mentions the color tekhelet in many situations, and the word refers specifically to the dye from which the color is made. Various discussions in the Gemara make it clear that the blue dye of the tekhelet was extracted from a living creature called a philazon. Because of the many passages that describe the philazon, it is difficult to identify one particular animal that meets all of the criteria, and there are many different opinions with regard to its classification. Already during talmudic times the use of tekhelet became a rarity, and soon its true source was forgotten. In recent generations there have been efforts to identify the philazon and to resume use of the dye. Various suggestions have been made as to the identity of the philazon, including the common cuttlefish and the raft snail. Today, many are of the opinion that the philazon is the snail Murex trunculus, which is found on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in the north of Israel. This creature has a unique liquid dye, which, when mixed with other materials, produces the blue tekhelet color described in the Torah.

The Torah (Numbers 15:38) delineates a positive mitzva to use wool that is dyed with this color for ritual fringes. One of the four threads of the fringes must be dyed with this blue dye, and it is wound around the other threads. However, one can fulfill the mitzva to wear fringes even if the threads are not dyed, and today most ritual fringes are made without the dyed thread.

Additionally, Rava says: For what reason did the Torah say: Bring dust for the sota? It is because if she merits to be proven faithful after drinking the water of the sota, a child like our Patriarch Abraham will emerge from her, as it is written with regard to Abraham that he said: “I am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27). But if she does not merit to be proven faithful after drinking the water of the sota, she shall die and return to her dust, the soil from which mankind was formed.

And Rava further taught: As reward for that which our Patriarch Abraham said, etc. – (Abraham’s statement displayed his modesty; the Divine Presence rests with those who are modest. God provided mitzvot that ensure that the Divine eradicate impurity and adultery, both of which banish the elements that one must contemplate so as to avoid sin.

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The Gemara asks: What is the reason for this? The letters alif and shin in the word isha are adjacent, joined together, but in the word ish they are not joined, as the letter yod is written between them.

And Rava further taught: As reward for that which our Patriarch Abraham said: “And I am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27), his children merited two mitzvot: The ashes of the red heifer (see Numbers, chapter 19) and the dust of the sota.

The Gemara asks: There, the dust does serve as an accessory to the mitzva of covering the blood, but there is no benefit imparted by it. It occurs after the animal has been slaughtered and does not itself render the meat fit for consumption.

Rava said: And the fire that consumes the woman is stronger than that which consumes the man. What is the reason for this? The letters alif and shin in the word isha are adjacent, joined together, but in the word ish they are not joined, as the letter yod is written between them.

And Rava further taught: As reward for that which our Patriarch Abraham said: “And I am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27), his children merited two mitzvot: The ashes of the red heifer (see Numbers, chapter 19) and the dust of the sota.

The Gemara asks: Granted, the strap of the phylacteries impart benefit, as it is written: “And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon you; and they shall be afraid of you” (Deuteronomy 28:10). And it is taught in a baraita that Rabbi Eliezer the Great says: This is a reference to the phylacteries of the head, upon which the name of God is written. Phylacteries therefore impart the splendor and grandeur of God and are a fit reward.
**MISHNA** The priest does not write the scroll of the *sota* upon a wooden tablet, and not upon paper made from grass, and not upon paper.

**HALAKHA**

The priest does not write upon a wooden tablet, etc.– The curses of the sota are not written upon a wooden tablet, nor on unprocessed parchment, nor on paper. They must be written on a parchment scroll. If they are written on paper or unprocessed parchment, the scroll is unfit (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 4:8).

**LANGUAGE**

Dithera – דיתaira: From the Greek διθερα, dithera, meaning a hide prepared for writing.

Gum (komes) – קומס: From the Greek κομμς, komms, meaning tree sap. It specifically refers to gum arabic from the acacia tree known as *Acacia arabica*. This sap has a variety of uses, including the production of strong inks.

Copper sulfate (kankantom) – קנקתנון: This word appears in other sources as *kalkantom* or *kalkantoos*. It derives from the Greek κάλκηντος, khalkanthos, meaning copper sulfate (CuSO₄). This substance was used as a base for the ancient dye and ink industry and is still used nowadays to make ink and shoe polish.

**HALAKHA**

And the scribe may not write with gum, etc.– The scroll of the sota may not be written with ink containing copper sulfate, nor may it be written with gum or any substance which makes a mark and cannot be completely erased, but only with ink made from soot, as it is stated in the continuation of the same verse: “And he shall blot them out into the water of bitterness” (Numbers 5:23). This indicates that the scroll must be written with a writing that can be erased in water.

**GEMARA**

Rava says: A scroll of a *sota* that one wrote at night is unfit. What is the reason for this? It is derived by verbal analogy between one instance of the word “law” and another instance of the word “law.” It is written here, with regard to a *sota*: “And the priest shall execute upon her all this law” (Numbers 5:30), and it is written there, with regard to judgment: “According to the law, which they shall teach you, and according to the judgment, which they shall tell you” (Deuteronomy 17:11). Just as judgment may be done only by day, so too the scroll of a *sota* may be written only by day.

**NOTES**

On a scroll (megilah)... in a scroll (sefer) – ספלתי: Rashi explains elsewhere (Erubin 15b) that whenever the Torah refers to a written object as a scroll it means a scroll (megilah). This can be seen in Jeremiah (36:18–20), where the sefer written is later referred to as a megilah. The same verse in Jeremiah also indicates that one must write with ink.

But only with ink – כו׳: Some question whether the scroll of a *sota* must be written specifically with ink, or whether it may be written with other writing substances that can be erased (Sefer Emet and Devar Shoul). According to Rabbi David Luria, the verses in Jeremiah 36:18–20 indicate that all scrolls must be written with ink. Although it appears from the Gemara that ink must be made specifically of soot and oil, the consensus is that one may use other inks with similar stabilizing materials.

**BACKGROUND**

Ink – פא: In talmudic times, various writing utensils and colored inks were used for writing on parchment and paper. Black was the most common color of ink. This ink was similar to India ink, a thick ink made from the soot of burnt wood or oil. The soot was collected and mixed with the appropriate quantity of oil. Sometimes sap was also added to the ink so that it would better adhere to the writing surface.
If one wrote the scroll out of sequence, it is unfit, as it is written: “And the priest shall write these curses in a scroll” (Numbers 5:23). They must be written in the scroll just as they are written in the Torah.

If one wrote the scroll before the sota accepted the oath upon herself, the scroll is unfit, as it is stated: “Then the priest shall cause the woman to swear with the oath of cursing” (Numbers 5:21), and afterward it states: “And the priest shall write these curses in a scroll” (Numbers 5:23).

If one wrote the scroll as a letter, i.e., without first scoring the lines onto the parchment, it is unfit, as the Merciful One states in the Torah: “In a scroll,” indicating that it must be written like a Torah scroll, in which the parchment must be scored.

If one wrote the scroll on two unattached pages, it is unfit, as the Merciful One states in the Torah: “Scroll,” in the singular. It must be written on one scroll and not on two or three scrolls.

If one wrote one letter and erased it, and then wrote another letter and erased it, the scroll is unfit (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 4:10).

Erasure for the sake of a specific woman – דָּפִין כָּא: If the priest erased the scroll not for the sake of a specific sota, the water of the sota is unfit. Whenever the Gemara states: If you say, this is an indication that what follows that introduction is the accepted halakha (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 4:11).

Erased them in two different cups, etc. – דָּפִין כָּא: If the priest wrote two scrolls for two women and erased them in one cup, or if he erased them in separate cups and mixed the water in one cup, the water of the sota is unfit (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 4:11).

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If one wrote one letter and erased it, and then wrote another letter and erased it, the scroll is unfit (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 4:10).

Rava raised a dilemma: If one wrote two scrolls for two separate sota women but then erased both of the scrolls in one cup, what is the halakha? Do we require that only the writing be performed for the sake of a specific woman, in which case that is accomplished here? Or perhaps we require that also the erasure be performed for the sake of a specific woman, which is not accomplished here, since both scrolls are erased together?

And if you say that we require that also the erasure be for the sake of each specific woman, then if the priest erased them in two different cups and afterward mixed the water from both together again, what is the halakha? Do we require that only the erasure be for the sake of a specific woman, in which case that is accomplished here? Or perhaps since this sota does not drink from only her own water and that sota does not drink from only her own water, the water is disqualified?

If one wrote the scroll out of sequence, it is unfit, as it is written: “And the priest shall write these curses in a scroll” (Numbers 5:23). They must be written in the scroll just as they are written in the Torah.

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HALAKHA

If he divided them again – הרברך. If the priest wrote two scrolls for two sota women, erased them in separate cups, and then mixed the water together in one cup, he should not administer this water of a sota to the sota women to drink ab initio. However, after the fact, if he separated the water again into two separate cups and they drank, the drinking is valid. The Kosef Minshe describes the Rambam rules leniently on this question since no answer is provided to the Gemara’s query, and such an uncertainty does not justly erase the Divine Name again (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 4:11).

If some of the water spilled out and some of it remained – וְכִסֹּסֲנֵיהָ נִנְפַּסְנֵיה. If some of the water spilled out and some remained, one should not administer it to the sota to drink ab initio. However, the drinking is valid after the fact. The Ramban rules leniently on this question since no answer is provided to the Gemara’s query, and such an uncertainty does not justly erase the Divine Name again (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 4:11).

HALAKHA

Retroactive clarification – ברברך. This principle is a matter of controversy throughout the Talmud. It posits that a case of uncertainty at a given time may be decided retroactively based on a later event. In this case, when each woman drinks the water, it will be clarified that this was the intended word for her. The consensus among the halakhic authorities is that concerning matters of Torah law one may not claim retroactive clarification, but with regard to matters of rabbinic law one may do so.

Administered the bitter water to her to drink through a palm fiber – הוא הרברך. Rashi explains that the fiber here is similar to a straw, whereas the Arukh asserts that it is a spongy material from which the sota sucks water that has been absorbed in it. According to this understanding, this question is distinct from the following question of whether the sota may drink the water from a tube. Tosafot says that the question is whether, if the water of the sota was absorbed by a fiber and the sota swallowed the fiber, this is considered valid drinking after the fact.

If some of the water spilled out and some of it remained – וְכִסֹּסֲנֵיהָ נִנְפַּסְנֵיה. Rashi explains that this is describing one case, in which some of the water spilled out while the rest remained. According to the Tosafot Hakosh, however, these are two separate cases: In one, some of the water spilled out but a majority remains. In the other, more serious case, most of the water spilled out and only a small amount remains. Some hold that at least a quarter-log must remain in any event, because as a rule, consumption of less than this amount is not considered drinking (Mishnat Kamma).

Two oaths, etc. – וּאֵלֵי מַהְיָאֲהָ. In his commentary on the Torah, Ibn Ezra explains that the priest does not administer the oath to the woman twice, as the Gemara indicates. However, the Rambam explains in his commentary on the Torah that there is only one oath. This is the ruling of the Rambam as well. The Sefot Emor challenges this understanding as Rabbi Zeira challenges this understanding as Rabbi Zeira explicitly states that there are two oaths. The Hazon Yeshaviel explains that Rashi’s opinion is that there is only one oath, and this is the source of the opinion of the Rambam and Ramban. Still, this is not the straightforward understanding of Rashi’s statement, which seems concerned only with the wording of the oath, while accepting that there are in fact two oaths.

HALAKHA

Rava raised a dilemma: If the priest administered the bitter water to the sota to drink through a palm fiber, what is the halakha? Or if he administered it through a tube, what is the halakha? Is this considered a normal manner of drinking, or is it not considered a normal manner of drinking, in which case the act is invalid? The Gemara responds: The dilemma shall stand unresolved.

Rava Ashi raised a dilemma: If some of the water of the sota spilled out and some of it remained in the cup, what is the halakha? Is it sufficient for the woman to drink some of the water in which the scroll has been erased or must she drink all of it? The Gemara responds: The dilemma shall stand unresolved.

NOTES

§ Rabbi Zeira says that Rava says: With regard to the two oaths that are stated with regard to the sota: “And the priest shall cause her to swear” (Numbers 5:19), and “Then the priest shall cause the woman to swear with the oath of cursing” (Numbers 5:21), why are they both necessary? One must be administered before the scroll is erased and one must be administered after it is erased.

Rava objects to this: Both of the oaths are written in the Torah before any mention of the scroll being erased. What is the basis to claim that one oath was administered afterward? Rather, Rava said: While both oaths are administered before the sota drinks, the two oaths are different: One is an oath that has a curse with it, and one is an oath that does not have a curse with it.

The Gemara asks: What are the circumstances of an oath that has a curse with it? What is the language of this oath? Rav Amram says that Rava says: The priest says: I administer an oath to you that you are honest in your claim that you were not defiled, as, if you were defiled, all these curses will come upon you.

Rava said: This is insufficient, as the curse stands by itself and the oath stands by itself. They are said in separate statements, and it cannot be considered to be an oath with a curse. Rather, Rava said: The priest says: I administer an oath to you that if you were defiled, all these curses will come upon you.

Rav Ashi said: Even this is insufficient, as there is a curse but there is no oath that she was not defiled. Rather, Rav Ashi said: The priest must say: I administer an oath to you that you were not defiled and that if you were defiled all these curses will come upon you. Here the oath itself includes the curse.

MISHNA

With regard to what does she say: “Amen, amen” (Number 5:23), twice, as recorded in the verse? The mishna explains that it includes the following: Amen on the curse, as she accepts the curse upon herself if she is guilty, and amen on the oath, as she declares that she is not defiled. She states: Amen if I committed adultery with this man about whom I was warned, amen if I committed adultery with another man. Amen that I did not stray when I was betrothed nor after I was married,

With regard to what does she say amen, amen – אַֽמֶּן, אַֽמֶּן (Number 5:23), twice, as recorded in the verse? The mishna explains that it includes the following: Amen on the curse, as she accepts the curse upon herself if she is guilty, and amen on the oath, as she declares that she is not defiled. She states: Amen if I committed adultery with this man about whom I was warned, amen if I committed adultery with another man. Amen that I did not stray when I was betrothed nor after I was married,