In a state of good health – והמתנה וترتيبה: The Gemara explains that if the woman admits that she is defiled, she is never given the water to drink. The discussion here refers to a woman who does not explicitly admit her guilt, yet refuses to drink. In this case, she will be ritually pure, in which case the erasure prevents her refusal to drink. However, if she appears frightened, it is possible that her refusal is due to fear that she will be harmed by the water even if she is innocent. In this case, if the scroll was already erased and the handful sacrificed, she is forced to drink so that the erasure will not be for nothing, as it is possible that she will be found innocent.

The Gemara answers: This is not difficult; this case, where she is forced to drink, is referring to a situation where she retracts her decision to drink due to fear, as her refusal is not viewed as an admission of guilt, and it is possible that if she drinks she will be found undefiled. And that case, where she does not drink, is referring to a situation where she retracts her decision in a state of good health. Since she does not appear to be afraid, her refusal is viewed as an admission of guilt.

And this is what Rabbi Akiva is saying: In any case where she retracts her decision to drink in a state of good health, she does not drink at all. With regard to a sota who retracts her decision due to fear, if she retracts her decision before the handful is sacrificed, when the scroll has not yet been erased; or even if the scroll was already erased, since the priests acted incorrectly when they erased it beforehand; she can retract her decision. Once the handful is sacrificed, in which case the priests acted correctly when they erased the scroll, she cannot retract her decision, and she is forced to drink against her will.

And then she retracted her statement and said I will drink, etc. – ויאמר אהודה נפשי: If the woman said explicitly that she was defiled, she cannot retract her statement. The discussion here pertains to a woman who did not state explicitly that she was defiled; however, her refusal to drink is interpreted in this manner, and the Gemara questions whether she can claim that her refusal to drink was only due to fear. Some commentators write that she can claim explicitly that her initial refusal was due to fear, she would certainly be believed. This case is comparable to that of a woman who informed her husband that she was menstruating and afterward retracted her statement and claimed that she was ritually pure, in which case the halakha is that if she provided a pretext for her initial statement, she is believed. The Gemara raises this question only in a case where she did not explain her reasons for initially refusing to drink but merely claimed that she is now willing to drink the water (Minhat Ritwak).

It is necessary to put a bitter substance into the water, etc. – והמתנה וترتيبה: The water is called “the water of bitterness” (Numbers 5:23) even before it is drunk, although it might not cause any harm. This indicates that it is not so named because it causes death, but because it is already bitter (Rashi). Others add that the additional phrase “the water of bitterness that causes the curse” (Numbers 5:11) indicates that the water’s bitterness is unrelated to its causing a curse. The ink and dust added to the water do not cause it to be bitter, and therefore something bitter must be added.

The Gemara asks: The statement of Rabbi Akiva is difficult, as it is contradicted by another statement of Rabbi Akiva: There, in the first baraita, he said that erasure prevents the authorities from compelling the woman to drink the water if she retracted her decision to drink, and here he says that the sacrifice of the handful prevents the authorities from compelling the woman to drink the water. In other words, according to the first baraita, the woman can retract her decision to drink until the scroll is erased, whereas according to the second baraita she can retract her decision until the handful is sacrificed.

The Gemara responds: There is a dispute between two tanna’im, and they disagree with regard to the opinion of Rabbi Akiva. They disagree with regard to what point in time, according to Rabbi Akiva, is the final moment at which a woman can refuse to drink the bitter water without being forced to do so.

A dilemma was raised before the Sages: If she initially said: I will not drink, while in a state of good health, and then she retracted her statement and said: I will drink, what is the halakha? Does one say that when she said: I will not drink, it is as if she confessed and said: I am defiled, and since she established herself as defiled she cannot retract her statement? Or perhaps when she said: I will drink, she revealed her thoughts that it was only due to fear that she said she will not drink? The Gemara concludes that the dilemma shall stand unresolved.

Shmueil’s father says: It is necessary for one to put a bitter substance into the water that the sota drinks. What is the reason for this? It is as the verse states: “And he shall blot them out into the water of bitterness” (Numbers 5:23), indicating that they are already bitter before the scroll is erased.

She cannot retract her statement – והמתנה וترتيبה: A sota who, due to fear, says: I will not drink, may later retract her statement and say: I will drink. However, if she said: I will not drink, when she is in good health and unafraid, she may not later recant and say: I will drink (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 4:3).
MISHNA

If before the scroll was erased she said: I will not drink, the scroll that was written for her is sequestered, and her meal-offering is begun and scattered over the place of the ashes, and her scroll is not fit to give to another sota to drink. If the scroll was erased and afterward she said: I am defiled, the water is poured out, and her meal-offering is scattered in the place of the ashes.

When a guilty woman drinks she does not manage to finish drinking before her face turns green and her eyes bulge, and her skin becomes full of protruding veins, and the people standing in the Temple say: Remove her, so that she does not render the Temple courtyard impure by dying there.

The mishna limits the scope of the previous statement: If she has merit, it delays punishment for her and she does not die immediately. There is a merit that delays punishment for one year, there is a larger merit that delays punishment for two years, and there is a merit that delays punishment for three years. From here Ben Azzai states: A person is obligated to teach his daughter Torah, so that if she drinks and does not die immediately, she will know that some merit she has delayed punishment for her. Rabbi Eliezer says: Anyone who teaches his daughter Torah is teaching her promiscuity.

Rabbi Yehoshua says: A woman desires to receive the amount of a k'v of food and a sexual relationship rather than to receive nine k'v of food and abstinence. He would say: A foolish man of piety, and a conviving wicked person, and an abistent woman and those who injure themselves out of false abstinence; all these are people who erode the world.

HALAKHA

If before the scroll was erased she said I will not drink, etc. – If the woman says: I will not drink, before the scroll is erased, then the scroll is sequestered, and it is not fit to give to another sota to drink. Her meal-offering is scattered over the place of the ashes. If she says: I will not drink, once the scroll has been erased, she is forced to drink against her will, and it is explained to her that if she is not defiled she will not be harmed by the water (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhos Sota 4:5).

She said I am defiled – If she is defiled, even if the scroll has been erased, the woman is poured out and her meal-offering is scattered in the place of the ashes (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhos Sota 4:5).

Her face turns green, etc. – If she is defiled, her face immediately turns green, her eyes bulge out, and her veins protrude, and the people standing in the Temple say: Remove her from the Temple courtyard, lest she begin menstruating and render the Temple courtyard impure (see 20b). She is then removed from the women’s courtyard where she is standing (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhos Sota 3:16).

Anyone who teaches his daughter Torah – A woman who studies Torah receives a reward, but her reward is not equal to that of a man because, unlike men, she is not commanded to learn. Despite the fact that women receive a reward if they study Torah, the Sages ruled that a man should not teach Torah to his daughter, since most women’s minds are not attuned to learning and they render the words of the Torah into nonsense. Therefore, the Sages stated: Anyone who teaches his daughter Torah is considered as though he taught her foolishness.

NAMES

Rabbi Eliezer ben Azarya in tractate Shabbat teaches his daughter Torah, it is not considered as though he taught her. Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya in tractate Hagiga (3a) that women are also required to participate in the mitzva of assembly, i.e., the obligation to assemble in the Temple on Sukkot in the year following the Sabbatical Year in order to hear the Written Torah being read publicly (Bab).

Some of the later authorities state that the above ruling does not apply to a woman who decides to study Torah on her own initiative, as by doing so she proves that she does not belong in the category of women who turn the Torah into nonsense (Perusha).

The Rema writes that women are certainly obligated to learn the halakhot that are applicable to them. The later authorities write that nowadays, when women study secular subjects, it is incumbent upon them to study Torah as well, and girls should be taught at least the entire Written Torah and the ethical teachings of tractate Avot (Likutei HaHalakhot). Furthermore, some authorities state that women are required to study those parts of the Torah that deal with matters of faith, as women are obligated to believe in God and to love and fear Him (Rambam Sefer Hilkhot Talmud Torah 13:13, Shubhan Arukh, Voreh Deria 246:6).

People who erode the world – If one gives all his money to charity or spends all his money on other mitzvot, he is not pious but foolish, and he is considered one of those who erode the world (Rambam Sefer Halifla, Hilkhos Arakhin Votamam 8:13).

And her eyes bulge, etc. – This is an exaggeration, as the water does not powerless but because of her merit. Although the knowledge that it is possible to survive the evaluation of the water could cause a woman to commit adultery, it is nevertheless preferable that they become aware of this possibility, as the lack of this knowledge is more likely to cause a lack of fear of the water, as rumors will be spread that the water is powerless (EzYor).
Lest you omit a single letter – halakhat ha’Ereizim
According to the Riva, Rabbi Yishmael means that any letter omitted or added to the text of a Torah scroll invalidates it, even if it does not alter the meaning of the verse. However, most of the commentaries explain that the Gemara is referring to additional or missing letters that change the meaning of the text and transform the text into a blasphemous statement. Rashi provides some examples of this. For instance, with regard to the verse: “But the Lord God is the true God (emet)” (Jeremiah 10:10), if one omitted the word emet, it would read: “The Lord is another.” For example, if when writing: “The King of Faith, the Lord, says to you: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart…” (Deuteronomy 6:5), if one added the word that, it would change the meaning of the verse.

REISH
Rabbi Meir continues: I said to Rabbi Yishmael: I have one substance that I put into the ink, and it is called copper sulfate, which prevents the writing from being erased. He said to me: And may copper sulfate be put into the ink? The Torah clearly said with regard to the scroll of the sota: “And the priest shall write these curses in a scroll, and he shall blot them out into the water of bitterness” (Numbers 5:23). This indicates that the Torah requires writing that can be blotted out.

Since Rabbi Meir’s remark about copper sulfate seems unrelated to Rabbi Yishmael’s previous statement, the Gemara asks: What is Rabbi Yishmael saying to Rabbi Meir, and what is Rabbi Meir replying to Rabbi Yishmael?

The Gemara explains: This is what Rabbi Meir is saying to him: It is not necessary to say that I do not err in omissions and additions, as I am an expert. Rather, there is not even any reason for concern with regard to all the errors I commit, and so I will not say anything to me. Afterward, when I came to learn Torah before Rabbi Yishmael, he prohibited me from doing so.

The Gemara questions the initial part of Rabbi Meir’s statement: Is that so? But isn’t it taught in a baraita that Rabbi Meir said: When I was studying Torah before Rabbi Yishmael, I used to put copper sulfate into the ink with which I wrote Torah scrolls, and he did not say anything to me. Furthermore, Rav Yehuda’s statement is difficult, since he states that it was Rabbi Yishmael who prohibited the addition of copper sulfate, and this is contradicted by the statement of the baraita that it was Rabbi Akiva who prohibited it.

The Gemara answers: Granted, the apparent contradiction between Rav Yehuda’s statement with regard to Rabbi Meir’s serving Rabbi Akiva as a disciple is difficult, as it is contradicted by the statement of the baraita with regard to his first serving Rabbi Yishmael. Furthermore, Rav Yehuda’s statement is difficult, since he states that it was Rabbi Yishmael who prohibited the addition of copper sulfate, and this is contradicted by the statement of the baraita that it was Rabbi Akiva who prohibited it.
However, the contradiction between Rav Yehuda's statement that it was Rabbi Yishmael who prohibited the addition of copper sulfate and the statement of the baraita that it was Rabbi Akiva who prohibited it still poses a difficulty. The Gemara concludes: Indeed, the matter is difficult.

It is taught in a baraita: Rabbi Yehuda says that Rabbi Meir would say: Copper sulfate may be put into the ink that is used for all sacred writings, i.e., Torah scrolls, phylacteries, and mezuzot,

except for the ink used to write the Torah passage about the sota, even when written in a Torah scroll. Rabbi Ya'akov says in the name of Rabbi Meir: It is except for the ink used to write the scroll with the sota passage used in the Temple. The Gemara asks: What is the difference between these two opinions? The Gemara replies: Rabbi Yirmeya says that there is a difference between them with regard to whether it is permitted to erase the passage for the sota from a Torah scroll. According to Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Meir holds that this is permitted, and therefore the passage in the Torah scroll must be written with ink that does not contain copper sulfate, so that it can be erased. By contrast, according to Rabbi Ya'akov, Rabbi Meir holds that it is prohibited to erase the passage from a Torah scroll, and therefore the passage may be written with ink containing copper sulfate.

The Gemara assumes that according to Rabbi Ya'akov it is prohibited to erase the passage from a Torah scroll, since he holds that the scroll must be written for the sake of the sota, whereas Rabbi Yehuda, who permits this, holds that the scroll need not be written for the sake of the sota. And therefore, the opinions of these tanna'im are parallel to the opinions of those tanna'im, as it is taught in a baraita: The scroll of one sota is not fit to be used in the preparation of the water to give to another sota to drink, as it was not written for the sake of the other sota. Rabbi Aha bar Yoshiya says: Her scroll is fit to be used in the preparation of the water to give to another sota to drink, since it does not need to be written for the sake of the sota.

Rav Pappa said: Perhaps that is not so, and the two disputes are not comparable. It is possible that the first tanna of the baraita states that the scroll may not be used for another sota only there, in the case if a scroll written for a specific woman; since it was originally designated in the name of one woman, e.g., Rachel, it cannot again be designated in the name of another woman, e.g., Leah. However, in the case of a Torah scroll, which is written without specifying anyone, indeed we may erase the passage to prepare the water for a sota even though it was not written for her sake.

Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said that the comparison between the two disputes can be refuted for a different reason: Perhaps that is not so. It is possible that Rabbi Aha bar Yoshiya states that the scroll may be used for another sota only there, with regard to the scroll written for a specific sota, as it was written for the purpose of the curses of a sota in general. However, in the case of a Torah scroll, which is written to be learned from, indeed we may not erase it for a sota, as it was not written for the sake of a sota at all.

Except for the ink used to write the scroll with the sota passage used in the Temple – the sota scroll is written with ink that does not contain copper sulfate and therefore can be erased (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 3:4).

The scroll of one sota is not fit, etc. – the sota scroll must be written for the sake of a specific sota. If it was not written for her sake, it is unfit for use. A scroll written for the sake of one woman is not fit for use in the evaluation of any other woman (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 4:4).

Perek III
Daf 20 Amud b

The/scroll/with/the/sota/does/not/contain/copper/sulfate/and/hence/can/be/erased.

However, according to Rav Ya’akov, only scrolls written for the sake of the sota are permitted to be erased. This is because the passage of the sota is written in a specific place, and thus it is not considered a sota for the sake of which the ink was written.

The Gemara concludes that the two opinions are parallel to the opinions of those tanna'im, as it is taught in a baraita: The scroll of one sota is not fit to be used in the preparation of the water to give to another sota to drink, as it was not written for the sake of the other sota. Rabbi Aha bar Yoshiya says: Her scroll is fit to be used in the preparation of the water to give to another sota to drink, since it does not need to be written for the sake of the sota.

Rav Pappa said: Perhaps that is not so, and the two disputes are not comparable. It is possible that the first tanna of the baraita states that the scroll may not be used for another sota only there, in the case if a scroll written for a specific woman; since it was originally designated in the name of one woman, e.g., Rachel, it cannot again be designated in the name of another woman, e.g., Leah. However, in the case of a Torah scroll, which is written without specifying anyone, indeed we may erase the passage to prepare the water for a sota even though it was not written for her sake.

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HALAKHA

Except for the ink used to write the scroll with the sota passage used in the Temple – the sota scroll is written with ink that does not contain copper sulfate and therefore can be erased (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 3:4).

The scroll of one sota is not fit, etc. – the sota scroll must be written for the sake of a specific sota. If it was not written for her sake, it is unfit for use. A scroll written for the sake of one woman is not fit for use in the evaluation of any other woman (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Sota 4:4).
One who wrote a bill of divorce with which to divorce his wife, etc. — If a bill of divorce was not written for the sake of the specific man and woman using the bill of divorce, it is not valid. Therefore, if one wrote a bill of divorce and then decided not to use it, then even if he later found a person from his city with the same name who is married to a woman of the same name, the second individual cannot use the bill of divorce (Rambam Sefer Nashim, Hilkhot Gezerin 3:1–2; Shulhan Arukh, Even HaEzer 13:1–2).

It is referring to the erasure — The Rosh explains that although the sota passage need not be written for the sake of a specific woman, it does need to be written for the purpose of cursing, as the verse states: “And he shall write the curses” (Numbers 5:23). Therefore, the sota passage in the Torah scroll, which is written for study purposes, may not be used for a sota (Tosefot Halosh).

The Gemara asks: And doesn’t Rabbi Aha bar Yoshiya hold in accordance with that which is taught in a mishna (Gittin 2:4): With regard to one who wrote a bill of divorce with which to divorce his wife but later reconsidered and did not divorce her, if a resident of his city found him and said to him: My name is the same as your name, and my wife’s name is the same as your wife’s name; give me the bill of divorce, and I will use it to divorce my wife, it is unfit to divorce the other woman with it. The reason for this is that it was written for the sake of another woman. Seemingly, the same principle should apply with regard to the scroll of a sota.

The Sages say in response: There, with regard to a bill of divorce, the Merciful One states: “And he shall write for her a bill of divorce” (Deuteronomy 24:1). This teaches that we require the writing to be performed for the sake of the specific woman. However, no similar requirement is mentioned with regard to a sota. The Gemara asks: Here, too, with regard to the sota, the verse states: “And the priest shall perform with her all of this law” (Numbers 5:30), indicating that the ritual must be performed for the sake of the specific woman. The Gemara answers: What is the performance referred to in the verse? It is referring to the erasure, whereas the writing need not be done for the sake of a specific woman.

The mishna states: When a guilty woman drinks she does not manage to finish drinking before her face turns green and her eyes bulge, and her skin becomes full of protruding veins. The Gemara asks: In accordance with whose opinion is this mishna, which indicates that the water evaluates her while she is still drinking? It is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Shimon, who says: The priest sacrifices her meal-offering and afterward forces her to drink, because according to the opinion of the Rabbis the meal-offering is sacrificed only after she drinks, and as long as her meal-offering has not been sacrificed the water does not evaluate her, as it is written: “And he shall bring her offering for her... for it is a meal-offering of jealousy, a meal-offering of remembrance, a reminder of iniquity” (Numbers 5:15).

The Gemara asks: Say the latter clause of the mishna: If she has merit, it delays her punishment for her. We arrive at the opinion of the Rabbis, as, if this statement were in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Shimon, didn’t he say: Merit does not delay punishment in the case of the bitter water of a sota?

Rav Hisda said: In accordance with whose opinion is this mishna? It is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Akiva, who says: The priest sacrifices her meal-offering and afterward forces her to drink. With regard to the order of the ritual he holds in accordance with Rabbi Shimon, and with regard to the matter of merit delaying punishment, he holds in accordance with the opinion of the Rabbis.

The mishna states: And the people standing in the Temple say: Remove her, so that she does not render the Temple courtyard impure. The Gemara explains: What is the reason for this? It is lest she die there immediately and render the women’s courtyard, where she drinks the water, impure. The Gemara asks: Is this to say that a corpse is prohibited from being in the women’s courtyard, which has the same status as the Levite camp in the desert?

In the Levite camp — The Gemara explains: When the Jewish people were in the wilderness, the camp was arranged around the Tabernacle and divided into three areas. The first camp was that of the Divine Presence, which included the Tabernacle and its courtyard. The second camp was the Levite camp, whose tents surrounded the Tabernacle. Surrounding this was the Israelite camp, where the rest of the nation pitched their tents. Those who were impure were required to remain outside the first, the second, or the third camp, depending on the type of ritual impurity involved.

When the Temple was built in Jerusalem, a corresponding division was instituted. The Temple and its courtyard were equivalent to the camp of the Divine Presence, the Temple Mount was equivalent to the Levite camp, and the city of Jerusalem was equivalent to the Israelite camp. The women’s courtyard was situated immediately outside the entrance to the Temple courtyard, and by Torah law its sanctity was equivalent to that of the Temple Mount. However, the Sages ordained that the sanctity of the women’s courtyard would be greater than that of the Temple Mount.
But isn’t it taught in a baraita: One who is ritually impure with impurity imparted by a corpse is permitted to enter the Levite camp. And the Sages said this not only with regard to one who is ritually impure with impurity imparted by a corpse; rather, even a corpse itself may be brought into the Levite camp, as it is stated: “And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him” (Exodus 13:19), which is interpreted to mean: With him, in his vicinity, even though Moses was in the Levite camp.

Abaye said: The woman is removed not due to a concern that she will die there but lest the fear of the water cause her to begin to menstruate, and it is permitted for a menstruating woman to enter the Levite camp. The Gemara asks: Is this to say that fear causes menstrual relaxation and menstrual bleeding? The Gemara responds: Yes, as it is written: “And the Queen was exceedingly pained” (Esther 4:4.), and Rav says: This means that she began to menstruate. The Gemara asks: But didn’t we learn in a mishna (Nidda 39a) that trepidation eliminates the flow of menstrual blood? Presumably, the sota experiences trepidation. The Gemara answers: Trepidation generated by extended worry contracts the muscles and prevents the blood from flowing, but sudden fear relaxes the muscles and causes the blood to flow.

The mishna states: If she has merit, it delays punishment… for one year… for two years… for three years. The Gemara asks: Whose opinion is expressed in the mishna? It is not the opinion of Abba Yosei ben Hanan, and not the opinion of Rabbi Elazar ben Yitzhak of Kefar Darom, and not the opinion of Rabbi Yishmael.

This is as it is taught in a baraita: If she has merit, it delays punishment for her for three months, equivalent to the time necessary to recognize the fetus; this is the statement of Abba Yosei ben Hanan.

Rabbi Elazar ben Yitzhak of Kefar Darom says: Merit delays punishment for nine months, as it is stated: “Then she shall be cleared, and shall conceive seed” (Numbers 5:28). It is possible to infer from this that if she has merit she will be cleared temporarily, for the length of time required to conceive a child, and there, in Psalms, it says: “A seed shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord unto the next generation” (Psalms 22:71). This indicates that the seed must be fit to tell of the Lord once it matures, and a child can live only if it is born after the culmination of nine months in the womb.

Rabbi Yishmael says: Merit delays punishment for twelve months. And although there is no explicit proof for the concept of merit delaying punishment for twelve months, there is an allusion to the concept, as it is written that Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar after interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream concerning the evil which would befall him: “Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you, and redeem your sins with charity, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor;