The Law of Jealousy

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Chapter Four

The Ritual in Front of the Sanctuary

One of the implicit objectives of the ritual is to give new expression to past experience and, more particularly, to guarantee a successful outcome for the socio-cultural order. Moving from events occurring in distant times, the ritual reorders vast spans of existence, even life itself, from its very beginning. It intervenes in the existing world with contributions capable of creating continuity between the present and the past.

The Sotah ritual, which ignores, or does not take into account historical and temporal divisions, adheres perfectly to this model. Indeed, by drawing upon categories which are shared and unchanging over time, upon an oracle or a solemn pronouncement, the procedure of the "bitter waters" conquers powerful means for recovering values and reestablishing the 'perfect' state in the present and in any time.

In order to explain the all-embracing and everlasting effectiveness of the rituals, it should be noted that their specific characteristic is to present themselves in multiple forms, with many objectives, each of which supports and clarifies the others. The procedure of Sotah confirms this rule through a complex division. It consists of two rituals, one confessional and the other of offering-sacrifice, which thence culminate in a third act, the actual ordeal, which bestows a unique influence upon the whole phenomenon, and which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In principle, the confessional and sacrificial rituals are to the ordeal what the individual and implicit sphere is to the collective, explicit one. In the former, operations concentrate on the intrinsic state of the participants take place, whilst the latter refers to the extended level of the collectivity, and to its public performances. Having said

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1 There is still a difference between the implicit and explicit objectives in the ritual. Durkheim says: "The real justification of religious practices does not lie in their apparent aims, but rather in the invisible action which they exert on conscience and in the way they influence consciousness" (1960, 514).
this, it should be pointed out that certain intermediary 'plural' characteristics are always present in the person of the accused, and that these accompany her intrinsic condition.

In order to give a general background to the subject, it might be useful to dwell for a moment on the fact that the passage from one stage of the ritual to another (and subsequently to the ordeal), occurs as an "operative act" (J. Skorubski, 1976, 99), that is, as an event which has a direct impact on the sensitive world, which has the aim of re-establishing status and norms, and which directly influences the formation of the social world. As a social event it should be linked, in a synoptic base, to events or similar acts.

The separate reading of the individual moments of the ritual here only aims to clarify better the values underlying each of these moments. In the same way, the dissimilarity of the effects of the rite enables us to disaggregate the lines and objectives of a composite world.

The scene of the confession and of the "offering of jealousy"

1. The "Supreme Court of Jerusalem" (Sot. 1:4), where the "wayward" woman was taken, was the superior organ which applied "all the law" and which formally, at least until the destruction of the town, dealt out the most serious sentences (B. Sot. 7b) (cf. S. Safrai, 1974, 392-400).²

Despite its lateness, but perhaps for the very reason that it represents centuries of reflection, the description of Maimonides makes some interesting points. "On the fifteenth day of Adar the court turned its attentions to the public needs" and examined the women, those that were to be subjected to admonishment, so as to send them back without their ketubah. The "bitter waters" could, however be drunk at other times, whenever the need arose (Maim. 4:1).³ This passage from Maimonides reveals particularly that recourse to the ritual continued to be considered, in the Jewish mentality, as a "public need," a

²"Jewish religious life included many areas of daily life and the concern for and supervision of religious matters thus comprised many areas" (S. Safrai, 1976, 395). This supervision was undertaken by the Sanhedrin which established, for instance, the times of the offerings, and how the seeds were to be mixed, as well as supervising a variety of technical operations (the opening of paths and the preparation of places of purification of pilgrims (cf. S. Safrai, 1976, 395).

³Maimonides' clarification is important although it does not allow a univocal interpretation: "Water could be given to a corrupted woman at any time" (4:1). It does not specify if the First of Adar was the moment when the women were admonished and subjected to the test, or rather when only the fate of the ketubah was decided.
The Ritual in Front of the Sanctuary

requirement in order to guarantee the cyclical healing of the community.

As part of a broader defence strategy, it is helpful to give a description of the scene in court. The interpretation of the Gemara provides details concerning the entrance of the judges and the start of the trial. The "Supreme Court" would meet (cf. G. Alon, 1980, 191) "near the altar (or in the Chamber of Hewn Stone)." The place where the meeting between the court members and the accused woman took place is not specified. This probably occurred in a different place from that of the ordeal itself.

The judges began the procedure by inviting the woman to trust and obey them. They advised: "rely on thy purity and drink" (B. Sot. 7b). This brief exhortation immediately underlines two principles on which the whole action is based. It highlights the fact that its purpose is to prove the "purity" of the accused woman (thus, a condition of lawfulness) as well as stressing the function of the "bitter waters" as a means by which to achieve this purpose.

The "Supreme Court" expects the woman to admit: "I am unclean" (Sot. 1:5). The confession is a woman's duty. This can be inferred, for example, from the text in Lev. 5:5 in which it is pointed out that in some serious cases (testimony, oath, contamination by a corpse) the sinner is expected to make a solemn, public confession. The fact that a parallel is drawn between such cases and Sotah indicates the enormity of the accused woman's responsibility. She has held injurious power, which has exposed her husband to "overwhelming doubt" (cf. Chap. 3). The subsequent operations will reduce her influence, will remove the possibility of her doing harm, and will be justified by these widened references.

Following their initial advice to the sotah woman, the members of the "Supreme Court" attempt to weaken her resistance. They try everything to induce her to confess her guilt, so as to avoid the "bitter waters" (cf. Maim. 3:2). These attempts aim to limit harmful events (secret plots, fear, disobedience). Just by exposing the vulnerability of the "wayward" wife before the power of the judges, her harmful influence is, in some way, neutralized.

The intention of the court is not, in any case, to burden the woman with excessive responsibility. From what is said by the judges in the ritual, the need to control, rather than to destroy the woman, can be perceived. She is conceded important extenuating circumstances so as not to aggravate her position. For instance, the negative influences of any bad company she may have kept, wine, inexperience, or youthful frivolity are used as justifications (Sot. 1:4). As a warning, but also by way of consolation, she is further reminded of the examples of "wise
men" who have sinned and confessed (B. Sot. 7b). Maimonides' comment clarifies better the warnings of the judges, which seem to remind the woman that anyone may fall: "My daughter, many have preceded thee and have been swept away. Great and worthy men have been overcome by their inclination to evil, and have stumbled" (Maim. 3:2).

Generally speaking, the public, solemn act performed before the court and the expedients adopted have the purpose of emphasizing that confession means salvation and safety for the woman and for the community and, as can be inferred from the Babylonian Talmud, this is a means to "inherit the world to come" (B. Sot. 7b). Translated into sociological terms, the admonishment and the solicitations of the judges appear to inform the woman that the divine order and social conventions cannot be challenged with impunity, and that backing down voluntarily from such a challenge puts order back into present and future existence.

Apart from this, the words of the judges assert their authority, above all, because they inform the accused woman that her confession has the urgent purpose of ensuring that the Name of God (written on the ordeal scroll, cf. Chap 5) is not "blotted out by the water" (Sot. 1:4; likewise B. Sot. 7b). This point is both delicate and revealing. The fact that the Name is used in the ordeal implies that an extremely dangerous situation must be faced. The dangerous effect, which is feared, is desecration and abuse. The woman is invited to confess in order to spare the community the risk of committing errors or excesses.

The Sotah tractate is explicit as far as the forms which this invitation to confess must assume. It must be formulated in such a way that the woman may understand what is been asked of her, in a language she knows (Sot. 7:1) in which she is able to reply consciously and clearly to her judges, and before the public.

The effects of the confession are immediate. When, whether spontaneously or under pressure, the woman confesses "I am unclean" she must renounce her marriage rights (Sot. 1:5). If a marriage contract exists, it must be destroyed immediately, according to the Amoraim (B. Sot.7b). Upon renunciation or destruction of the marriage contract, all duties between husband and wife cease to exist. As has already been discussed (cf. Chap. 3), the woman loses her endowment, and is removed from the marriage area as a result of this type of dissolution of the marriage union.

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4Philo says that when he reached the Temple, the husband "standing opposite the altar, in the presence of the priest, officiating on that day, explains his suspicion" (De Spec. Leg. III:55).
The dissolution of the marriage constitutes a clear-cut separation of the woman from that which she is able to contaminate or destroy. This is the form of salvation which the system, using force and institutional correctness, applies to itself. It is not, however, superfluous to point out that with her confession and the dissolution of her marriage, the woman frees herself from the state of dangerousness. In a certain sense, she too is saved from a precarious or unbearable situation.

The fact that confession frees the accused woman from a number of problems leads to one inevitable consequence: refusal to confess leaves all these problems unsolved. This leads to greater severity. If the accused woman insists on proclaiming "I am clean" (Sot. 1:5) the system resorts to very severe, intimidatory acts. The woman is thus treated as a person in bad faith, or as a slave to evil inclinations, who despises advice and suitable solutions. It is this arrogance which must be fought and beaten.

Thus the procedure changes. Once the possibility of a confession has been exhausted, and no result has been obtained, the legal action comes to a halt. In its place, the phase of the "offering of jealousy" is introduced. The background to the ritual is no longer the "Supreme Court." It becomes instead, the area of the East Door, at the Gate of Nicanor. The exposure of the woman "before the Lord" (Num. 5:16) takes place before the Holy of Holies (albeit at a certain distance) and involves further intimidation, according to Sot. 1:4, as occurs in cases of death sentences. The Talmud, and more specifically Maimonides, point out that the woman is made "to go up and down from place to place and led around in order to tire her out so much that she might become sick of it and perchance confess" (Maim. 3:3). It is again "before the Lord" that the priests tear her robes, untie her hair, and take away all her jewellery (Sot. 1:5-6).

The ritual of confession, together with the ill-treatment inflicted upon the woman, once again illustrate that order does not depend on the application of the legal system instituted by man. If the male world had effective tools and uncontrasted authority, and the female sphere were totally submissive or defenseless, it would be enough to apply male supremacy fully (and with force). On the contrary, man is not capable of regulating life through acts of eradication of evil, of removal of disorder.

5Following Sanhedrin 4:5 H. Bietenhard (1956, 34) draws a parallel between the threats made to the witnesses in cases involving capital punishment and those made to the "wayward" woman. He concludes that these threats had the aim of showing the death which the woman would face if she were to be found guilty.
The Sotah procedure illustrates, therefore, that on a structural level, a unilateral male act would not solve the uncertainties, the unclear areas, the dangers which must be fought. Even if she constitutes a problematic and threatening element, the woman must participate to make the situation comprehensible and to meet the needs of everybody in a suitable way. Her participation is essential in order to continue the game of challenge and reply, of question and answer. In such conditions of interdependence, the binary scheme becomes less representative and has little effect.

The ritual of the offering, which falls into the the broad category of sacrificial acts, begins with the exposure of the woman "before the Lord," in front of the Sanctuary. This entrance into the real cult becomes the fulcrum of the whole trial.

2. The background of the "offering of jealousy" must be highlighted. First of all, the question of if, and how, it can be considered a sacrifice, that is, one of those acts which constitute the culminating experience of the Jewish cult, must be approached.

The variety of Jewish sacrifices, and their wide-ranging effects, is considerable, and only brief reference can be made to them here. They may be classified according to the type of offering (animals, food, first fruits) or according to the purpose of the offering itself (expiatory, conciliatory, dedicatory, for peace and communion, etc.).

For the purpose of this analysis, the difference between the bloody sacrifice of animals, and the offering of cereals and drink, is important. In the former, the blood becomes the instrument of atonement, through the sacrifice of a living creature. The latter is used in a similar way, as a substitution, or integration of the former. Broadly speaking, it takes on the characteristics and functions and reproduces its ideal presuppositions. It is helpful at this point to specify that the central characteristic of the sacrifice is determined by a close similarity with food, be it solid or liquid and with the latter's symbolic value, and

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6 Illustrating the various categories of sacrifice, A. Edersheim makes an important distinction between those "in communion" or "for communion with God." "To the former class belong the burnt- and peace-offerings; to the latter the sin- and the trespass-offerings. But, as without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, every service and every worshipper had, so to speak, to be purified by blood" (1959, 108-109).

7 Another important point is that the animals for sacrifice are domestic because they are chosen from those raised to provide food. Animals which are imperfect, wild, and under eight days old cannot be used. Only the former are integrated into the divine plane while the rest is excluded.
that the cereals in the Sotah ritual, clearly constituting "food," adhere closely to this model.

The animals in the community sacrifices explicitly represent the status of the offerer: a high priest offers a young bull, a Nasi (Prince) brings a he-goat, a commoner a she-goat or a lamb, a poor man two doves or two pigeons. In cases of extreme poverty, the offerer is allowed to bring just one-tenth of an epha of pure flour (Lev. 5,11-15).

The most important animal sacrifices offered at the Temple are expiatory (hatta'at and 'asham) and regard sins committed or amends for offences towards consecrated things or other persons' rights (Lev. 4:5). The dedicatory sacrifice ("olah, holocaust or burnt sacrifice, "which goes up") was celebrated morning and evening, as well as on Saturdays and all other feast days. This reflects the idea of the total gift, the offering par excellence (R. De Vaux, 1964, 28-31), placed "before the Lord" and wholly dedicated to Him. In the great feasts, the holocaust ("olah") was accompanied by sacrifices offered for the sins (hatta'at) of the people or individuals. The hatta'at sacrifice was a central feature in the ritual of Yom Kippur, the only day in the year when the priest would take the blood of the victim beyond the "veil" of the Holy of Holies (cf. R. De Vaux, 1964, 86). The sacrifices of peace-communion (shelamim), which include todah, offered in cases of solemnity, and nedabah, a voluntary offering of devotion (cf. De Vaux R., 1964, 33) recall, through the food shared and consumed by the priest and the people, the whole community.

An offering of cereals or oblation (minhah) would usually accompany, in a quantity proportional to the animal sacrificed (cf. Num. 15:4-12), the sacrifices of "olah and some shelamim, but would never accompany the hatta'at sacrifices or 'asham (cf. A. Edersheim, 1959, 136). In ordinary cases, the minhah was composed of pure flour (solet), oil (shemen) and incense (levonah) (Lev. 6:7-8), and it was always salted (Lev. 2,3). 'Olah, hatta'at and 'asham were the holiest sacrifices (qodesh qodashim) and were offered at the northern side of the altar, as a sign of greater respect.9

Returning to the case of Sotah, it should be remembered that the offering of the woman's food, which signaled the beginning of the ritual, constitutes the meeting point of the "holy" ritual with the

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9"The Rabbis attach ten comparative degrees of sanctity to sacrifices, and it is interesting to mark that of these the first belonged to the blood of the sin-offering; the second to the burnt-offering; the third to the sin-offering itself, and the fourth to the trespass-offering" (A. Edersheim 1959, 112).
ordeal. Through such an offering, it is possible (cf. Chap. 5) to arrive at the definitive test. For the time being, we must attempt to determine the connection between the Sotah offering and the sacrifice, and try to understand how, through this offering, a concentration of symbolic actions takes place.

3. Although the Sotah offering occurs in the solemn setting of the Temple, it cannot be considered as one of the "holiest" rituals, and is not included in the tractates of the Mishnah in which festivals of importance are discussed (cf. Divisions of Moed and Qodashim) (cf. Chap. 6). Furthermore, the minhah of Sotah appears to be something of a dishomogeneous act, both autonomous and isolated, because it neither accompanies nor concludes the immolation of the victim. No connection with the sacrificial blood is evidenced in it.

This picture could lead one to conclude that the Sotah offering does not possess any of the true characteristics of sacrifice. It is, however, possible to situate the Sotah ritual within the ideal and symbolic area of sacrifice, due to the fact that 1) the Sotah offering takes place at the altar, where the daily victim (tamid) is sacrificed together with other sacrifices (cf. S. Safrai, 1976, 885-890) and that 2) it contains some of the specific characteristics of the hatta'at sacrifice for sins. It is in fact called a "commemorative offering" (minhat zikkaron) which recalls an iniquity, transgression or sin ('awon) (Num. 5:15).

Attention has already been drawn to the fact that the hatta'at sacrifice of the poor man\(^{10}\) may only consist of cereals (Lev. 5:11-13) and must be kept apart from the blood sacrifice.\(^{11}\) If one wished to clarify the relationships between the hatta'at of the poor man and the minhah of an unfaithful wife, can the former's status of sacrifice be extended to the latter's offering?

There are various similarities between the hatta'at sacrifice and the minhah of Sotah (cf. 1,2,3,4) and some more specific ones can be explained only with reference to the special hatta'at of the poor man (cf. 5 and 6): 1) The Sotah rite is a memorial of sin, like hatta'at (cf. Num. 5:15). 2) The procedure of the minhah of Sotah seems, firstly, to

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\(^{10}\)Hatta'at is a sacrifice offered for sins committed out of ignorance, lack of attention, weakness or when the guilt was not clear (cf. A. Edersheim, 1959, 128). It was offered both during major feasts and in purification rituals. It could be public or private. "It can be distinguished from other sacrifices by two characteristics: the role of blood, and the use of the victim's flesh. It is the sacrifice in which blood plays the most important role" (R. De Vaux, 1964, 83).

\(^{11}\)According to A. Edersheim there were other occasions of offerings ("isolated") from the bloody sacrifice, but these were connected with rituals and the consecration of priests (1959, 136-137).
recall or underline the woman's condition (cf. n. 4). This reflects a specific characteristic of hatta'at, in which the victim is chosen on the basis of the status and function of its offerer. 3) In Sotah, a solemn, and quite unique act of confession is foreseen, which could, in principle, be considered similar to the confession required in every hatta'at (cf. A. Edersheim, 1959, 113-114). 4) Both in Sotah and in hatta'at the unburnt part is set aside for the priests, and the offerer does not touch it. 5) Oil and incense, (signs of joy) are poured neither onto the food of Sotah, nor on the poor man's offering of hatta'at. 6) In the procedure of Sotah, and in the poor man's hatta'at, the semikah (laying on of hands) is not clearly present, even though these are offerings which must be presented personally (Lev. 7:30). 12

The fundamental differences are, however, either of a general nature (cf. 1,2,3,4,5) or they can be connected to the sacrifice of hatta'at of the poor man (cf. 6,7). 1) The victim of hatta'at is a prized gift, a perfect animal, whilst the Sotah offering is "food for beasts" (Sot. 2:1). 2) The Sotah offering is made only in specific circumstances and, according to the interpretation of Maimonides, on a fixed date (the 15th of Adar, a month before Passover). A collective hatta'at is required in the main feasts while a personal hatta'at is required on a number of "sober occasions" (well-known examples are birth and personal purifications). 3) The minhah of Sotah is taken to the southwest side, and not the northeast side, where the most important sacrifices take place (including hatta'at). 13 4) Whilst an animal is usually required in cases of hatta'at for "uncleanliness," in the Sotah ritual only cereal is allowed, and moreover, it cannot be offered during the festivities (cf. A. Edersheim, 1959, 128-131). 5) The minhah of Sotah is offered in worthless vessels; the hatta'at sacrifice (even the poor man's one) is never presented in rough or common vessels. 6) The food of Sotah is unpolished barley flour; the poor man's sacrifice of hatta'at is wheatflour, to be precise, one tenth of an ephah of pure flour (cf. Lev. 5:11-13; Hebr. 9:22). 7) Whilst every hatta'at is taken personally by the sinner, in Sotah, the offering is carried by the suspected wife, as well as by the husband and the priest, who perform alongside her. If semikah takes place, therefore, it is a 'plural' act.

12 Hands are laid on all private sacrifices, except for the first fruits, the tithes and the Passover lamb (cf. A. Edersheim, 1959, 114).
13 The rules governing priest behavior are as follows: "Taking his stand at the southeastern corner of the altar, he next took the 'handful' of what was actually to be burnt, put it in another vessel, laid some of the frankincense on it, carried it to the top of the altar, salted it, and then placed it on the fire. The rest of the meat-offering belonged to the priests" (A. Edersheim, 1959, 138).
The Sotah ritual may be better understood through an analysis of the network of similarities and differences listed above. It appears to hinge on elements which are connected to, or are very close to the area of authentic sacrifice. In a strictly legal sense, it is, in fact, modelled on the substitution of a blood sacrifice with a bloodless one, and at the same time, of the offerer with the victim (cf. A. Edersheim, 1959, 107). It is, nevertheless, a readaptation of the ordinary sacrifice, because it involves specific procedures and gives rise to improper factors which cannot be classified.

Before reconsidering the individual points listed above, some further observations should be made, together with a description of what happens at the scene of the sacrifice, and at the scene of Sotah in particular.

The basis and the effects of sacrifices

1. According to the interpretation of M. Mauss, a wide-scale act of sacralization takes place in the sacrificial ritual: the victim, the altar, and the priest assume holy characteristics for themselves and for the society which they represent. In fact, "the victim of sacrifice is obliged to become God himself in order to be able to act (on the Gods)" (M. Mauss, 1968, I, 213). For this reason, the ritual must be preceded by fastings, sprinklings, and ablutions of the offerer and the sacrificer, who "prepare the profane one for the holy act removing the vices of lay life from its body, and taking it from the common life to be introduced into the holy world of the gods" (1968, I, 217).

This preparatory procedure is very clearly evidenced in the ancient Jewish ritual, in which: "Having first been duly purified, a man brought his sacrifice himself 'before the Lord' – anciently, to the 'door of the Tabernacle,' where the altar of burnt-offering was, and in the Temple into the great Court" (A. Edersheim, 1959, 113).

How does the woman's offering fit into this picture? What does her personal presence at the scene of the sacrifice show? If the scheme of M. Mauss were to be followed, by assuming the role of offerer, the woman ought to be subjected to rituals with the aim of separating her from her ordinary state, and bringing her closer to the extraordinary state which she is about to enter. As is known, this action was not foreseen in the Jewish environment, because women were not obliged to make sacrifices on appointed times.\(^{14}\) In the cases in which, for matters connected with

\(^{14}\)In connection with this, Ex. 23:17 gives a positive precept depending on time (to which women were not normally bound) and relative to three feasts: spring (pesah), first fruits (shavuot), harvest-time (sukkot). On such occasions, the men had to appear before the Lord and not empty-handed. Other important rituals
maternity, for instance, they had to bring personal sacrifices (a lamb, a pigeon, a dove "for atonement," cf. Lev. 12:6), they stayed within limited procedural contexts (cf. S. Safrai, 1976, 903), which envisaged specific ritual and behavior, and in particular, imposed a period of time during which the mother had to wait "for her blood to be purified" (Lev. 12:5).

It is the position of the woman at the scene of the ritual which gives an initial explanation, enabling the sacrificial character of Sotah to be brought out. While, on the one hand, there are no fasts, segregations, ritual sprinklings, or other interventions with the aim of bettering or liberating, which emphasize the woman's exit from the lay state (or other ritual incapacity), on the other hand, there are acts which appear to underline, through humiliation and pain, the woman's low level. All these operations clearly visualize how the woman belongs to a degraded world, far removed from holiness. They reveal, in effect, that she is where she should not be (if she were honest), and that she must perform an act of atonement (which she could have avoided), rather than that an elevation towards holiness is about to begin.

The accused woman is therefore largely defined by the vexations to which she is subjected. In particular these recall, one by one, circumstances or deviances in which she is supposed to have been involved. She undressed to sin and so she is stripped and exposed to the public immediately after the start of the trial (Sot. 1:7). She hid herself and so she must show her disgrace to the women, so that they may judge the gravity of her guilt and avoid falling into the same immodesty (Sot. 1:6). She adorned herself for her lover and so she is

at "appointed times," when offerings were performed for sins, took place at the New Moon, (Num. 28:11), Rosh Hashanah (Num. 29:5) and of course, Yom Kippur (Num. 29:7). It was the duty of the men, in groups or deputations of at least ten people, to take the sacrificial offering to the Temple. However, in the important feasts, the women, together with their families, were allowed to contribute to the offerings of peace and communion (S. Safrai, 1976, 877 and 903) and indeed they frequently accompanied their husbands and they took part in the rituals with them (cf. S. Safrai, 1977, 877). So it is interesting to note that women were never really absent, not even in the most obviously male area. The Babylonian Talmud, in fact, says that in certain circumstances, even the killing of an animal by a woman could be considered valid (cf. B. Zeb. 31b). Even if the occasions of sacrifice of the man and the woman do not usually coincide, some significant prohibitions, such as the one specified twice in Lev. 27:10 - "do not substitute" the victim dedicated for the altar - were directed at the man but "repeated" for the woman (in the interpretation of the rabbis).
made ugly, repellant to the eyes of the judges, her husband, and all those who are present at the ritual (cf. Chap. 5).

The intention to place the woman at such a dishonourable level can be interpreted within a broader view of sacrifice in the Temple.\textsuperscript{15} As has already been pointed out, there is an important connection between the offerer and the nature of the sacrifice. The condition and the transformation of the victim-offering synthesize and modify the status of the offerers. This means that during the sacrificial ritual, the victim becomes progressively holier (according to M. Mauss, 1968, I, 247-250), and that the same transformation occurs through the victim (albeit less precisely and intensely) to the offerer. This improvement of the victim is necessary so that the sacrificial offering may become an effective intermediary between the offerer and the divinity, between whom there can be no direct contact.\textsuperscript{16}

A further note should be added here with respect to the connection between victim and expiation. A passage from Lev. 10:17 regarding sacrifices speaks of an "expiatory victim" and is therefore taken to be the foundation of a doctrine of expiation. This doctrine, however, is not clearly expressed, according to J. Neusner (1979, 144), in mishnaic and talmudic texts. In the case in question, the doctrine cannot really be considered a coherent presupposition of sacrifice, mainly because in Jewish rituals, expiation has a very specific meaning. Generally

\textsuperscript{15}'The Israelites came to the Temple for various reasons: a) to fulfill their obligations, such as the offering of the first fruits, the tithes and the wave-offerings and obligatory sacrifices, b) to worship and pray during the liturgy and at other times, or to pose questions on legal tradition and to study the Torah, c) to participate in Temple worship alongside the priests, especially in the form of deputations....Many came to the Temple to cleanse themselves of severe impurities such as defilement by the dead, which required sprinkling with 'cleansing water' on the fourth and seventh day....Many Jews would go up daily to the Temple in order to be present at the worship, to receive the priestly benediction bestowed upon the people at the end, to pray during the burning of the incense, and to prostrate themselves before God upon hearing the singing of the Levites. Others would go up to hear or to teach the Torah; or they would combine several such activities" (S. Safrai, 1976, 886-887). During pilgrimages: "those who came to adore had to offer two sacrifices: a vision-sacrifice and a peace-offering as a happy obligation" (S. Safrai, 1976, 903). In the Temple of Jerusalem the day was solemnly opened and closed by a burnt sacrifice. Personal sacrifices occurred during week time (except on Saturday) between the morning 'olah and the evening one (cf. S. Safrai, 1976, 887 ff.).

\textsuperscript{16}E. Durkheim points at that: "By definition, holy beings are separate beings. What characterizes them is the fact that, between them and profane ones there is a solution of continuity. Normally the former are external to the latter" (1960, 428).
speaking, voluntary sin, or be yad ramah cannot be eliminated by sacrificial ritual alone. If the transgression is not a careless or unconscious error, or if there is no repentance (cf. Yoma 8:8) then there is no hope of redemption for the offerer and "the guilty person must be eradicated from the community" (R. De Vaux, 1964, 85). The circumstances in which the "wayward" woman is involved (illicit hiding, nonconfession, enforced offering) appear to exclude the possibility of involuntary sin.

The subject is too complex to be discussed briefly. But, hypothetically speaking, if we were to accept the theory of the "expiatory victim," in the Sotah ritual, the function of expiation is nonexistent or, at best, very dubious. Neither the instruments nor the ritual setting would seem to indicate it. For a clear understanding of this point, it is necessary to investigate the meaning of several aspects of the connection between victim and offerer.

2. The absence of expiatory functions in the minhah is made sufficiently clear by the fact that it is of the lowest grade, "food for beasts," and, unlike other offerings, is not accompanied by oil and incense (Sot. 2:1),17 which are signs of delight, and which might introduce a more noble note and dignify the minhah. It has already been pointed out that the coarseness of this offering distinguishes it both from the hattat of the poor man and from the minhat 'omer (Lev. 23: 9-13), which is an offering made on the second day of Passover and is also composed of barley, and has the property of imposing "temperance"18 before the new harvest.19

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17 Oil was a symbol of honor (Judg. 9:9) of joy (Ps. 45:8) and favor (Deut. 33: 24; Ps. 23:5). It was thus prohibited in cases of offerings associated with disgrace and guilt. Likewise it could not be used (on the body) in periods of mourning (2 Sam. 12:20; Dan. 10:3 in D.M. Feldman, 1971, 1349). Midrash Rabbah to Numbers (IX:13) outlines the reasons why oil and incense could not be poured on the Sotah offering: "because oil is light unto the world, Scripture describing it as yizhar, brightening, and this woman loved the dark..., because the frankincense is reminiscent of the Matriarchs....As this woman departed from their ways, let not their memory be associated with her offering." The Babylonian Talmud declares that the meal-offering brought by a sinner should require oil and frankincense "so that the sinner should not profit (by being exempted from these additional costs)" (B. Sot. 15a). Midrash Rabbah to Numbers confirms this point: "In strict justice the meal-offering of a sinner should require oil and frankincense so that he should not be in the position of a sinner who profits by his sin" (IX:13).

18 'Omer means literally "sheaf." It was an offering connected with the protection of the harvest. The ceremony of Omer opened a period of sobriety and semi-mourning which lasted forty-nine days, until Shavuot (cf. D.M.
It is difficult to define the exact difference between the offering of Sotah, which Sifré to Numbers defines as something which renders the woman "fit" to the husband (VIII:II), and ordinary offerings. On the one hand, it would seem to belong to a category apart; at the same time, it shares certain characteristics of the other offerings. There is another important point to be made. Where any similarities between the Sotah offering and other offerings are found, these refer to "the gifts" of needy persons, or else to the ritual which (in making the new fruits available), introduces conditions of abstinence-privation. If the woman's offering is placed on the same plane as situations of renunciation or need, an image of poverty and marginality is certainly conveyed. It nonetheless transmits an idea of help and benefit which is complementary to that of the visualized need. The 'poverty' of the woman, in fact, is met with an exception and a facilitation: she is permitted to offer a few things of little value.

To summarize, the symbology of the minhah contains two signs: a) first of all, the offering expresses and stabilizes the mean position of the "wayward" woman, b) the procedure applied to the Sotah woman embodies an example of an exceptional 'reply' to need and degradation notwithstanding the principles of offerings. It constitutes, once more, a corrective to the opposing categories (the saint and the non-saint, he who has the capacity to act and he who is impotent) which reduces the sharpness of the binary definition even further.

Furthermore, as already seen, the offering of the "wayward" woman is brought in a coarse vessel (Sot. 2:1). Unlike other sacrifices (cf. B. Sot. 14b), this offering is presented in a basket. It is then

Feldman, 1971, 1386). Minhat 'Omer consists of barley, with oil and incense. The barley was special, having matured and been harvested in the Jerusalem area (cf. D. M. Feldman, 1971, 1383).

19The 'Omer offering meant that the new harvest was "permitted," and so could be eaten (S. Safrai, 1976, 893). There is thus a parallel between the woman "permitted" after the offering and the ordeal, and the food "permitted" after the ritual of Omer.

20The meal-offering which she brought in her hand symbolized her works, the fruit of her life. But owing to the fact that her life was open to suspicion, it was brought not of wheat, as on other occasions, but of barley-flour which constituted the poorest fare" (A. Edersheim, 1959, 362).

21In order to underline its diversity, the Babylonian Talmud compares this offering with the usual procedure, of which it explains the various phases. A. Edersheim describes it in more detail: "When presenting a meat-offering, the priest first brought it in the golden or silver dish which had been prepared and then transferred it to a holy vessel, putting oil and frankincense upon it" (1959, 138). Maimonides explains that both the basket containing the offering, and
transferred, as usually happens, into vessels destined for Temple service. It thus passes from a very low level to a high one, and is subsequently taken to the altar to be definitively consecrated.

The ideal difference of the levels, the change or the transposition that the offering undergoes, could be considered as a progression of value of the victim and of the woman making the offering. This attractive interpretation is belied by the fact that the connection between the woman and the victim is slight and poorly identified. The symbolic transmission which ought to bind victim and offerer continues to be imprecise, because the recognition of the victim at the moment in which the offering is prepared for sacrifice is unclear.

In the ancient Jewish world, for this recognition to take place, the offerer a) had to lay his hands on the victim (cf. Lev. 1:4; 4:4) and carry the offering with his own hands (cf. Lev. 7:30); b) in personal sacrifices, as has already been seen, in accordance with similar assumptions, the offerer was also obliged to proclaim his own guilt in a public confession (cf. A. Edersheim, 1959, 114). In the Sotah ritual, whilst there is a confessional ritual, the laying of hands on the victim (semikah), which would clearly define the link between victim and offerer, does not take place. In order to further clarify the problem of recognition, it should first of all be underlined that, in the judgment of Sotah, a real semikah would be out of place or illicit, given that this operation is not permitted to women (Men. 9:8 and Qid. 1:8). Semikah may only be performed by he who may legally possess the animal. According to Lev. 1:2, the doctrine states that women are implicitly excluded from the right of laying hands on the "large or small beasts" destined for the rituals, since they do not have full right of possession. In the case of other rituals (performed in order, for example to render the wife permitted to the husband), the problem did not exist because the offering was the latter's responsibility (with or without negative effects on the ketubah, cf. Midrash Rabbah to Numbers, IX, 31).

All this means that, in accordance with the custom, the woman accused of adultery is not permitted to introduce her minhah into the holy area, nor is she allowed to have an exclusive relationship with the ablution. But there is another element to be considered. As has been

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22 Various stages were completed in the sacrifices of an animal: semikah, the laying of hands; shehitah, the killing of the victim; qabbalah, the receiving of the blood; holakhak, the carrying of the blood to the altar; seriqah the scattering-sprinkling of the blood; haqtarah, consumption with fire (cf. E.G. Hirsch, n.d., 619).
noted in Chap. 1, the operation of taking the barley to the scene of the Temple was performed by the husband, who is in fact described as he who "would bring her meal" (Sot. 2:1). Almost immediately, however, he handed it over to his wife, "into her hands to tire her out" (Sot. 2:1). Thus, the offering (minhah) held by the accused woman seems to be aimed at defining her only at a later stage, and with the express purpose of oppressing her. The explicitly underlined aim of "tiring" the woman both upsets the nature of the action and modifies the relationships which qualify the victim. All this would imply that the act was not intended to connect the woman in an unambiguous way to the offering which was to be taken to the altar.

Finally, the offering was poured into service vessels and given back to the "wayward" woman. Although H. Bietenhard maintains that "with this symbolic act, the offering of food is characterized as a gift from the woman to God" (1956: 64), in reality, the contact-recognition was somewhat elusive and was dependent on the action of others. The priest placed his hands beneath the woman’s hands (Sot. 3:1) for the "lifting and waving" (A. Edersheim, 1959, 114-115) and was ready to receive the offering from the accused woman (cf. Sifré to Numbers. XVII: I). The intervention of the officiant, albeit coherent with the cult procedure, is nonetheless rather strange. Clear or necessary justifications for the priest's action are not to be found in biblical precepts. In Num. 5:25 it is written only that "the priest shall take the cereal from the woman's hand" while in Lev. 7:30 it is specified that the offerer "will bring with his own hands that which must be offered to the Lord with fire." These rules are discussed in B. Sot. 19a, but explanations are given only as far as the "waving" is concerned.

Owing to the general prohibition and the particular way in which various people take part at the presentation of the minhah, the link between the woman and the sacrifice becomes obscure and unrecognizable. Furthermore, the indissolubility (pointed out by M. Mauss, 1968, I, 233) which should bind the destinies of the woman and the expiatory victim cannot really be considered valid.

23The Talmud of Jerusalem widely discusses the function of the husband who brings the offering to the Temple, and through a comparison of a series of opinions, draws a parallel between husband and wife. It specifies that the Mishnah indicates that "just as it (the offering) is consecrated for her in particular, so it is consecrated for him in particular" (Y. Sot. 2:1). It further adds that the man may (when his actual participation at the ritual is considered) operate in the offering without the knowledge and the consensus of the woman (cf. Y. Sot. 2:1).
If, on the one hand, in the expiatory ritual, the woman participates indirectly through the man or the family (and this, in fact, makes the *semikah* superfluous), while in the sacrifices of the neo-mother, it is the woman, without intermediaries, who "will bring a lamb a year old (to the priest)" (Lev. 12:6) why, in Sotah, is there an offering brought by the husband? Why is there so much emphasis on the passages from hand to hand? The situation is obscured further by the structure of the text and the theoretical approach of the discourse. If, in the case of "jealousy" the husband enters the scene, it is because he does not have the usual function of supplementing the woman. If he had had this function, if it were an offering which he could extend to, and share (in some way) with the woman, it would not have been necessary to assign him the role of bearer of the *minhah*. He would, in any case, have had his usual mediating role. The closely scheduled interventions of the husband and the priest appear to have been introduced in order to exclude any automatic connections between husband and wife, any substitution of one with the other, because of the great distance which separates the woman from expiation.

Even if the sacrifice were made in the name of, and for the woman by her guarantors or representatives, there would be no recognizable transmission of the effects of the ritual on the victim. A progression of value of the *minhah* through the sanctification of the food offered is never visible.

The whole procedure becomes even more peculiar, underlining the fact that elements exist which are uncontrollable and which do not belong to familiar patterns. A division between the guilty person and the offerer, with an unsatisfactory or approximate definition of the accused, may be perceived. Such a division alters the whole ritual. It raises the problem of how, and to whom, the effects of the offering are directed.

3. We are obliged to affirm that, because of the general prohibition regarding the laying on of hands and practices connected to the case in question, the expiation of the accused woman is highly improbable. She does not appear to be the person, or at least, is not the only person, on whom the effects of the ritual are focused. Even before the actual moment of sacrifice, the offering enters a phase wherein its meaning, or its function, is amplified by the intervention of various persons who are attributed with the power to cover for, or substitute the action of, the woman.

At the point where the *minhah* is taken away from the woman and placed near the other protagonists of the ritual (husband and priest), the question of whether it invests total community and structural spaces may be asked. Is what the accused woman is required to perform an
operation conceived and planned for a multipurpose situation with wide-ranging effects?

This hypothesis can be verified by examining what is reserved exclusively for the 'technical' action of the priest. As has been noted on several occasions, following the ordinary ritual, the priest not only ennobles the offering and makes it effective, by transferring it to consecrated vessels (Sot. 21; 3:1), he also "waves" it (Sot. 3:1) and "separates" it, burns a handful on the altar, and assigns the residue "for the eating of the priests" (Sot. 3:2). By waving the accused woman's offering, the priest indicates that it belongs to God. Through the removal of a handful, however, he distinguishes the part destined for God, which goes up like a perfume, from the part which becomes food for the priests. By consuming the handful in the fire, the priest, finally, acts "as God's representative, showing in this way that the food of the offerer is food shared with Him" (A. Rainey, 1971, 604).

Through these acts and these representatives, legitimized by an invariable model, proposed again and again in all sacrifices involving food, we discover that in Sotah the priest "will take a handful" (qamaz) of the woman's offering "in memory of her" ('et-azkaratah) (cf. Num. 5,26). This means that the "commemorative offering" (cf. n.3) alludes to the accused wife. The commemorative form has the purpose of "remembering" the woman, her condition and her guilt to God. All this seems to be made in order to highlight the woman's degradation. It definitively introduces a guilty person, instead of clearly defining an offerer who is legitimately involved in a minhah.

In addition to the above, other elements can be included in the range of operations performed by the priest (cf. S. Safrai, 1976, 870-871). He who sacrifices with blood does so for atonement (Lev. 17:11), for reconciliation with God (cf. A. Edersheim, 1959, 85). What is the

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24 The operations of the minhah in a strict sense consisted of: tenufah, waving; haggashah, the carrying (of the offering) to the southwest corner of the altar; qemizah the separation of a handful which was placed on a plate for service at the altar; and haqtarah, destruction with fire (cf. G. G. Hirsch, n.d., 619). The sacrifices-offerings which had to be "waved" were: "the breast (of the animal)" in the peace-offering (Lev. 7:30; Lev. 8:25-29); the first 'Omer of Passover (Lev. 23:11), the jealousy offering (Num. 5:25), the offering for the Nazirites (Num. 6:20), the offering of the leper (Lev. 14:12) and the offering for the feast of Sukkot (Lev. 23:20) (cf. A. Edersheim, 1959, 136).

25 According to A. Edersheim, "The fundamental idea of sacrifice in the Old Testament is that of substitution, which seems to imply everything else - atonement and redemption, vicarious punishment and forgiveness" (1959, 107) so that the life of the victim, which lies in its blood, stands for the life of the offerer.
role of "reconciliation" in the procedure of Sotah? There is no straightforward reply. Since the offerer is not clearly identified, the personal case of the "wayward" wife assumes less importance with respect to other collective interests. Might the focus of the action move to the community and its primary statutes? Could the "reconciliation" be applied to the community itself? These interpretations are not admissible, because the portion of the offering which is not burned is destined (as in the ordinary hatta't) for the priests and not for the community. This introduces a certain amount of doubt as to the overall collective and reconciliatory value of the ritual. In other words, a transfer of its effects on those present (or indeed, on the whole nation), is open to discussion, because there is no undivided action. Whilst having wide, "retrospective" value (cf. A. Edersheim, 1959, 128), the suspected woman's offering does not appear to give rise to pacification-expiation for the whole community.

To summarize, a) it is not easy to prove healing effects for the woman in the sacrifice, given that the semikah (if it can be called semikah) is not performed exclusively, either by the husband, or by the wife, or by the representatives in the ritual (the priests). b) It is likewise difficult to identify therein an act of redemption for the people, given that there are no precise signs of a shared communion, or conviviality, for that matter. The "bitter waters" are still an act of collective, but rather general, defense.

The cult context and the position of the woman

1. The order of the actions performed at the Temple of Jerusalem has a precise meaning. In accordance with Num. 5:26, the Sotah

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26To provide a clearer background to the Sotah ritual, and its dimensions, it is helpful to add that, according to E. Leach (1976), the basic idea which can be understood in a sacrificial ritual is that of separation of the person who sacrifices ("initiated") into two parts, one clean, and one unclean. The unclean may be left behind, while the clean one is incorporated in the new status of the initiated. Both positions might belong to what E. Leach calls "metaphysical topography of the relationship between gods and men" (1969, 86). This splitting of clean and unclean components underlines the particular status of Sotah, wherein the woman appears to be wholly defined by the suspicion which has fallen upon her and by what is implied by this suspicion. Her entire being is defined by the condition of forbidden wife. Her offering of coarse food presented without ornamentation, which (in some ways) might even seem a means to separate and eliminate her unclean part, may not be used to this end, because it cannot – as has just been noted – be directly and clearly related to her. As long as it is used to define her state it is centered on her; when the actual ritual begins, it is no longer centered on her.
tractate affirms that the offering precedes the administration of the "bitter waters" and the ritual. In any event, it also declares that the inverse procedure is valid (Sot. 3:2) (cf. Chap. 1) given that the two moments are never separate.

If, before the actual ordeal, that is before the physical test, a sacrifice is performed in which the victim offered is not 'splendid', and in which the presumed offerer does not cover important roles, nor reap particular benefits, then what is its purpose?

A purely hypothetical answer may be given. Throughout the ritual, the woman's position, at a profane level, has not altered. She cannot, in fact, escape from this level, having been stigmatized by the stripping and the intimidations. The fact that the woman after the offering is still "forbidden" and that she must undergo the trial illustrates unequivocally that there are no acts of symbolic recovery and that the woman's position is unvaried. What then, is the advantage of subjecting the woman to the ritual at the altar, if her position is the same?

It is precisely through the filter of the lack of freedom and redemption that the overall function of what takes place in the "Supreme Court" and within the confines of the Temple can be understood. It constitutes an action which identifies evil and deviance (the baseness, the poverty and the excess of the woman) but it does not dissolve them. Quite the contrary, it emphasizes the impossibility of absorbing or making the accused woman a homogeneous part of the community.

There is a further circumstance which helps clarify why the woman is not able to escape from the profane, obscure state, and why she is compelled 'uselessly' to take an offering to the Temple. As already mentioned, the woman is marked by a voluntary "sin" and is therefore not redeemable (cf. D. Taylor, 1985, 32). Whoever has sinned is branded by God, like the leper or the unclean person, both typical examples of people who have received the sign of sin. M. Mauss writes that the sinner receives, in this sense, a kind of "consecration" (1968, I, 258) which keeps him separate from ordinary people or things. Following this line of argument, the "wayward" woman stays in an exceptional and untouchable state. She receives the mark of something which, because of its links with the sacred, is marked by special characteristics.

Here, a further aspect of the woman's intermediary position, on the 'threshold,' emerges and takes on shape and form. On the one hand, she is consecrated and separated (because of her sin), on the other, she is placed at the meanest level, the "level of beasts." She is thus in an ideal position in which to act as intermediary between the holy-divine
sphere and the human-profane sphere to which she equally belongs. The two spheres can never meet and "cannot coexist on the same level" (E. Durkheim, 1960, 440). Although they are separate and cannot intersect, they do, however, need to interrelate. Indeed, they could not exist without reciprocal points of reference or without instruments of connection. This explains why mediation is necessary and, according to E. Leach (1969), why it is always obtained by introducing a third category which is abnormal or anomalous. The fact that the Sotah woman is not recovered may therefore seem to make her functional for the contact between spheres in which she equally exists and intervenes.

Since there are no precise acts of liberation or absolution in the action of Sotah, it can be said that the woman and her ambiguity are 'in transit' through the sacrifice, that is they do not find a terminal or conclusive point therein. So much so that they reappear at the moment of the real judgment, the ordeal itself.

2. The ordeal of the "bitter waters" will be examined in the following chapter. It need only be repeated here that the physical test has a mixed function, both ritual and judicial. However, given that the person who officiates over the most important part of the procedure (from the minhah onwards) is the priest,27 who acts as "minister of a ritual" (R. De Vaux, 1958-60, I, 243), and that the divine oracle goes beyond the limits of the actual legal circumstance, it seems clear that the religious component takes on particular importance in the whole procedure.

We should briefly reconsider here the consumption of the handful of barley at the altar. Until this has been separated and burned, and until the victim has been destroyed (an action essentially ritual and religious) nothing of importance has been achieved. Nothing has happened and, more importantly, nothing further may happen.

All this is indirectly confirmed by the amoraic technical-legal model. This fixes a number of essential procedural steps. Before the offering has been consumed "the woman may retract" (B. Sot. 19b). Once the immolation has been performed, the real ordeal must entirely take place. Thus, it may be said that it is the status of the victim, its form as a tangible and 'actual' sign of the link with the divine, which makes the procedure of the "bitter waters" unitary and effective.

27The Sanhedrin "grouped together priests, lay-men and scribes and was presided over by the high priests" (R. De Vaux 1971-73, I, 239). The ancient Jewish nation had three different types of jurisdiction, which are somewhat difficult to define: the jurisdiction of the elders and heads of family, the "professional" jurisdiction at the city gates, and the jurisdiction of the priests (cf. R. De Vaux, 1971-73, I, 235-236).
Furthermore, it is through the unity of the legal and ritual actions (cf. Sifré to Numbers XVII: 1), performed in the same place and at the same moment, that the legal correctness of the whole trial is guaranteed.

As at least partial confirmation of the above, it should be remembered that the entire discussion of the sages develops from religious data (times and procedures of the minhah, the ritual, the function of the priests at the altar) and then extends to a technical examination of the instruments and the material preparation of the "bitter waters." That is, the doctrine determines statuses and prerogatives starting from the procedures of worship and of the rituals.

As a consequence of its predominantly religious character, could the entire procedure of the "bitter waters" be associated with other ritual activities (feasts, purification cycles or rites)?

In the previous chapter, it was noted that the festivals constituted meaningful events. The solemn feasts were moments of joy and the coming together of the Jewish nation, in which the 'perfect' state was regained through collective and private sacrifices. The whole population would revitalize the routine of the Temple, and recover a strong sense of identity and belonging.

Contrary to the ordinary sacrifice (including hatta'it), which may be considered a distinctive element of the feast, the offering of the suspected adulteress cannot legitimately be paralleled to any manifestation of this kind. Being a sorrowful event, which bears signs similar to those of mourning, as Midrash Rabbah to Numbers points out, the ritual of the "bitter waters" cannot take place on one of the days of the great celebrations (IX: 13).

3. The incompatibilities which distance the ritual of the "bitter waters" from festive rituals are also derived from other circumstances. The event of Sotah is not only a joyless event. Having been established in accordance with Num. 5:11, it has the importance of an obligation which cannot be shirked. It is therefore unlike the spontaneous acts of

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28Private sacrifices were admitted during the main feasts. They were, in fact, so numerous that in order to ensure that there was enough time for all of them, the daily worship began earlier and the ashes were removed from the altar as soon as night fell. Later, at midnight, the Temple gates were opened and before dawn the court was full of people (cf. S. Safrai, 1976, 891). In particular, extra time was allowed for personal and supplementary sacrifices after some feasts (cf. S. Safrai, 1976, 893-894).

29The fact that this sacrifice is compulsory could make it appear similar to the sacrifice of "appearance," performed by all those who appeared before the Lord in the Temple, and especially by pilgrims. It is different, however, in that
offering which take place on other occasions. It is likewise different from the personal sacrifices which satisfy the desire for participation and redemption, because it imposes unpleasant obligations.

How is the procedure of Sotah placed with respect to other operations which were performed in the Temple? What is its connection with the purifications, symptomatic tools of dangerous situations?

A connection certainly exists between the law of the "bitter waters" and the rules regarding the purifications, because the unclean wife, (cf. Sot. 1:3; 2:6), forbidden to the husband (Sot. 1:2; 1:3) is mentioned several times, and contamination is discussed on several occasions (cf. Num. 5:13; Y. Sot. 5:2; B. Sot. 29a-b). It is useful here to recall that on a number of occasions (birth, death, the taking of vows: all moments, that is, of unspeakable danger), "defilement called (the people) to the Temple" (A. Edersheim, 1959, 343) to carry out sacrifices. However, as the "wayward" woman does not perform a clear act of expiation, likewise, no ritual of purification through the usual ingredients (for instance, water, blood or ashes, as described in the Division of Purities) takes place, either before or during the act of worship. This fact is particularly significant and stresses that this is not an action aimed at finding a way out of the unclean state. That is to say, within the concept of the "bitter waters," there is no intention, nor instruments capable of eliminating the course of the woman's uncleanness. The characteristic signs of redemption present in other rituals are lacking, because this is an operation aimed at rectifying the situation created by a supposed violation of the Decalogue (prohibition of adultery) and not an improper state of the body.

the sacrifice of "appearance" is forbidden to women (cf. Hag. 1:1) and because it takes place in the feasts of Pesah, Shavuot and Sukkot.

In the purifications there are three other interesting ingredients: cedar wood, hyssop and red wood, which are burned with the victim or else used for sprinkling. Symbolically interconnected, they all indicate the return of a healthy and perfect state, the reconquest of new vitality and strength. The discussion of the purification is contained in the Division of Purities, including the tractates of Kelim (regarding utensils), of Ohaloth (regarding the human body), of Negaim (skin diseases) of Niddah (menstruation, confinement and childbirth, the blood of virginity and sexual maturity). The new mother, after the birth of her first child was, for example, sprinkled with blood from the sacrifice and declared purified. A person who has been contaminated by a corpse was sprinkled (on the third and the seventh day of contamination) with pure water in which ashes of the "red cow" had been mixed. The leper was purified with water and blood (from one of the two birds which he had to offer).
The absence of an act of purification makes it even clearer that the justification of the sacrificial ritual lies in something more abstract. If, indeed, the ritual is not orientated towards an immediate result, and certainly cannot be considered a superfluous act, it appears to be aimed at creating meanings which go beyond its tangible effects.

It will be seen later that the visible result of the ordeal can be interpreted in different ways, and that it can give rise to uncertainty and approximative assessments (cf. Chap. 5). If, however, immediately before (or after), a religious ritual of great symbolic value has taken place, the effect obtained will not be disappointing. A sacrifice invariably makes an act of recovery, or of verification, useful and satisfying. In advance or independently of what will take place in the ordeal itself, the minhah of Sotah provides what all other rituals obtain, that is, the alliance or the benevolence of God. It thus has the power of bringing the act of judgment as near as possible to the altar, a unique place at which the divine powers meet, which assigns particular prerogatives to the court, and which intensifies the cosmological images of the nation.31

The consumption of the minhah at the altar, which thus becomes holy and closely bound to the latter, provides the foundations for continuing the action, for coming closer to the "dramatization" of divine intervention. It has the function of strengthening every contact or direct appeal to God. This point will be taken up again, after some circumstances relative to the problem of "uncleanness" of the "wayward" woman have been explained.

The metaphor of uncleanness

1. Once the fact that the wife's guilt does not derive from a careless or involuntary sin – it is not actually redeemable by sacrifice, but rather, it binds her to the ordeal – has been accepted, and likewise, the fact that her 'corrupt' condition cannot be eliminated by an act of purification, then we can raise the question of the ṭme'ah category applied to the sotah woman.

The unclean state of the "wayward" woman is hypothetical and is declared as a precautionary measure. It is a condition which is revealed by the "spirit of jealousy." It is prolonged, and may possibly

31The altar "sanctifies that which belongs to it" or, according to the words of the Mishnah, "whatever is appropriate to the altar, if it has gone up, should not go down" (Zeb. 9:1) because it has been definitively and solemnly consecrated.
cease, but only at the end of the judgment. Unlike other cases of ordinary, or cyclical contamination, until that judgment the charge of uncleanness may not be annulled or overcome. If, at the conclusion of the procedure the outcome of the ritual of maim ha-marim is negative, then the woman becomes fit for the husband. The procedure proclaims the nonexistence of uncleanness. It does not remove a state, it merely removes a prohibition.

If this interpretation is correct, using the category of uncleanness certainly means conveying ideas of incorrectness on the one hand, and values covered by automatic defenses on the other. On the level of transgression, however, the connection between uncleanness and sin is very subtle and delicate. If considered too rigidly, it obscures the discussion around Sotah because it erroneously ignores the extra-personal dimension, as well as many general symbolic meanings.

The connection between sin and uncleanness is very complex, and through the centuries it changed significantly. The transmission of uncleanness, according to the interpretation of modern scholars, originally concerned the practical problem of attending the Temple and the service of the priest. Before the destruction of Jerusalem, cleanness was certainly a fundamental paradigm of the cult and intellectual existence of the people. Perceiving the need to substitute the Temple, and its principles of purity, the sages sought a surrogate for the cult, and its rules. They incorporated the rules and the 'ideology of uncleanness' into a broader system of thought and turned this ideology into a crucial point of Jewish cosmology.

The definition of areas of cleanness, the watch over such areas and the punishment for contamination became, therefore, important

32The contamination stayed in the woman from the moment of her violation of the qinnui until the moment in which she drank the "bitter waters" (cf. L.M. Epstein, 1967, 232).

33The theme is treated in the Division of Purities. It contains several basic conceptual principles: man is at the center of the system, whether he is the creator of some of the conditions and means connected with purification (e.g. the tractates of Kelim and Parah) or whether he cannot be (as in the tractates of Miqvaot and Makhshirin). In the Division the places of impurity and the methods of purification are at the center of the observation (cf. J. Neusner, 1979, 105-121). In order to give meaning to the pollution dimension of the sotah woman, it should be pointed out that there is no strict connection between purity and ethics. The principles of purity neither interfere with, nor contradict, the idea that the act of transgression involves responsibility, and that sin deserves punishment. Nor do they contrast the idea that mistaken ideal and moral beliefs influence the fabric of the community and place it in danger. They nevertheless belong to another order of reality.
instruments of social and religious control. They depicted large taboo areas. This process occupied a large place in legal thought, as well as in the ritual and judicial activities of the rabbis (it amounted to a quarter of their work, according to J. Neusner, 1973, 8).

Inasmuch as the procedure of Sotah is a "public" act, it may be collocated within the context of surveillance described, rather than within the more restricted field of sexual and conjugal regulations. It belongs, that is, to a wider reality than that of ordinary contamination.

In a certain sense, these characteristics of Sotah can be explained by starting from the mishnaic laws of purity (cf. Chap. 6). Indeed, within the flow of the tannaitic tractates, the "bitter waters" can be said to find their most authentic expression. Simplifying the question as far as possible, it can be stated that, because of their structure, the aim of such laws is the control of possible sources of contamination and the definition of purification practices. They are thus not intended to analyze ethical problems nor to resolve moral questions. If the targets of rules of cleanliness are not sin and excesses, it is clear that purification cannot easily be interpreted as atonement for, or solution to, moral errors. This is clearly explained by the example of greatest uncleanness,

34The system of Purities has two dimensions. We have already seen that one dimension corresponds to the Temple, the potential site of universal sanctification. The other dimension, "superimposed upon the former, places man at one pole, nature at the other, each reciprocally complementing and completing the place and role of the other. Nature produces uncleanness and removes uncleanness. Man subjects food and utensils to uncleanness and, through his action, also imparts significance to the system as a whole" (J. Neusner, 1979, 123). This means that everything which constitutes life, and which is useful to man is at the center of the system. However, man does not usually have the power "to stimulate the bodily sources of uncleanness....But he must impart purpose and significance to the things affected by those bodily sources of uncleanness" (1979, 124).

35The issue is very complex and cannot be discussed briefly. It should be noted, however, that the system of purity can explain the moral code, and that the connection between purity and morality is neither absent nor unnoticed. In fact, it is cited and highlighted in order to justify impurity. Nevertheless, there is no linear link which can be translated into a perfect connection between pure and moral. In the course of time the problem has assumed different connotations. Whilst in biblical and post-biblical literature, cleanliness is used as a metaphor for morality (cf. J. Neusner, 1973, 126) in the mishnaic-talmudic age of academies, the paths either split or duplicate. Under pressure from exceptional circumstances (such as estrangement from the Temple, and cultural-political isolation) articulate interpretations have been reached (cf. J. Neusner, 1973, 126).
discussed in Ohalot (Division of Tohorot), which is contamination from a corpse, and which is entirely extraneous to the field of morality (cf. J. Neusner, 1973, 127).

If, when speaking of cleanliness in the Mishnah, it is accepted that one is not in a strictly moral context, and that there is no clear relationship with "the problem of evil" (cf. D. Taylor, 1985, 27), one may indeed wonder what kind of context might clarify the question of what is clean and what is unclean. It can be deduced from the above, that one of the most important explanatory paradigms is constituted by sacrifice at the Temple. This gives a structure to the nation; the victim brings together and represents, the people. The explanation or the root of the problem of Sotah can thus be seen within these structural foundations: in order that a real society-community may exist, it must be constructed on a shared act of sacrifice. Likewise, in order to guarantee correctness and cleanness, this society must keep the symbols and the functions of the act of sacrifice intact.

For the purpose of this discussion, it is therefore the image of the 'perfection' of the victim which vigorously comes into play. This perfection is the crucial element and the eloquent image which enables the ideology built around the sotah woman to be defined.

2. Taking the condition of the victim as a point of discrimination, given that the original and holy state is contained therein, the victim, naturally, becomes the paradigm of the conformity of the things created to the eternal and supreme statutes. It reflects the absolute, and order originates from it. It becomes the place of integrity and stability. Thus, actions and behavior patterns must be tuned to the victim.

The victim's perfection is to be interpreted starting from a clear warning. This is not only a question of physical integrity, of good health, or of suitable age and sex, and sacrificial worship is not only correctness of behavior. The animal is chosen, according to M. Douglas's suggestions, because it contains an idea of clear opposition to the hybrid, the partial, the disaggregated, the identity-less or the product of mixing.36 Only by excluding the imperfection of the aforementioned states, can the animal destined for the altar reproduce the specificity of the people and their particular bond with God. Two further considerations must be made in connection with the paradigmatic value of the victim.

a) The animal-victim is chosen because it is a domestic animal belonging to the category of food. As food, it symbolizes the creation

36 M. Douglas writes: "To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind" (1969, 54).
destined for man. It represents, in its entirety, the care of God for His people, and for their well-being. Consequently it is part of the "divine plan." If, in synthesis, the victim represents everything that God reserves for the Jewish people, then man can recognize his own worth in the victim, his own image for God, and the measure of a predilection. Hence, the only answer which man can give to God's predilection is to respect his own likeness to the victim.

b) The victim is not only the image of predilection, it is also the means by which the inseparable bond between the supernatural and the natural can be restored. In ordinary existence, threatened by dangers and insecurities, regeneration cannot be achieved without a victim, nor can the concrete protection-benevolence of God be obtained. On the other hand, the victim restores logic and value to things, through the perfect and sacred life which it contains (cf. Lev. 17:11).

This discussion has brought us closer to an explanation. The uncleanness named in the Sotaḥ tractate derives from, or can be attributed to, the uncertain and 'separate' status of the accused wife. This woman is synonymous with confusion, promiscuity, distance from the original order. She is thus in antithesis to the scheme suggested by the victim. Whilst the latter contains an idea of creation destined for man and of the predilection of God, the "wayward" woman conveys a totally different image, that of the wicked and secret destruction of what God reserved for mankind. She has opposed the divine plan, thus voluntarily damaging the conjugal unit, by offering herself illegally to a man and abandoning the marriage area. The place of the victim which restores completeness has been taken by her, a person who corrupts and annuls existence.

The aforementioned facts should be radicalized in order to continue this discussion. Attributing uncleanness to the woman may, in the end, mean accusing her of responsibility for an operation aimed at consciously 'refusing' the plan of creation, symbolized by the sacrificial animal, as well as its defense performed at the altar. The suspected wife is therefore unclean, principally because her behavior becomes an intolerable contradiction (and what is worse) a refutation of the model followed by the priests, the sages and the people for all the operations of existence.

In short, the guilt of the sotah woman cannot be eliminated nor expiated, because it is not connected with a simple infraction or deviance. Rather, it embodies the abandoning of an idea which unites the physical, psychic, moral and ritual worlds; it constitutes flight from the principle which considers the imperfect state intolerable.

3. The uncleanness of the woman brought to trial is also tied, in a collateral, but not subordinate way, to the field of sexuality and
corporality. There is certainly a fear of corporal contamination between a husband and his "unclean" wife, which implies that the couple cannot possibly cohabit as husband and wife. Some elements which underlie the attention paid to corporality may be briefly outlined as follows.

One of the foundations of the sexual prohibitions on which ancient Jewish legislation is based is a principle of distinction. In the sexual field, Leviticus contains an unequivocal command: "You shall not do as they do in the country of Egypt where you dwelt, nor shalt thou do as they do in the country of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes" (Lev. 18:2). Under the laws of the Lord, the people "shall walk" in a completely different way from the other peoples. They will keep their distance from what they have experienced or what they will have to experience in the future. The woman who breaks the sexual norms damages the essence of the people who have distinguished themselves from all the other nations by respecting these norms.

The fact that the products of the body (blood, excrement, sperm, saliva), considered vehicles of uncleanness and contamination, are such powerful elements that they are able to upset any normative scheme, must be added to the initial observation. The talmudic text makes an important point. When commenting on the phrase from the Mishnah which says: "the wife of the eunuch (saris) undergoes the ordeal of drinking the bitter water" (Sot. 4:4), it says that, although generally speaking this man does not belong to the category of husbands, his being expressly named by the mishnaic text in connection with the "unclean" woman, means that he must be considered in that same way as a husband (B. Sot. 26a). It follows that the sterile man who is not capable of procreation, still maintains marital authority and functions towards the "wayward" woman. He is protected by the "law of jealousy" because he may still be exposed to the risk of contamination. The legal norm bends. It places who is husband and who is not on the same level, whenever the risk of sex arises, and where the uncleanness of the body must be opposed.

On other levels, the body contains latent contagious powers, which emerge and show themselves outwardly only when a situation is changed or transformed. Like the typical examples of birth or death, the example of Sotah represents a transition or a change. The body of the suspected woman is contagious in a particular way, because it has become an object of mobility.\textsuperscript{37} It has moved out of a state of regularity

\textsuperscript{37}Some examples of mobility of people who, in situations of transition or in the preparatory phase of a specific action are exposed to contamination, are: the
and order (the conjugal area) into a state of disorder and corruption (the extraconjugal area). As a result of these movements, the distinction between the levels becomes clearer, but, at the same time, many polyvalent and inexact states are created. It is known that dangerous evils penetrate inexactness, and that in inexactness they may be more recognizable and more easily confronted. It is herein that sometimes the possibility exists of redefining the parts, or bringing them closer to the overall context (cf. Chap. 6).

Everything pertaining to the contamination of the body is a difficult topic also for other reasons. The small size of the population and the political weakness following the year 70 threatened the social body of the ancient Jewish nation. Specific concern over defense (endogamy, exclusion of illegitimate offspring, restrictions on proselytism) was concentrated on this body and the individualities of its components. Following the disappearance of the Temple, the people were required to preserve the purity of their bodies, both individual and social, in ordinary and domestic life, because all that remained of holiness was incarnated in that cleanness. J. Neusner writes: "The processes of life's nurture will be so shaped as to preserve and express that remnant of the sacred which remains in this world" (1974-77, XXII, 198). Being residual places of sacredness, the body, the nuptial couch and the table become areas of close surveillance and particular involvement.

In this sense, the living, existing nation always represented itself as a place of consecrated purity, and defined itself by opposing any form of contamination which threatened its borders. Adhering to these principles, it placed distance between the community and the rest of the world, between parts of the community itself, or as the Sotah tractate clearly states, between man and woman.

It may be concluded that in the Sotah tractate, the occasion of presumed infidelity is used for an intervention which is not limited to sexual purity, nor concentrated solely on the relationship between the married couple. It says a great deal about the concept of distinction of the Jewish people, the representations linked to the victim, about traveller, the soldier, and the priest. They move, in a certain sense, from the ordinary condition to an exceptional one (journey, war, worship), thus exposing themselves to the risk of being overcome by obscure forces (cf. P. Sacchi, 1983, 36-37).

38Historically speaking, even the borders of and participation in exclusive groups (cf. E. Urbach, 1975, I, 583) like the Pharisees or the Qumranites, were expressed, amongst the people, in terms of purity, which differentiated and dramatized social relations in the name of loyalty to the pure state.
mobility and the inside and the outside. The 'unclean,' repulsive state, underlined throughout the ritual, raises a great many problems. It makes a knot of 'dogmas' visible and incisive.

The Sotah ritual is an event – probably hypothetical but in any case significant – which has a direct effect on society. Precisely for this reason, it has been placed alongside sacrifices (social acts of extremely high value) which are far from being hypothetical, and which seem to be able to illuminate it and its singularity. The entire discussion of the analogies and parallels with hatta't was thus intended to provide a framework to illustrate important elements (expiation, victim, sinner, uncleaness) of Jewish culture and eschatological structure. Another type of observation should be added: syntactical analysis. Namely, it is necessary to study the arrangements of the constituent parts of the judicial phenomenon of Sotah, in order to understand its internal conceptual relationships and its normative value.