Jealousy

Exodus 20:5-6

4. You shall not make for you any engraved image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;

5. You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

YOUR TORAH NAVIGATOR

1. Why is it appropriate for God to be “jealous”?

Exodus 34:14

1. What is the relationship between jealousy and fidelity?

Numbers 5:11
11. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
12. Speak to the people of Israel, and say to them, If any man’s wife goes astray, and commits a trespass against him,
13. And a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and this is kept undetected, and she is defiled, and there is no witness against her, since she was not caught in the act;
14. And the spirit of jealousy comes upon him, and he is jealous of his wife, and she is defiled; or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him, and he is jealous of his wife, and she is not defiled;
15. Then shall the man bring his wife to the priest, and he shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense on it; for it is a offering of jealousy, an offering of memorial, bringing iniquity to remembrance.
16. And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord;
17. And the priest shall take holy water in an earthen utensil; and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water;
18. And the priest shall set the woman before the Lord, and loosen the hair of the woman’s head, and put the offering of memorial in her hands, which is the meal offering of jealousy; and the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that causes the curse;
19. And the priest shall charge her by an oath, and say to the woman, If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness with another instead of your husband, be you free from this bitter water that causes the curse;
20. But if you have gone astray with another instead of your husband, and if you are defiled, and some man has lain with you other than your husband;
21. Then the priest shall charge the woman with an oath of cursing, and the priest shall say to the woman, The Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the Lord makes your thigh fall away, and your belly swell;
22. And this water that causes the curse shall go into your bowels, to make your belly swell, and your thigh to fall away; And the woman shall say, Amen, amen.
23. And the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall blot them out with the bitter water;
24. And he shall cause the woman to drink the bitter water that causes the curse; and the water that causes the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter.
25. Then the priest shall take the meal offering of jealousy from the woman’s hand, and shall wave the offering before the Lord, and offer it upon the altar;
26. And the priest shall take a handful of the offering, its memorial, and burn it upon the altar, and afterward shall cause the woman to drink the water.
27. And when he has made her drink the water, then it shall come to pass, that, if she is defiled, and has trespassed against her husband, that the water that causes the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall fall; and the woman shall be a curse among her people.
28. And if the woman is not defiled, but is clean; then she shall be free, and shall conceive seed.
29. This is the Torah of jealousies, when a wife goes astray with another instead of her husband, and is defiled;
30. Or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon him, and he is jealous over his wife, and
shall set the woman before the Lord, and the priest shall execute upon her all this Torah.
31. Then shall the man be guiltless from iniquity, and this woman shall bear her iniquity.

YOUR TORAH NAVIGATOR
1. Everyone knows this is a difficult passage which presents difficulties for modern sensibilities. What is the Torah trying to achieve through this ritual?
2. Why is God’s Name erased on a piece of parchment, what does that symbolize?
3. Is God humiliated too by this ritual?
4. What does this chapter say about the nature of jealousy?
5. In Hebrew jealous and zealous come from the same root. What is the relationship between the two qualities?

Proverbs 14:30
A sound heart is the life of the flesh; but envy is the rottenness of the bones.

Proverbs 27:4
Wrath is cruel, and anger is overwhelming; but who is able to stand before envy?

YOUR BIBLE NAVIGATOR
1. Why is envy considered worse than wrath or anger?
2. What does it mean that envy “is the rottenness of the bones?”

Values of Our Fathers 4:21
Rabbi Elazar HaKapar said: Jealousy, desire, and honor take a person out of this world.

YOUR VALUES OF OUR FATHERS NAVIGATOR
1. What does it mean that these things take you out of the world?
R. Zechariah, the son-in-law of R. Levi, related the following incident: R. Meir used to hold regular classes in the synagogue every Sabbath eve. A certain woman was present who regularly came to listen to him. On one occasion he went later than expected. When she arrived home she found the lights out. Her husband asked her: "Where have you been?" She told him: "I have been listening to a class." He replied: "You may not enter this house until you go and spit in the face of the teacher."

Through the Holy Spirit Rabbi Meir witnessed this. He then pretended to be suffering from pain in the eyes, and announced: 'If there is any woman skilled in whispering charms for the eyes, let her come and whisper.' Her neighbors related this to her and said: 'This is a chance for you to return home. Pretend you are a charmer and spit into his eyes [which was part of the charm]." When she came to him he said to her: "Are you skilled in whispering charms for the eyes?"

Daunted by his presence she answered in the negative. He said to her: "Never mind, spit into this one seven times and it will get better." After she had spat he said to her: "Go and tell your husband: "You bade me do it only once; see, I have spat seven times!"

His disciples said to him: 'Master! Are the words of the Torah to be treated with such contempt as this? Had you told us, would we not have sent and fetched the man and given him a flogging on the bench and forced him to become reconciled with his wife?' Said he to them: 'The dignity of Meir ought not to be greater than that of his Divine Master.

If in the case of [the Sotah ritual where a woman was suspected of infidelity] the Holy Name which is so sacred, is to be blotted out in water because the Torah wishes to bring peace between a husband and his wife, what does the dignity of Meir matter?

YOUR MIDRASH NAVIGATOR
1. Who is humiliated in this story?
2. Why is this ironic?
3. Has Rabbi Meir innovated a new ritual for suspicious husbands?