

# Shabbat Naso Shalom



The Jealous Husband by Joseph Ducreaux

by Phyllis Chesler

Ah, my dear friends, this is not among my favorite parshiot—but who am I to judge God’s law? I like it that here women are being held responsible, just as men are, for unkind deeds. While women may be spared certain ritual obligations we are nevertheless punished when we “sin against another human being or against God.” This I like.

But then we have the Sotah ritual in which a suspicious and jealous husband’s fears can only be laid to rest by scapegoating the wife, expecting her to bear his shame in public, in his place. There is no evidence that this woman has, in fact, committed adultery, there are no witnesses. The Torah is even clear that what’s happened is that “a spirit of jealousy” (ruach kinah) has overwhelmed the husband.

Ellen Frankel, in *The Five Books of Miriam* is excellent on

this point. She has Beruriah The Scholar teach us: "Let's remember the primary function of this ritual: to exorcise a husband's unsubstantiated jealousy." Other female voices here suggest that this bizarre and humiliating ritual may be the only thing that will keep their marriage intact, so that the woman is not divorced, abandoned, impoverished.

I dunno. Wasn't Korach punished mightily for his jealousy? Are men exempt from God's wrath when a mere woman, not God's greatest intimate, is in the cross-hairs of a wrathful schemer?

Tell me what you think.

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