

### Suffering's Reward (Naso)

*Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it." – Helen Keller*

The Torah makes a straightforward connection between doing good and receiving God's reward and blessing and doing bad and receiving divine punishment and suffering. Only a few thousand years later do we see rabbinic literature deal with more theologically challenging concepts of sinners who receive rewards and righteous who are punished.

Ibn Ezra jumps into this discussion with yet another possibility in divine ledger-keeping and that is reward as compensation for suffering.

Amongst the strangest rituals described in the Bible is that of the Sotah. It is the process whereby a woman suspected of adultery, who denies any wrongdoing, is publicly degraded and made to drink a unique concoction called the "bitter waters". During the times of the Sanctuary and the Temple these bitter waters apparently had the power to determine a woman's infidelity. If the woman had been untrue, the waters would cause her to die a gruesome death including the rapid swelling of her stomach and the falling off of body parts. However, if she was innocent, the result would be the birth of a healthy baby boy.

Ibn Ezra on Numbers 5:28 suggests that the resultant birth of a child is a gift, a reward from God to the mother for the blameless suffering she was subjected to. Her being accused by her husband of adultery and the subsequent public degradation despite her repeated, vehement and true affirmations of innocence called out for compassion and vindication.

Ibn Ezra sees the birth of a healthy child as a sign of that divine reassurance and blessing.

In moments of suffering that seem undeserved or incomprehensible, perhaps one of the Torah's messages is that pain is not ignored, forgotten, or unseen by God.

Chag Sameach and Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

*Dedication*

*To Noam Bettan on representing Israel at the Eurovision and getting to 2<sup>nd</sup> place.*