

LIVING ON THE END

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Speak to the Children of Israel, saying, 'a woman, when she conceives and gives birth to a boy, she shall be impure for seven days, like the days of her cyclical separation she will be impure.'" [12:2]

In the Talmud, Rabbi Simlai says: "Just like the formation of Man followed that of the animals and birds in the works of Creation, so too the laws about a person are taught after the laws of animals and birds." [Last week's reading concluded with the laws of kosher and nonkosher animals.]

The Chasam Sofer explains: man is the pinnacle of Creation, and thus a person might think that the entire world exists to serve him or her, while he or she has no responsibilities. The Torah teaches us that "being at the end" works both ways. A person has such tremendous potential that he or she can rise higher than angels, truly reaching the highest possible spiritual levels. But the opposite is also true -- a person is capable of evil which no animal could duplicate. A person can descend beneath the animals to the lowest possible levels as well.

We live by our choices; good choices raise us up, bad choices push us down. Only we can make the choice!