

THE POWER OF BIRTH

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha, Tazria, begins with the laws of a woman who gave birth. Upon giving birth to a male, a woman is t'mayah [ritually impure] for a seven-day period. If she gave birth to a female, her period of impurity extends for fourteen days. The possukim [verses] then enumerate the sacrifices brought for a baby boy at the end of forty days and for a baby girl at the end of eighty days.

Many find difficulty with this concept of a woman becoming t'mayah after birth. They erroneously see this as an implication that birth is in some way 'dirty' and thereby brings on impurity. The fact that this period of impurity is double when a girl is born further exacerbates this perception.

In order to properly understand this we must gain a proper understanding of the concept of tum'ah [ritual impurity].

Tum'ah does not seem to work according to the rules that we'd assume would apply. Animals have no tum'ah during their lifetime, human beings do. Furthermore, upon death a Jew has a greater level of tum'ah than a gentile.

The commentators explain that when an existing kedusha [holiness] departs, a vacuum is formed. That void which is created is immediately filled with tum'ah. The greater the level of kedusha, the greater the degree of tum'ah that will fill the void.

During one's lifetime, one has tremendous potential to bring 'tov' [good] and holiness to this world. While asleep, a person is incapable of performing any such acts. As a result, a 'ruach rah', a certain degree of tum'ah, sets in to fill the void formed by that lack of potential. Upon awakening, that potential kedusha returns. The ruach rah is pushed to the fingers and n'tilas yadayim [the ritual washing of the hands] is performed in order to remove that ruach rah.

The Talmud teaches that sleep is 1/60th of death. That temporary state of inability experienced during sleep becomes permanent at death. At that permanent state of inability the tum'ah sets in at a far greater level. The greater the potential for bringing tov into this world during life, the greater the vacuum that is created at death and filled with tum'ah. The corpse of a Jew therefore has a greater degree of tum'ah than that of a gentile.

Now let's see how this can be applied to the tum'ah of a woman after childbirth.

Our goal is to become as similar to Hashem as we can. "Just as He is compassionate, so too must you be compassionate..." Our life goal and project is to emulate Him to the best of our ability.

If we were to choose one word to best describe the unique character of Hashem, an excellent choice would be 'Creator.' At what point does a human being moves as close as possible to becoming a 'creator'? A woman at childbirth! At that time she is as 'G-d-like' as we ever can be. However, after birth she is no longer in that state. That kedusha is no longer there. A vacuum is formed--she becomes t'mayah.

Why is the period of tum'ah twice as long after a baby girl is born? Because she created a being which has the potential to create. She created a creator. However, once the birth had been completed, she is no longer in that state. The drop is that much more precipitous-the void is that much greater. She is t'mayah for twice as long.

People have feelings of emptiness and voids at different points of their lives. Perhaps these are the tangible stirrings of the vacuum created black of connection to holiness-the holiness for which we were created. May we merit to fill that void with the types of acts which make us most similar to our Creator.

Good Shabbos,
Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha-insights is dedicated in mazel tov to Howie HersHKovich and Martha Vays in honor of their upcoming wedding. May they be zocheh to much happiness together and to build a bayis ne'eman b'Yisroel.

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