

# Illuminating Man's Inner World

## THROUGH THE LENS OF THE PARSHA

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### Parshas Tazria: Birth – The First and Most Monumental Moment in Man's Life

There are topics brought forth in the Torah that gives thinking man no reason for pause. Honoring one's parents, giving charity, observance of Shabbos and of the Moadim, and hundreds of other laws and concepts causes no puzzlement or consternation. Other topics are not so simple and for one reason or another are never properly delved into and understood even by educated Jews. I believe that the laws and concepts of tum'ah v'taharah fall into that latter category.

On the simplest of levels, even the term 'impurity' feels challenging. One can easily wrap their brain around the idea of impurity connected with exposure to a dead body and the like but why would we refer to a woman who menstruates as impure? It is the most natural of human processes, yet a woman might feel as though she is being stamped with a designation that implies something negative. Even more confounding is the topic introduced in this week's parsha, namely the tum'ah associated with childbirth. How do we understand the apparent paradox that the process of creation of a tzelem Elokim can also by definition yield impurity. These concepts of טומאת נדה and טומאת לידה are topics that are indeed challenging for some to wrap their heads around and requires great thoughtfulness.

While many of the meforshim (see the Kli Yakar and others) attach both טומאת לידה and the necessity to seek atonement after childbirth to Chavah's original sin (poor Chavah seems to get blamed for everything) I would like to mention several different approaches.

Rav Hirsch in his commentary on Chumash writes

with the sophistication that is his hallmark. The piece is somewhat lengthy, but I will do my best to summarize his idea. The pasuk states that אשה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וַיִּלְדָּה זָכָר and almost all of the meforshim comment on this language of tazria as opposed to yaldah (gives birth). Rav Hirsch writes that the language tazria impresses upon the reader that the process of a woman giving birth is similar to the ground producing seeds and vegetation. The woman's role is a passive one as the fetus takes shape, develops and ultimately arrives into the world. Ravi Hirsch points out that the word 'mother' comes from the Latin word mater which means womb - her essence and identity is that of almost the passive womb bringing forth life to the world. As beautiful as that is, it also subjugates her own identity as being a full blown, independent servant of G-d with her own unique strengths, goal, and spiritual ambitions. That piece of her is reestablished by tum'as leida. It is her own process of personal rejuvenation culminating in the bringing of a korban. טומאת לידה is a reclaiming of her own spiritual identity away from the structure of her family and newborn child. One can understand טומאת נדה in similar terms.

While I love Rav Hirsch's idea I would like to suggest another approach that I have always been fond of. Recently I was gratified to find a similar idea in the name of the Kotzker Rebbe quoted in the Pardes Yosef. Simply stated tum'ah, far from being anything detestable or dirty, is a reflection of the absence of sanctity. The Kotzker wrote that this absence of kedusha is rendered by the fact that HKB'H was involved in the process of labor and childbirth. As the gemarah in the beginning of Ta'anis says הַמִּפְתָּח

טמאה של חיה אצל השי"ת בעצמו - the key to childbirth rests in G-d's hands alone. When the process is over the sanctity of the experience also departs rendering the woman טמאה.

It would seem that the idea is even more simple than what the Kotzker wrote, and I believe even more profound. The absence of kedusha is not only that HKB'H is involved in this process but that the fetus itself is its own soul and has its own sanctity. Leaving aside all of the Rabbinic and ethical debates of when is it that a fetus takes on the status of an independent living entity, the fetus is, or will become, a life with a formed neshama tehorah and with his or her own capacity for both spiritual greatness and regeneration. The removal of that nefesh leaves a spiritual impact on the woman. This is clearly and observably true on emotional, psychological, and physiological levels and it's no less true in the unseen but yet palpable realm of the spirit.

The reality is that this concept that tum'ah is a spiritual response to the absence of life is what drives the halakhos of tum'as meis and tum'as niddah. A human's physical body with the departure of the soul (i.e., death) or woman's body with the departure of potential life (i.e., menstruation) paints a picture that has nothing to do with any perception of filth and disgust and everything to do with the basic and fundamental sanctity of a human being. Laws of tum'ah from start to finish are the greatest statement of man's nobility and of the necessity of both protecting and cultivating that nobility.

Without sounding simplistic or 'mussary' I believe that the consistent reminder of these first pesukim in the parsha yields great benefits. If I as a person am imbued with fundamental sanctity, unassailable and unquestioned, so much so that one's departure from their mother results in a status of Biblically ordained tum'ah, then what does that say about אדם בעולמו. What

does that mean for every piece of my life - the way that I speak, how I spend my time, what I ingest into my being, what my life goals are, who I am, where I am going - every fiber of my being can be and should be shaped by this one simple fact established at the moment of my birth.

Far from being a source of philosophical discomfort, tum'as leida stands as the ultimate testament to the beauty, greatness, majesty and responsibility of man.

Everyone should have a beautiful Shabbos

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