

BS"D



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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON TAZRIA - 5765

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WEEKLY PARSHA INSIGHTS FROM

RAV MEIR GOLDWICHT

Parashat Tazria

Our parasha opens with the laws of a yoledet (a woman who gives birth). As we go through the section discussing these laws, we find a passuk that commands us to perform the mitzvah of brit milah on the eighth day, from which Chazal learn that the brit milah must be performed by day, not by night, and that it is performed even if the eighth day falls on Shabbat. This raises the following question, asked by both the Chizkuni and the Ohr HaChaim: Why does the Torah interrupt the halachot of yoledet with a passuk discussing brit milah? This passuk seemingly belongs in parashat Lech Lecha with the rest of the halachot of brit milah, not here in the middle of the halachot of yoledet!

The Chizkuni and Ohr HaChaim suggest that we might have mistakenly thought that brit milah was performed on Shabbat only before kabbalat haTorah, but now that we have the mitzvah of Shabbat, the brit milah would be pushed to Sunday if the eighth day was Shabbat. This passuk therefore teaches us that even after kabbalat haTorah, brit milah on the eighth day trumps Shabbat. Although the answer of the Chizkuni and the Ohr HaChaim explains the necessity of this passuk, it doesn't seem to explain its seemingly incongruous placement in the middle of the section discussing yoledet! This, then, is our first question: What is the passuk of brit milah doing here in the middle of the parasha of yoledet?

The Torah goes on to obligate the yoledet to bring a korban chatat (a sin-offering). What exactly was the sin of the yoledet? The gemara in Niddah (31b) explains that the chatat is brought in order to atone for the woman's oath during childbirth never to give birth again because of the intense pain involved. The gemara's explanation is difficult to understand, however, because certainly not every yoledet, even with the great pain of childbirth, takes an oath to never again give birth! Yet the Torah obligates every yoledet to bring a korban chatat, not just those who take this oath. Our second question is: What sin did the yoledet commit that obligates her to bring a korban chatat?

To answer these questions we turn to the Ramban on sefer Bereishit. When HaKadosh Baruch Hu created the world, He regarded every aspect of the Creation as "ki tov, That it was good." The Ramban explains that "ki tov" means that Hashem desired that His handiwork last forever. The only thing HaKadosh Baruch Hu does not regard as "ki tov" at the time of its creation was Man. When HaKadosh Baruch Hu created Adam HaRishon, the Torah says, "VaYetzer, And He created," with two yuds. Rashi explains that one yud represents a yetzirah for this world and one yud represents a yetzirah for olam haba. In other words, when a person is born, it is unclear whether his creation was a good thing. As Iyov puts

it, "VaIr Pereh Adam Yulad, Man is born a wild animal" (11:12). Man is born a wild animal, an Ir Pereh, but must ripen into an Adam. If a person works on himself to be spiritually reborn, then he can be described as "ki tov," for at that point HaKadosh Baruch Hu certainly desires that His handiwork last forever.

How does one achieve spiritual rebirth? The only way to accomplish this is to bring oneself to live a life of kedushah and taharah. Tumah comes into being wherever there is a termination of life or of the potential to create life. One who touches a live animal does not become tamei, but one who touches a dead animal does. Similarly, one who touches a live person does not become tamei, but one who comes into contact with a dead person does. This is also one of the explanations for tumat middah—since potential for new life existed within the middah, when this potential is terminated, tumah is created. In contrast, a pregnant woman does not have tumat middah since she is actively involved in the creation of life.

In general, tumah arrives after a state of taharah or vice versa. Only at one time do tumah and taharah appear simultaneously—at the moment of birth. On the one hand, the baby represents taharah and new life. On the other hand, at that very moment the yoledet becomes t'meiah. The reason for this is that the baby has already begun to die, as it is one moment closer to its predestined time. (This is why Chazal refer to the womb as "kever, grave" since it is not only the source of life, but the source of death as well.) The Ba'al HaTurim explains that this is in fact the reason the brit milah is on the eighth day of the child's life, since we must wait for the seven days of aveilut for the child to pass, as it were.

All of this is because of the sin of our great-grandmother, Chava, who ate from the eitz hada'at. This, then, is the reason why the yoledet brings a korban chatat—together all of the chata'ot will atone for the sin that brought death to the world and bring us back to eternal life. The way to fix the sin of our great-grandparents Adam and Chava is to strive for lives of kedushah and taharah.

This also explains why the mitzvah of brit milah appears in the middle of the parasha of yoledet—the brit milah reminds one of the kedushah within, through which we merit the ability to transform every negah (plague) into oneg (delight) and every tzara'at (leprosy) to atzeret (holiday). This ability comes about through the middah of anavah. The gemara in Erchin (16a) says that tzara'at afflicts a person because of ga'avah, lashon hara, and tzarut ayin (stinginess), all of which reflect the opposite of humility. The more we work on achieving anavah, the more we bring kedushah and taharah into our lives, and the closer we come to the fulfillment of the words of the navi, And I will sprinkle pure waters upon you and purify you from all of your impurities..." (Yechezkel 36:25).

This Shabbat, which is both Shabbat HaChodesh and Shabbat Mevorchim for the month of Nissan, is a unique opportunity to begin our spiritual lives anew, imbuing our lives with kedushah and taharah, and preparing ourselves to receive the light of the Geulah.

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov! Meir Goldwicht  
B'ezrat Hashem, next week, in honor of Pesach, we will discuss insights into the Haggadah shel Pesach.

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Subject: NCYI Dvar Torah: Parshat Tazria  
Parshat Tazria

29 Adar II 5765 April 9, 2005

Guest Rabbi: RABBI STEVEN PRUZANSKY  
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There are three types of tzaraas that can afflict the Jew, as a reminder from G-d that he is not living correctly. At first, the tzaraas attaches itself to the sinner's house, then to his clothing, and finally, if he does not repent, it adheres to his very flesh. His body bears the signs of this spiritual illness, and the cure, so to speak, is also spiritual - teshuva (repentance). The metzora does not go to a doctor, but to the kohen. When he is ready for purification, he does not go to a medical clinic but to the Beis HaMikdash. Why are these particular three entities the targets of this affliction - his home, clothing, and body? And why this progression? Why not just attack his body immediately? Why the subtlety? Chazal says (Arachin 16a) that tzaraas is visited on a person for one of seven possible sins, most famously Lashon hara, but also for others, such as arrogance, envy, etc. What is the connection between arrogance and tzaraas? We do many things to generate self-importance, sometimes to inflate our egos but more often simply to raise our self-esteem. We endow the most mundane acts with glamour, prestige, and a certain cachet. These days, people gladly pay ten times more for a cup of coffee than they did just a decade ago, only because it engenders a sense of sophistication and a feeling of trendiness. We tend to invest the simplest acts with the most profound significance.

In and of itself, this is usually harmless; the real danger lies in doing the same thing in our interactions with others. Lashon hara is a by-product of arrogance. One who thinks he is superior to others, or one who wants to boost himself, will often seek to degrade others. People who are emotionally secure do not need that, but those who are most self-centered thrive on it. So what is the first punishment of the Metzora? He is quarantined, banished from society for seven days - in essence, humbled, diminished, and losing esteem in the eyes of others. The metzora is segregated not only as a punishment, but primarily as a learning experience - so he can reflect on what it means to be part of a society, on the value of human companionship, so he can better appreciate human companionship - because therein lies his flaw.

The metzora has no respect for the rights, needs, or claims of others. He lives in a world in which he is at the center, the hub of importance, and the straw that stirs the drink. In other words, he is not only arrogant, but also worse - he is rude. To be rude doesn't violate one of the 613 commandments; it violates all of them. In our world, we have become inured to the death of civility, so we accept rudeness as a matter of course and we almost pay it no attention, until it affects us. The etiquette of "please, thank you, excuse me, sorry" is in decline in our world.

But G-d will not first punish the person. In His kindness, He will first target those objects with which the Metzora identifies, which bring him security, and add to his sense of self: first his house and then his clothing.

People invest much in their homes - money, time, effort, personality, and aggravation. It is a very keen expression of their identity. It is 'who I am' to the outside world. We all have homes, and yet no two homes are alike. And clothing is an even more immediate and trenchant means of self-expression - there are rules and regulations (what matches or doesn't, what is in and what is out of fashion), infinite styles, and endless supply of compliments. ("That's a beautiful suit/dress, etc." - even though the recipient of the compliment did not make the garment, he/she is just wearing it.) And yet, nothing is closer to us than our bodies, where we feel pain, and which is most important to us.

These three are familiar to us in another context as well. Gemara Menachos 43b states that "whoever has tefilin on his head and arm, and tzitzis on his clothing, and a mezuzah on his doorpost is secured against sin." These three items, explained Rav Yisrael Chait shlit"a - are our primary means of self-expression, the focal points of our individual identity and putative security. These are the areas of life that G-d specifically endowed with mitzvos, in order to re-direct our trust back to Him.

If we think that our homes are our castles and furnish us with security and strength, then we are commanded to put a mezuzah on the outside door - to remind us that the true refuge is with G-d. If we are obsessed with our appearance - how we look, what we wear, on maintaining the latest fashions, then we are provided with one sartorial constant: Tzitzis. For those who think that man exists only to seek pleasure and indulge the body, know - through the wearing of tefilin - that the body can be consecrated to a higher purpose. Man is first and foremost a servant of G-d.

The metzora, in his arrogance, stumbled. He is first taught - through his home, then through his clothing, and then on his body - to gain some perspective, regain some humility, to re-create himself as a wiser, more dedicated servant of HaShem. But what the metzora learns through an affliction, we understand through mitzvos. That is why tzaraas only affects Jews, and mitzvos were only given to Jews - and that is why we remind ourselves, in this month of geula, of the foundation of our people, the terms of our existence, and the glorious destiny that awaits His faithful servants, with the joys of redemption, and the coming of Moshiach.

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

RABBI DR. JONATHAN SACKS

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago]

Tazria - Holiness and Childbirth

THE SIDROT OF TAZRIA AND METSORAH contain laws which are among the most difficult to understand. They are about conditions of "impurity" arising from the fact that we are physical beings, embodied souls, and hence exposed to (in Hamlet's words) "the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to." Though we have immortal longings, mortality is the condition of human existence, as it is of all embodied life. As Rambam explains (Guide for the Perplexed, III: 12)

We have already shown that, in accordance with the divine wisdom, genesis can only take place through destruction, and without the destruction of the individual members of the species, the species themselves would not exist permanently . . . He who thinks that he can have flesh and bones without being subject to any external influence, or any of the accidents of matter, unconsciously wishes to reconcile two opposites, namely, to be at the same time subject and not subject to change. 1

Throughout history there have been two distinct and opposing ways of relating to this fact: hedonism (living for physical pleasure) and asceticism (relinquishing physical pleasure). The former worships the physical while denying the spiritual, the later enthrones the spiritual at the cost of the physical.

The Jewish way has always been different: to sanctify the physical - eating, drinking, sex and rest - making the life of the body a vehicle for the divine presence. The reason is simple. We believe with perfect faith that the G-d of redemption is also the G-d of creation. The physical world we inhabit is the one G-d made and pronounced "very good." To be a hedonist is to deny G-d. To be an ascetic is to deny the goodness of G-d's world. To be a Jew is to celebrate both creation and Creator. That is the principle that explains many otherwise incomprehensible features of Jewish life.

The laws with which the sedra begins are striking examples of this:

When a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, she shall be *teme'ah* for seven days, just as she is during the time of separation when she has her period . . . Then, for thirty-three additional days she shall have a waiting period during which her blood is ritually clean. Until this purification period is complete, she shall not touch anything holy and shall not enter the sanctuary.

If she gives birth to a girl, she shall have for two weeks the same *teme'ah* status as during her menstrual period. Then, for sixty-six days after that, she shall have a waiting period during which her blood is ritually clean.<sup>2</sup> She then brings a burnt-offering and a sin-offering, after which she is restored to "ritual purity."

What is the meaning of these laws? Why does childbirth render the mother *teme'ah* (usually translated as "ritually impure", better understood as "a condition which impedes or exempts from a direct encounter with holiness")? And why is the period after giving birth to a girl twice that for a boy? There is a temptation to see these laws as inherently beyond the reach of human understanding. Several rabbinic statements seem to say just this. In fact, it is not so, as Maimonides explains at length in the Guide. To be sure, we can never know - specifically with respect to laws that have to do with *kedushah* (holiness) and *teharah* (purity) - whether our understanding is correct. But we are not thereby forced to abandon our search for understanding, even though any explanation will be at best speculative and tentative.

The first principle essential to understanding the laws of ritual purity and impurity is that G-d is life. Judaism is a profound rejection of cults, ancient and modern, that glorify death. The great pyramids of Egypt were grandiose tombs. Arthur Koestler noted that without death "the cathedrals collapse, the pyramids vanish into the sand, the great organs become silent." The English metaphysical poets turned to it constantly as a theme. As T. S. Eliot wrote:

Webster was much possessed by death  
And saw the skull beneath the skin . . .  
Donne, I suppose, was such another . . .  
He knew the anguish of the marrow  
The ague of the skeleton . . .

Freud coined the word *thanatos* to describe the death-directed character of human life.

Judaism is a protest against death-centred cultures. "It is not the dead who praise the Lord, nor those who go down into silence" (Psalm 114) 3 "What profit is there in my death, if I go down into the pit? Can the dust acknowledge You? Can it proclaim your truth?" (Psalm 30) 4. As we open a sefer Torah we say: "All of you who hold fast to the Lord your G-d are alive today" (Deut 4:4) 5. The Torah is a tree of life. G-d is the G-d of life. As Moses put it in two memorable words: "Choose life" (Deut. 30: 19) 6.

It follows that *kedushah* (holiness) - a point in time or space where we stand in the unmediated presence of G-d - involves a supreme consciousness of life. That is why the paradigm case of *tumah* is contact with a corpse. Other cases of *tumah* include diseases or bodily emissions that remind us of our mortality. G-d's domain is life. Therefore it may not be associated in any way with intimations of death. This is how Judah Halevi explains the purity laws in his work *The Kuzari*:

A dead body represents the highest degree of loss of life, and a leprous limb is as if it were dead. It is the same with the loss of seed, because it had been endowed with living power, capable of engendering a human being. Its loss therefore forms a contrast to the living and breathing. (*Kuzari*, II: 60) 7

The laws of purity apply exclusively to Israel, argues Halevi, precisely because Judaism is the supreme religion of life, and its adherents are therefore hyper-sensitive to even the most subtle distinctions between life and death.

A second Principle, equally striking, is the acute sensitivity Judaism shows to the birth of a child. Nothing is more "natural" than procreation. Every living thing engages in it. Sociobiologists go so far as to argue that a human being is a gene's way of creating another gene. By contrast, the

Torah goes to great lengths to describe how many of the heroines of the Bible - among them Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah and the Shumanite woman - were infertile and had children only through a miracle.

Clearly the Torah intends a message here, and it is unmistakable. To be a Jew is to know that survival is not a matter of biology alone. What other cultures may take as natural is for us a miracle. Every Jewish child is a gift of G-d. No faith has taken children more seriously or devoted more of its efforts to raising the next generation. Childbirth is wondrous. To be a parent is the closest any of us come to G-d himself. That, incidentally, is why women are closer to G-d than men, because they, unlike men, know what it is to bring new life out of themselves, as G-d brings life out of himself. The idea is beautifully captured in the verse in which, leaving Eden, Adam turns to his wife and calls her Chavah "for she is the mother of all life." 8

We can now speculate about the laws relating to childbirth. When a mother gives birth, not only does she undergo great risk (until recently, childbirth was a life-threatening danger to mother and baby alike). She is also separated from what until now had been part of her own body (a foetus, said the rabbis, "is like a limb of the mother" 9 ) and which has now become an independent person. If that is so in the case of a boy, it is doubly so in the case of a girl - who, with G-d's help, will not merely live but may herself in later years become a source of new life. At one level, therefore, the laws signal the detachment of life from life.

At another level, they surely suggest something more profound. There is a halakhic principle: "One who is engaged in a *mitzvah* is exempt from other *mitzvot*." 10: for forty days in the case of a boy, and doubly so in the case of a girl (the mother-daughter bond is ontologically stronger than that between mother and son), I exempt you from coming before Me in the place of holiness because you are fully engaged in one of the holiest acts of all, nurturing and caring for your child. Unlike others you do not need to visit the Temple to be attached to life in all its sacred splendour. You are experiencing it yourself, directly and with every fibre of your being. Days, weeks, from now you will come and give thanks before Me (together with offerings for having come through a moment of danger). But for now, look upon your child with wonder. For you have been given a glimpse of the great secret, otherwise known only to G-d. Childbirth exempts the new mother from attendance at the Temple because her bedside replicates the experience of the Temple. She now knows what it is for love to beget life and in the midst of mortality to be touched by an intimation of immortality.

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PENINIM ON THE TORAH  
BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM  
Parshas Tazria

When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male. (12:2)

Rashi cites the famous statement of Rabbi Simlai, "Just as the creation of man followed that of all of the animals, wild beasts, and fowl, so, too, do the laws concerning man follow the laws governing animals, wild beasts and fowl. The soul of man, however, was created on the first day of Creation. The Midrash responds to this by commenting, "If he is *zocheh*, deserving, he is told, 'You preceded everything in Creation'; if he does not merit, he is told, 'Even the *yitosh*, tiny gnat, preceded you in Creation.'" What are we to derive from the fact that the lowly gnat preceded man in Creation?

The Ksav Sofer explains that, in truth, man towers over the rest of creation. Who is like man, that is endowed with such abilities as wisdom, cognitive powers and abilities to communicate and articulate his thoughts, to create tools for living, to elevate and develop his potential? On the other hand, the other creatures of the world have an advantage over man. Their sustenance is waiting for them without an obligation to

worry about earning a livelihood. Moreover, animals have been created with a natural instinct and ability for self-preservation and self-protection. Despite all of his cognitive skills, man must worry about earning a living and protecting himself from predators. In other words, the idea, "The gnat preceded you," is not simply a chronological concept, it is a perception regarding the quality of life.

There is one difference, one consideration, that must be taken into account: purpose. Man has purpose; he has a mission, while the animal does not. Regarding the quality of life, animals might have the advantage, that they are able to live without worry, without a care in the world, but man's advantage is that he has a purpose. We know that life on this world is only temporary. It is a stepping-stone, a vestibule for the real life of Olam Habah, the World to Come. This purpose, this opportunity, gives meaning to life, overshadowing whatever difficulties we might encounter.

We distinguish ourselves from the insignificant gnat and other creatures by the manner in which we demonstrate respect to the Torah. We are compensated by others for the respect which we accord the Torah. On the other hand, one who maintains a materialistic lifestyle, who shows a greater respect for money than he does for the Almighty, profanes himself and loses the respect of people. If he merits, it is considered a mark of distinction, granting him precedence before all creatures. If he is not deserving, then his position is behind that of the lowliest creature.

One who values life and lives it with purpose develops a sense of self-respect as well. He is revered and admired by other people. This is what Chazal mean when they say, "Who is considered mechubad, honorable? He who honors others." The Shevat Mussar explains that one who honors other people will, in turn, receive respect from honorable people. The average person thinks that an honorable person is he who receives much honor from others. The Torah's attitude is quite the opposite. It considers the honorable person to be the one who gives honor, not the one who receives it. This attitude has been the hallmark of our gedolim. Horav Akiva Eiger, zl, writes in a letter to his son, who was preparing his fathers' responsa for publication, "You will see among the letters of correspondence from people who identify themselves as having learned in my yeshivah. Do not refer to any of them as students. I have never referred to anyone as my student, because how do I know that I did not learn more from him than he did from me?"

Another short vignette which demonstrates this characteristic occurred concerning Horav Bentzion Halberstam, zl, the Bobover Rebbe, who resided for a while in the city of Tchebin where Horav Dov Berish Weidenfeld was rav. The Bobover made a comment and quoted a Tosfos to support his thesis, whereupon Rav Weidenfeld, himself a scholar of great distinction, replied, "There is no such Tosfos." Months later, while lecturing to his yeshivah, Rav Weidenfeld came across the Tosfos to which the Bobover had referred. He then exclaimed to his students, "Look at the incredible restraint the Bobover Rebbe exercised. He had the correct source which I had overlooked. He did not, however, want to embarrass me in public, so he remained silent."

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, cites the Talmud in Shanhedrin 102b which quotes a dialogue that Hashem had with Yoravam ben Nevat. Hashem "grabbed" him by the cloak and said, "Repent! Repent! And I, you and the son of Yishai (David Hamelech) will stroll together in Gan Eden." Yoravam replied, "Who will be at the head?" Hashem answered, "Ben Yishai." Yoravam countered, "Then I am not interested."

Rav Chaim notes: Yoravam was worthy of talking to Hashem. He was so obsessed with kavod, honor, that he threw it all away, because David would go first! Better he should be banished to the nadir of oblivion than to observe David at the helm. To someone like Yoravam, we say: "The gnat preceded you."

...

The Kohen shall look... the Kohen shall declare him tamei, contaminated; it is tzaraas. (13:8)

The Ramban, as well as the other commentators, explains that tzaraas is not a physical condition. It is a physical manifestation of a spiritual affliction. It is a punishment for a number of sins, the most predominant of which is lashon hora. A person officially becomes a metzora only when, after viewing the plague and determining its authenticity, the Kohen proclaims him to be tamei, contaminated. If the afflicted person were to surgically remove the plague, he could not become a metzora. Removing the plague, however tempting, is categorically forbidden by the Torah. Why?

The Sefer Hachinuch explains that a person should learn to accept pain and suffering with which Hashem afflicts him. By nullifying the tzaraas, he has not solved his problem. He has sinned and, as such, he must expiate his sin. He should accept his punishment and pray to Hashem for forgiveness and that He remove his pain and suffering.

This is a very powerful statement. No one wants to suffer, but then, when we do wrong we invariably forget about the consequences of our actions. Suffering is regrettably a part of life which cannot be completely avoided. Hashem has His cheshbonos, calculations, for determining the amount of pain a person will endure. Man's function is to entreat Hashem to remove the afflictions and suffering, so that all will be reckoned positively for him. Indeed, a maxim of Jewish belief is that suffering in this world is an "altar of atonement" which can wipe away the stain of sin, in order to free the person from the pain that would be his in Olam Habah, the World to Come.

In Rabbi Sholom Smith's latest anthology from Horav Avraham Pam, zl, on Chumash, the venerable rosh yeshivah addresses suffering and the proper attitude we must manifest toward it. He explains that while suffering comes in different forms, the form which is packaged in disease, the terrible physical pain that some people must endure, is indeed very difficult for the average person to accept. Yet, there is a type of suffering with which people can learn to live, one that provides us with great spiritual benefit: this is the ability to be ne'elavim v'einam olvim, to accept the insults, mockery and derision of others. When someone directs verbal abuse at us personally, it is very difficult to respond appropriately. Immediately, there awakens within us a desire to retaliate with much of the same, to stoop to the level of the individual who is disparaging us. This eventually leads to the long list of sins associated with verbal response; lashon hora, machlokes, contention, revenge and anger. A person can be happy in suffering if he accepts the verbal abuse without responding. Accepting the abuse will hopefully take the place of some other form of suffering he was to endure either in this world or in Olam Habah.

At the conclusion of the Shemoneh Esrai, we say v'limkalelai nafshi sidom, "to those that curse me, let my soul be silent." Why does it say nafshi, my soul? It could have simply said, "I" should be silent. Why bring in the soul? I think we may note from here that to keep quiet in the face of verbal abuse and embarrassment is an overwhelming ability - one that needs the support of the soul, the spiritual dimension of a person. The soul is acutely aware that the individual who is abusing us is Hashem's agent, sent to cause us pain. It is the will of Hashem that we suffer, and the soul inspires us to accept this reality. In other words, one whose spiritual dimension plays a positive role in his life will be able to control his physical response to someone who insults him. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, explains that David Hamelech is called "the fourth leg of Hashem's Chariot," because he ignored the curse and insult of Shimi ben Geira, a privilege not granted even to Moshe Rabbeinu.

We ask Hashem to protect us from suffering because we realize that we are not on the level to request the yesurim shel ahavah, "afflictions of love," which the great Jews of earlier generations have requested. We understand that our capacity for studying Torah and performing Hashem's mitzvos properly will be hampered by suffering and illness. Yet, we acknowledge the great value of accepting this suffering with faith and conviction if it is decreed upon us.

Rav Pam relates that when Horav Shmuel Rozovsky, zl, was ill with the devastating disease to which he eventually succumbed, he received a letter of encouragement from the Steipler Gaon, Horav Yaakov Kanievsky, zl. In the letter, he wished Rav Shmuel a refuah sheleimah, offering a prayer that Hashem would relieve him of the agony he was enduring. He added that he was sending this wish in regard to any future pain that he might endure, but the suffering that he had already braved was an immense treasure and a source of great merit in the World to Come.

One individual, the Piascesner Rebbe, zl, who was the subject of much affliction, addressed the meaning of suffering as he attempted to provide hope, consolation and a message of inner joy to the many Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto during the bitter years of the Holocaust. He did not focus on suffering from the point of theological justification vis-?-vis the doctrine of reward and punishment, but rather on the concept of "afflictions of love." Drawing upon a number of citations in Chazal which speak of accepting suffering in love, he invoked the analogy of korbanos, the sacrifices that were offered in the Bais Hamikdash. He goes as far as to suggest that one may offer up his suffering as a gift to the Almighty. He views suffering as an occasion for the sufferer to give others the opportunity to demonstrate compassion and empathy. The empathizer, in turn, reciprocates with prayers and expressions of concern on behalf of the sufferer. This reciprocal interaction has great cosmic significance.

He explains that on a fast day, we pray, "May the diminution of my fat and blood be considered a sacrifice offering." Indeed, all afflictions purge the individual of his sins, because they diminish his strength, fat and blood. All the suffering that Klal Yisrael endures is a form of sacrificial offering. These are rendered with love to the Almighty.

Undoubtedly, the notion of nobility in suffering is a concept that is above the reach of the average person. If one could, however, transcend the pain and deprivation to sense a feeling of contentment in the knowledge that what he is enduring is G-d-given, purposeful and purifying, he might then be able to experience nobility that comes with spiritual ascendancy which will enable him to dedicate his moments of pain to Hashem as a sacrifice that Hashem will hold dear.

We hope for the day when Hashem will remove illness and affliction from our midst and that we will merit joy and blessing for ourselves and for our families.

Sponsored by Yaakov and Karen Nisenbaum and Family in memory of our Father and Grandfather Martin Nisenbaum

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[www.RabbiWein.com](http://www.RabbiWein.com)

Parsha April 08, 2005 <http://www.rabbiwein.com/parsha-index.html>

TAZRIA <http://rabbiwein.com/column-899.html>

The Torah is pro-family. It commands people to marry and have children. This week's parsha deals with the ritual laws of cleanliness and impurity inherent in giving birth to a child. Though the laws of purity and impurity have little consequence in our lives today due to the absence of the Temple and its rituals, there are certain laws regarding childbirth that still retain actuality today. But, I wish to dwell on the broader aspect of having children in this article. One of the main problems facing Jewish society today is demographic. Bluntly put, Jews are not reproducing themselves. In the United States, the statistics regarding Jewish births show that the birth rate is down to 1.8 – minus population growth, not just zero population growth. This is attributable to many factors – a large number of permanent singles, the declining birthrate that seemingly always accompanies economic affluence, people marrying later, women choosing careers over family, etc. Whatever the reasons, the numbers spell disaster for the future of American Jewry.

And here in Israel, the birth rate among secular Jews is also spectacularly low. Compounding the problem is the high number of abortions undertaken by Jewish women every year, the numbers of these abortions being measured reportedly in the tens of thousands. There are wonderful organizations here in Israel that are committed to helping women in desperate straits give birth to their children instead of resorting to abortion. But in the overall picture these efforts are usually too little and too late.

We may be heartened by the fact that in the religious Jewish community there is currently a high birthrate, 7.6 in the Charedi society and 4.2 in the Dati society. Eventually, this will cause a vast change in the life, politics and behavior of our country. But for now, because more than fifty percent of the Charedi population and a third of the Dati population is under the age of eight, this is not recognizable. It should be apparent that there could be no Jewish people if there are not enough Jews to populate the nation and the Land of Israel. The Jewish people, sixty years after the Holocaust ended still has not made up its losses. In fact, it has not even come close. There were nineteen million Jews in the world in 1939. There are barely fourteen million Jews today. The price of Auschwitz, assimilation and intermarriage is very high. A shrinking base of Jewish population will spell the loss of Jewish influence and ideas in the world. And that would truly be a tragedy for all concerned.

The Lord told us in advance that we would not be a people of great numbers – "for you are the smallest of all nations." Nevertheless, we have an obligation to promote increased Jewish population and numbers. Family, children, generations, these are the values that Jews are judged by. It is our way of guaranteeing that the message of Sinai will continue to be heard in a world that so desperately needs to hear it.

Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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From: RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN'S SHABBAT SHALOM Parsha

Column [Shabbat\_Shalom@ohrtorahstone.org.il]

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Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Tazria (Leviticus 12:1-13:59)

By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel - "And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (Leviticus 12:3).

This week's Torah reading is not only difficult because of its subject matter – the ritual status of a woman after she gives birth in terms of the times when she is ritually impure and when she is ritually pure as well as the ritual impurity which devolves upon both men and women when semen or blood emerges from their bodies – but also in terms of the very strange order of the verses and the chapters.

The first question arises from a verse which seemingly has no connection to what precedes or follows it: after the Bible has informed us that when a woman bears a male child she will be ritually impure for seven days (Leviticus 12:1,2), the following verse does not deal with the subsequent 33 days of ritual purity which she is allowed to enjoy no matter what her physical state may be – that comes two verses later (Leviticus 12:4) – but rather the Bible informs us "That on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (Leviticus 12:3).

Why have the law of circumcision in the very midst of the laws of a woman's status of purity upon her giving birth? It hardly seems to belong!

The second question deals with the order of the chapters. Chapter 12 deals with ritual purity and impurity as a result of childbirth as we have seen. Chapter 15 deals with the different kinds of seminal emissions which emerge from a male and the different kinds of blood emissions which emerge from a female, emissions which are also connected to reproduction as a result of a sexual act between the couple. In the midst of these two Biblical discussions which certainly involve ritual impurity and impurity surrounding reproduction come two chapters right in the middle – Chapter 13 and 14 – which deal with tzara'at, usually translated as leprosy but which certainly refers to a discoloration and degeneration of the skin which causes the individual to look like a walking corpse. Why bring tzara'at in the midst of a discussion on reproduction?

In Rav J.B. Soloveitchik's most important work entitled *Family Redeemed*, my revered teacher interprets the opening chapters of Genesis as a crucial lesson to humanity concerning the spiritual potential as well as the destructive danger of the sexual act. Indeed, the classical commentary Rashi understands the fruit of knowledge of good and evil as having injected within human nature libido, eroticism and lust rather than the expression of love and the reproductive powers which were initially imbedded in human nature. Sigmund Freud sees the serpent as a phallic symbol and "eating" is often found in the Bible as a metaphor for engaging in sex. From this perspective, the sin of having partaken of the forbidden fruit is the sin of sexual lust which can often separate sex from the sacred institution of matrimony, from a natural expression of affection between two individuals who are committed to a shared life and to the establishment of a family.

It is fascinating that the punishments for having eaten the fruit are related to reproduction: "And to the woman (who initiated the transgression according to the Biblical account) He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain and travail in pregnancy and with pain shall you bring forth children...'" (Genesis 3:16). Even more to the point, the most fundamental penalty for having tasted of the forbidden fruit is death, which plagues men and woman alike: "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat; for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17) The sexual act was meant to give not only unity and joy to the couple but also to bestow continued life through the gift of reproduction. Tragically the misuse of sex and its disengagement from love, marriage and family can lead to death inducing diseases such as Aids.

I would argue that this is precisely why tzara'at, or the living death which it symbolizes, appears in the Bible in the midst of its discussion of reproduction and the normative processes of seminal emissions and menstrual blood which are necessary by products of the glory of reproduction. Tragically the life-force which is granted by G-d through the sexual organs can often degenerate into decay and death when those very sexual organs are misused.

I will also submit that this is precisely why the commandment of circumcision comes right before the Biblical establishment of a large number of days of purity (33 after the birth of a male and 66 after the birth of a female) no matter what blood may emerge from the woman's body. The much larger number of days of purity attest to the great miracle of childbirth – which is always a heartbeat away from death for every anxious parent until the healthy baby emerges and omits its first cry (and this accounts for the initial days of ritual impurity) – but which results in new life and the continuation of the family line giving the greatest degree of satisfaction that a human being can ever experience. Such glories of reproduction are only possible if the male will learn to limit his sexual activity to being within the institution of marriage and will recognize the sanctity of sex as well as its pleasures. Placing the Divine mark upon the male sexual organ with the performance of the

commandment of circumcision establishes this ideal of sanctity. The sacredness of the woman's body is similarly expressed when she immerses herself in a mikveh prior to resuming sexual relations with her husband each month and even makes a blessing to G-d while still unclothed within the ritual waters which symbolize life and birth and future.

Hence, the most meaningful blessing which I know is intoned during the marriage ceremony: "Blessed are You O Lord our G-d King of the Universe, who sanctifies his nation Israel by means of the nuptial canopy and the sanctity of marriage."

Shabbat Shalom.

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From: weekly-owner@ohr.edu Ohr Somayach [ohr@ohr.edu] Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Tazria  
TORAH WEEKLY - For the week ending 9 April 2005 / 29 Adar II  
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-- Parshat Tazria <http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/2139> Written and compiled by

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

OVERVIEW - The Torah commands a woman to bring a korban after the birth of a child. A son is to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life. The Torah introduces the phenomenon of tzara'at (often mistranslated as leprosy) - a miraculous affliction that attacks people, clothing and buildings to awaken a person to spiritual failures. A kohen must be consulted to determine whether a particular mark is tzara'at or not. The kohen isolates the sufferer for a week. If the malady remains unchanged, confinement continues for a second week, after which the kohen decides the person's status. The Torah describes the different forms of tzara'at. One whose tzara'at is confirmed wears torn clothing, does not cut his hair, and must alert others that he is ritually impure. He may not have normal contact with people. The phenomenon of tzara'at on clothing is described in detail.

INSIGHTS Skin Deep II "...and it will become a tzara'at affliction on the skin of his flesh..." (13:2)

When G-d created the world, the light of G-dliness radiated from the entire universe like a beacon. Everyone could see clearly the Creator through His creation. As yet, evil had not dulled and masked His radiance in the world. After the sin of the first man, however, G-d hid his presence in the world behind the veil of nature. Thus, nature became more opaque, coarser, until it was virtually impossible to perceive that it is G-d Who sustains the world.

In Bereshet it says, "And Hashem, G-d, made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them." (3:21)

The world was covered as with opaqueness - a "garment of skin" - hiding the inside of nature, just as the skin conceals the inside of the human body.

It's interesting to note that the word for skin in Hebrew, ohr, can be pronounced eevair, which means a blind person. Just as the skin, as it were, blinds us to the inner reality and workings of the body, so too the opacity of nature blinds us to the inner reality of G-d's running the world.

Of course, the skin is no more than a surface covering, and just as skin has pores - microscopic openings that allow air to enter the body and sweat to be expelled - so too does the "skin" of the world have its "pores" that allow us a view beyond the natural world. If we choose to look, we can see the rays of Divine Providence filtering through the cracks of existence. It's not by coincidence that the words in Hebrew for both "skin" and "light" are pronounced the same way - ohr. For if we open up our eyes, the "skin" of the world that masks G-d's Hand becomes a light that illuminates His Presence.

However, if those spiritual pores become clogged with the grime of this physical existence, then we lose that sensitivity to the transparency of the world's "skin" and see nothing but happenstance in a random world.

This is "...the tzara'at affliction on the skin of his flesh..." From Above, the skin is afflicted when a person disconnects from the inner spiritual world and sees nothing but the outer world of nature.

It is the job of the kohen and the kohanim of all generations - those who teach Torah to the Jewish People - to turn that membrane of doubt and denial into a light which will light up the universe.

- Based on the Sfat Emet

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From: Parasha list [mailto:EPORION-L@LISTSERV.OS.BIU.AC.IL]  
ICJI at Bar-Ilan University

Subject: English article for P. Tazria from BIU's Parashat Hashavua Center

<http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/> Bar-Ilan University's Parashat Hashavua Study Center

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"WHEN A WOMAN AT CHILDBIRTH" ... ETHIOPIAN CUSTOMS  
YOSSIE ZIV

Department of Talmud

This week's reading begins with the laws concerning purification of a woman after childbirth. The Ethiopian Jews have unique customs relating to impurity and purification, particularly with regard to the impurity of a woman after childbirth. Below we shall briefly describe their customs.[1]

When labor commences the woman leaves her home and goes to the margam gudo (the house for impure women),[2] escorted by female relatives and neighbors to assist her at the birth. In this hut, which is outside the village, she gives birth to her baby and remains until the end of the seventh day after the birth. The margam gudo is a hut used jointly by women in menstruation and childbirth.

The Water People

After the seventh day following the birth of a male, or the fourteenth day following the birth of a female, the mother moves to the aras gudo (the house for women after childbirth).[3] In this hut, which is also outside the village, the circumcision ceremony takes place,[4] and there the woman stays until forty days after the birth of a male or eighty days after the birth of a female. From dawn on the fortieth day following the birth of a male or the eightieth day following the birth of a female, the woman fasts[5] and goes down to the river, escorted by her female friends. She spends the entire day by the river, washing her clothing and ritually immersing them, cutting and arranging her hair, trimming her fingernails, and washing in the river many hours, during which she frequently immerses herself. The description of the Ethiopian Jews by their gentile neighbors as "the people with the smell of water,"[6] did not spring from nowhere, for it was their practice to immerse numerous times after any event associated with impurity (death, menstruation, parturition, ejaculation, contact with creeping creatures, carcasses, and

any contact with a gentile or a gentiles dishes or food). The newborn, too, is ritually immersed in the river the day the mother is purified.[7]

As evening falls the woman after childbirth comes out of the water, dresses in her clothing that has been laundered and purified, and returns to her home in the village. Near her house or the Masjid (House of Prayer) all the villagers await her at tables laden with every delight. The Keis showers her and the infant with blessings and the woman brings the sacrificial offering of women after childbirth, and at this ceremony the infant is named. The sacrifice is adjusted according to the economic ability of the family: wealthy families bring a sheep; the middle-class, a bird; and the poor, baked bread. When the economic condition of the Jews of Ethiopia deteriorated greatly, they made do with reciting prayers and reading from the book of ardaat.[8]

Blood of Purification

The main difference between the Ethiopian practice and the laws concerning a woman in childbirth lies in their different interpretation of the verses in this week's reading, especially revolving around a long-standing difference of opinion regarding one small mapik sign (a dot in the letter heh, which indicates the feminine possessive). Let us take a look at the relevant verses (Lev. 12:1-8):

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: (2) Speak to the Israelite people thus: When a woman at childbirth bears a male, she shall be unclean seven days; she shall be unclean as at the time of her menstrual infirmity. - (3) On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. -(4) She shall remain in a state of blood purification (Heb. bi-demei toharah) for thirty-three days: she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until her period of purification (Heb. yemei toharah) is completed. (5) If she bears a female, she shall be unclean two weeks as during her menstruation, and she shall remain in a state of blood purification for sixty-six days.

(6) On the completion of her period of purification, for either son or daughter, she shall bring to the priest, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. (7) He shall offer it before the Lord and make expiation on her behalf; she shall then be clean from her flow of blood. Such are the rituals concerning she who bears a child, male or female. (8) If, however, her means do not suffice for a sheep, she shall take two turtle-doves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. The priest shall make expiation on her behalf, and she shall be clean.

The practices of the Ethiopian Jews reveal their close bond with Scripture and the absence of interpretation coming from the Oral Law. A woman who bears a male is unclean for seven days as during menstruation (v. 2), and a woman who bears a female is unclean for two weeks as during menstruation (v. 5). Indeed, their custom is that a woman goes to the house of the menstruating women for either one or two weeks. The sacrifice is adjusted according to what the family of the woman who gave birth can afford (v.6-8).

The dot in the heh

The main difference between their practices and the interpretation of the Sages stems from the meaning of the word 'purification' - toharah. This word appears twice in verse 4. The Sages held that the first occurrence of the word is without a mapik, and therefore the word toharah describes the previous word "blood" ("the blood of purification", or "blood of cleanliness"). According to this reading, "She shall remain in a state of pure blood" means that the blood which a woman after childbirth sees from the seventh to the fortieth day after the birth of a male, and from the fourteenth to eightieth day after the birth of a female, is "pure" blood which does not prohibit her to her husband for marital relations. Rather, she is forbidden only from touching any consecrated thing or entering the sanctuary, as the continuation of the verse spells out. Thus the Sages held that a woman who has born a male is unclean for seven days, as during her menstrual period; for the next thirty-three days, even if she

sees blood, she is not forbidden to her husband, but only forbidden to eat consecrated offerings or to enter the Sanctuary. A woman who has born a female is forbidden to her husband for two weeks, and forbidden to touch any consecrated thing for the next sixty-six days. However, the second time toharah appears in the verse there is a mapik in the heh, so that the phrase means "she shall remain in the state of her purification regarding blood": according to the Rabbis, until the period of her purification is concluded, she is ritually unclean for the Temple on account of her blood, after which time she may also enter the Sanctuary.[9]

Some ancient sources disagreed with the Sages' interpretation of the vocalization of the word toharah in its first occurrence in the verse,[10] and added a mapik to the word. In other words, they interpreted the purification as applying not to the blood, but to the woman, who became purified forty days after the birth of a male, and eighty after a female (as we explained the second verse above according to the Rabbis). In other words, only after sitting out the entire period of blood is the woman pure. According to this approach, there is no such concept as demei tohar, "pure blood." The woman who gave birth is unclean seven days as in menstruation and another thirty-three days as a woman after childbirth, and only attains purification both for marital relations and for the Temple upon the conclusion of forty days after the birth of a male and eighty days after a female, even though her show of blood may have finished earlier.[11]

The latter more strict approach does not distinguish between the blood of menstruation and the blood of a woman after childbirth, and makes the woman forbidden to her husband for as long as eighty days after the birth of a female, even when her show of blood finished earlier.[12]

The Ethiopian Jews, who in any event tended to be extremely strict in matters of uncleanness and purification, and viewed their places of residence as sacred,[13] followed the stricter interpretation and forbade a woman after childbirth to return to her home until the entire period of purification was concluded.[14]

It is interesting that this ancient controversy has continued among those who rule on the Halakhah to our day. It turns out that many communities followed the stricter interpretation, perhaps out of ignorance, and proclaimed the woman unclean for her husband and forbade her to enter the synagogue until the conclusion of forty/eighty days. Let us examine several sources pertaining to this controversy.

#### Rabbinic Sources

Maimonides (Hilkhot Issurei Bi'ah 11.15) strenuously objected to this strict interpretation:

In a few places and in the responsa of a few geonim one finds that after bearing a male the woman is forbidden intercourse until the end of the forty days, and after bearing a female, eighty days, even though she had no show of blood beyond the seven days. This is not a valid practice; rather, it is a mistaken view in those responsa and a heretic practice in those places – something learned from the Sadducees. It is a commandment to enforce [the correct view] in order to remove [this mistake] from their hearts and return them to the words of the Sages, that she count seven cleans days and no more, as we have explained.

In contrast, Ribash[15] was sympathetic towards those who take the harder line regarding the uncleanness of a woman after childbirth and forbade doing away with this strict interpretation (Resp. Ha-Ribash 40): Regarding the practice of taking the strict line in counting the days of purification for a woman after childbirth, even if she does not see [any blood] on those days, I say that if this practice is observed as an added precaution or for abstinence, or for reasons of cleanliness, for reason of blood being found in her on those days, then they should be left to follow their practice and she should not be made permissible for them. But if they follow this practice mistakenly, because they believe that the law forbids it, they should be told that they are mistaken and that this practice came to them from the Sadducees.

To this day halakhic experts disagree over this strict interpretation. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef[16] strenuously objects to the practice and views it as a stricture that leads to violation of the law, since its practical implication is that the woman is forbidden to her husband for close to three months. On the other side, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu instructs those who follow this custom to continue in their practice (Darkhei Toharah, ch. 11, p. 114): "In some places it is the custom not to go to the mikveh throughout the period of purification, ... and whoever wishes to be strict in this regard, and his intentions are for the sake of Heaven, may rely on a minority of the later rabbinic authorities (aharonim) who wrote that this practice is to be maintained."

Thus we see that the practice of the Ethiopian Jews helps us understand an ancient controversy that existed among the Jews from the Second Temple period to the present day.

\* I wish to thank my friend and neighbor, Rabbi Avigdor Shiloh, for the many important incites that he gave me for this article.

[1] The Ethiopian Jews do not have books on their Halakhah, and the only way one can be acquainted with their religious practices prior to their immigration to Israel is by means of conversations and interviews with the religious leaders of the community.

[2] The literal translation of the word margam is curse, although margam gudo is the term used to refer to a place of impurity.

[3] In some of the villages, apparently the smaller ones, there was no special hut for women after childbirth, and so they would remain with the women who were menstruating until the end of their period of impurity.

[4] For further reading on the Ethiopians practices of circumcision see Yossi Ziv, Bar-Ilan Web Parasha Page (Hebrew edition) Lekh Lekha 2004.

[5] The Ethiopian Jews always fast on the day that they do ritual immersion.

[6] Reuven Kashani, Ha-Falashim – Korot, Masorot u-Minhagim, Jerusalem 1976, p. 18.

[7] The ritual immersion of the women would be considered of no consequence without ritual immersion of the newborn, since the newborn would make his mother impure when he nursed. Hence, immersion of the infant along with the mother is for the purposes of purification and is not a Christian custom, as many mistakenly believe.

[8] The book of prayers and benedictions used by the Ethiopian Jews, especially for recitation and prayer at rites of birth and purification. The same book can also be found in the Ethiopian Church and apparently came to the Jewish community from there. The book, with an introduction, notes and Hebrew translation, was published by Mordechai Wormbrand in 1964.

[9] Targum Onkelos, the Jerusalem Talmud and the Peshitta all take care to translate the "purification" at the beginning of the verse as pertaining to the blood and at the end of the verse as pertaining to the woman. For a summary of the laws concerning a woman after childbirth according to the Sages, see Maimonides, Hilkhot Issurei Bi'ah 4.5; 11.5 -7.

[10] The following translations: Septuagint, Vulgate, Samaritan, and the translation of the Torah to Ge'ez, an Ethiopian language.

[11] This approach was also taken by the Karaites (Sefer ha-Mitzvot le-Anan ha-Nasi, Harkabi edition, p. 51) and the Samaritans. We do not have an extant book of Samaritan Halakhah. I learned of the Samaritan practices from Benjamin Tzedaka, and the same was written by Aaron Ze'ev Eshkoli, Sefer ha-Falashim, Jerusalem 1973, pp. 44-45, without any source cited).

[12] The pronouncement by Rabbi Ze'ira (Babylonian Talmud, Nidah 66a), "The women of Israel were very strict with themselves, and even if they saw a drop of blood as large as a mustard [seed], they would wait for seven clean days after that," somewhat reduced the difference of opinion, since he drew no distinction between the blood of menstruation and the blood of a woman after childbirth, and a woman was forbidden to her husband whenever any show of blood occurred. Nevertheless, the disagreement remained regarding the period from the end of any show of blood after childbirth until the completion of forty/eighty days.

[13] From the fact that they used to remove all the impure persons from the village and offer sacrifices at every masgid, I conclude that they viewed their village as a sanctuary-city and themselves as ministering in the sacred worship. A similar pattern of behavior was found among the Qumran sect, cf. Megillat ha-Mikdash, p. 45, l. 17, Yadin edition, vol. 2, p. 136.

[14] Rabbi Shiloh informed me that according to the practices of the Ethiopian Jews there is no distinction between the first seven days and the subsequent thirty-three days after the birth of a male, the first fourteen days and subsequent sixty-six days after the birth of a female; whereas the Bible distinguishes explicitly between menstrual impurity of a woman after childbirth and the impurity of a woman after childbirth. In several instances, when I attempted to ask Keisses about the contradiction between their practices and the plain sense of Scripture, I did not receive a satisfactory response. They simply answered, "This is what is done, and that is that." It would be well to make a separate investigation into the relationship between their practices and the plain sense of Scripture in order to examine in greater depth whether they developed their customs on the basis of the plain sense of Scripture or whether they preserved various oral traditions even when these did not match Scriptural verses. I am inclined towards the latter hypothesis.

[15] Rabbi Isaac son of Rav Sheshet, Spain-Algiers, late fourteenth century.

[16] Toharat ha-Bayit, vol. 2, pp. 27-46, in great detail, especially page 28 and page 33, sect. 5.