

תורה מציון Torah MiTzion

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Chag Atzma'ut Same'ach!

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The Impurity of Childbirth

By Rav Dror Brama, former Rosh Kollel, London

Our Torah portion begins with the laws of *tumah* (impurity) for a woman after childbirth:

Speak to the Jewish people thus: When a woman at childbirth bears a male, she shall be impure seven days; she shall be impure just as at the time of separation when she menstruates. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. She shall remain in a state of blood-purification for thirty-three days: she shall not touch any holy thing, nor enter the Sanctuary until her period of purification is completed. If she bears a female, she shall be impure two weeks as during her menstruation, and she shall remain in a state of blood-purification for sixty-six days (*Leviticus 12:2-5*).

From among the many discussions about these verses, we will raise three central questions.

1. Why is there *tumah* following childbirth? Generally speaking, *tumah* is connected with death, such as a human or animal corpse, or with the loss of potential life, such as a *ba'al ker*i (one who has had a seminal emission) or a *niddah* (a menstruant). Why does bringing new life into the world cause *tumah*?
2. Why is the *tumah* twice as long when a girl is born?
3. Why is circumcision (*brit milah*) mentioned here? The Torah already commanded circumcision in the portion of *Lekh Lekha*, and it seems out of place here.

Chazal explain (*Shabbat* 132b) that the additional mention of circumcision here comes to teach us that circumcision always takes place on the eighth day, even if the eighth day is Shabbat. Shabbat symbolizes the holiness of nature, the respect that created beings feel for the act of creation. The Maharal explains at length that the number seven - which is connected to Shabbat - expresses the holiness that is within nature, while the number eight - which is connected to circumcision - expresses the extra holiness that man can achieve beyond that of nature.

Circumcision on the eighth day is an improvement on nature, in accordance with the command of God. As such, the level of holiness it achieves is higher than the holiness which is inherent in nature as God's creation. Therefore, circumcision on the eighth day overrides Shabbat.

With this insight we can answer our other questions. Nature is beautiful, and it involves the creation of life. But nature is also cyclical and blind, and it involves much pain and suffering. Birth expresses this duality of nature. Birth brings new life to the world, but the act is accompanied by blood and great pain, and is sometimes life-threatening. From the moment of birth, the interconnection of body and soul is present and wondrous. Yet physicality is responsible for our impulses, our vulnerability to the forces of nature, the deterioration of our bodies and our ultimate death. With every birth, we come face to face with the sin of Adam and Eve which led to the debasement of the material world and of nature, and which left us with the current world where all are subject to the cycle of life. We are all born and we all die.

The joy at a birth is mixed with pain. The appearance of new life is mixed with the death which is part of the cycle of life. This is the source of the *tumah* which follows birth. Why is circumcision mentioned at this very point? Because it is the way in which man enters into a covenant with God and rises above nature. The placement of this verse also explains why the time period of *tumah* is shorter following the birth of a boy - the circumcision is a corrective to *tumah* so it shortens the *tumah's* duration.

Both male and female undergo physical changes which are connected to a covenant and the reproductive organs - the male at the covenant of circumcision and the female at the covenant of marriage (with the breaking of the hymen). The corrective for the female's body takes place at a later age and is not connected with birth, and therefore it does not shorten the duration of *tumah* after the birth of a girl.

The ability of the Jewish people to bring holiness beyond nature to the world will lead, with God's help, to man's victory over death and *tumah*, and will serve as a corrective for the sin of Adam and Eve. This hope is reflected in the blessing we recite at the covenant of circumcision: "Rescue our beloved from destruction, for the sake of His covenant that He has placed in our flesh." The hope is also reflected in the blessing we recite at the covenant of marriage: "Gladden these beloved companions as You gladdened Your creation in the Garden of Eden of old."

Israel Independence Day 5766

By Rav Nehemya Taylor, Torani Advisor to Torah MiTzion

On the fifth of Iyar, 5708 (1948) - three years after the end of the terrible Holocaust which left six million Jews dead and millions more alone, widowed, and orphaned - the Creator of the World returned the land of Israel to the Jewish nation, two thousand years after He exiled them from it.

Since then, there has been an ingathering of the exiles from the four corners of the earth, and the prayer "Who gathers in the dispersed of Israel" (*Shmoneh Esreh*) has been partially fulfilled. The Jewish nation made the desert bloom, built cities, and established large centers of Torah, wisdom, and science, just as our prophets predicted. However, this year the Jewish nation suffered a serious crisis, when one of the most physically and spiritually beautiful parts of the land was handed over to our mortal enemies. "The ways of God are hidden."

How should we relate to Israel Independence Day this year?

On the verse, "This is the day which God made" (*Psalms* 118:24), Chazal comment:

It is written, "This is the day which God made; we will delight and rejoice in it/him (*bo*)."
Rabbi Avin said: We would not know whether "*bo*" means "in it, the day" or "in Him, God." Solomon came later and clarified (*Song of Songs* 1:4), "We will delight and rejoice in You" (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Pinchas* #782 and *Isaiah* #505).

The question that the Midrash is asking is whether we should focus on the holiday itself, which is a day on which a miracle occurred for which we praise God, or whether we should rejoice in God directly, in which case we are faced with difficult questions. How can we rejoice in God when we have so many questions in the areas of belief and trust, when the innocent suffer, and when we have other, similar theological problems? Rabbi Avin suggests that we find the solution by examining the words of King Solomon son of King David, who wrote in *Song of Songs*, "We will delight and rejoice in You." What is the meaning of this answer?

The expression "We will delight and rejoice in You" appears in *Song of Songs* 1:4. The full verse reads: "Draw me after You, we will run! The King has brought me to His rooms. We will delight and rejoice in You. We will find your love more fragrant than wine. They love you sincerely." We do not intend to explain this entire verse, but only the middle section: "The King has brought me to His rooms. We will delight and rejoice in You." What are the rooms of God and what is their relevance?

The Midrash tells the following story relating to this verse:

We learned there that four went into the Orchard: Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, Elisha ben Avuyah and Rabbi Akiva. Ben Azzai looked and was harmed. About him it states, "If you find honey, eat only what you need" (*Proverbs* 25:16). Ben Zoma looked and died. About him it is written, "Precious in the sight of God is the death of His followers" (*Psalms* 116:15). Elisha ben Avuyah cut the plants. What does this mean? When he entered *batei kneset* (synagogues) and *batei midrash* (houses of study) and saw children excelling at their Torah studies, he would have words with them and silence them. About him it says, "Don't let your mouth make your flesh guilty" (*Ecclesiastes* 5:5). Rabbi Akiva entered and exited unscathed. He explained, "This is not because I am greater than my friends; rather, it is as the wise teachers taught, 'Your deeds will draw you closer and your deeds will distance you' (*Mishnah, Eduyot* 5:7)." About him it is said, "The King has brought me to His rooms" (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, *Vilna* edition, #1).

The rooms of God are complex and complicated, and everyone relates to them in a different way. This is true to such an extent that some are unable to visit God's rooms. Such a visit demands tremendous strength of spirit, and only a few can exit unscathed. Rabbi Akiva

visited God's rooms and saw the destruction of the Temple, the sparks of the Messiah and the extinguishing of the sparks, as well as foxes that walked on the Temple Mount. Yet he continued to say, "We will delight and rejoice in You." This is because there are additional rooms in the house of God, and in those rooms Rabbi Akiva found a different perspective. The Gemara elaborates:

"But if you will not hear it, My soul shall weep in secret for the pride" (*Jeremiah* 13:17). R. Shmuel b. Inia said in the name of Rav: The Holy One, blessed be He, has a place, and its name is "Secret." What is the meaning of "for the pride"? R. Shmuel b. Yitzchak said: For the glory that has been taken from Israel and given to the nations of the world. R. Shmuel b. Nachmani said: For the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven. But is there any weeping in the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He? After all, R. Papa said: There is no grief in the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says (*I Chronicles* 16:27), "Majesty and splendor are before Him; strength and beauty are in His place"! - There is no contradiction; one case refers to the inner rooms, and the other case refers to the outer rooms (*Chagigah* 5b).

The Creator of the Universe has two sets of rooms: the inner and the outer. The inner is a hidden place, the innermost rooms of the house of God. This is the place where God cries, because in these rooms He sees the glory of Israel taken away from them. These are the rooms where Rabbi Akiva and those like him visited many times. However, Rabbi Akiva did not despair or become depressed, because he also saw the showroom, the outer room where "Majesty and splendor are before Him."

It is our task to struggle with the tension between the inner and outer, the light and darkness which exist simultaneously. Nevertheless, there are days when God allows us to enter the outer rooms only and to see what He has done for us. In under sixty years, we have a country full of Torah and wisdom; a country which has much kindness and altruism; a country among the most advanced in the world in many varied fields. This is His showroom and ours - "We will delight and rejoice in You."

Happy Independence Day!!!

Family Learning, Parshat Tazria Metzora Bluma Zalcman

- 1) What is Tzara'at?
- 2) What are the two signs a Kohen looked for to make sure that a person indeed had tzara'at?
- 3) How many days does a person who had Tzara'at have to wait until he is tahor and can reenter his home?
- 4) Where else can a person find Tzara'at?
- 5) Is Lashon Hara the only reason a person can get Tzara'at? If not, what are other sins?

Answers follow below

Looking Back: HaTikva

Hatikva, The Hope, was the anthem for the Zionist movement before becoming the official national anthem for the State of Israel.

Hatikva was written by the Galician poet Naftali Hertz Imbar and its original name was "Tikvatenu". It was first published in Jerusalem in the year 1886 as part of Imbar's first poetry book. The poem was well received by the Jewish Yishuv in Israel and became the official anthem of the Chovevei Zion movement. During the 18th World Zionist Congress, which took place in Prague, the poem was adopted as the official anthem of the entire Zionist movement. However, some changes were made to the original song by Yisrael Balkind, Mordechai Lubeman, and David Yudolovitz, all residents of Rishon Letziyon.

Rishon Letziyon resident Shmuel Cohen fit the well-known tune to the poem. There are different opinions about the origin of the tune. While Shmuel Cohen claimed he took the tune from a Romanian folk tune, other people think that it is an adaptation of the first portion of the Vltava, composed by Czech composer Bedrich Semanta.

The song was originally 9 verses long, but the government decided to use only the chorus as the national anthem. Changing the words of the anthem is forbidden, unless the government votes on it. Hatikva was never declared to be the actual national anthem until November of 2004, and was made a part of the "Flag and Coat-of Arms" law. (Which is now called the "Flag, Coat-of-Arms and National Anthem law".)

After the liberation of Jerusalem in 1967, it was suggested to turn Naomi Shemer's song "Jerusalem of Gold" into the official national anthem. However that suggestion was turned down.

Today, it is customary to sing Hatikva at the beginning and/or end of official state ceremonies. People must stand up straight while singing the anthem. Some people join in while Hatikva is being sung, others just stand respectfully.

Hatikva (translated):

As long as in the heart, within,
A Jewish soul still yearns,
And onward toward the East,
An eye still watches toward Zion.

Our hope has not yet been lost,
The two thousand year old hope,
To be a free nation in our own homeland,
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.

Torah MiTzion establishes Religious Zionist Kollels (centers of Jewish learning and outreach) in Diaspora Jewish communities to strengthen the study of Torah, Jewish identity, the unity of the Jewish people, and the connection between Torah study and Israel.

The Kollels, led by a Rosh Kollel, are comprised of Israeli shlichim (emissaries) - married men and their wives, and single young men, graduates of Yeshivot Hesder in Israel - who serve in the communities for a period of one-three years.

Torah MiTzion is also proud to be a partner of the "**Jewish Learning Initiative**" program on college campuses.
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Answers, Family Learning

1. Tzara'at was a special skin disease where the skin would turn white. A person with tzara'at was considered tamei (impure).
2. a. that two hairs inside the patch had also turned white
b. a piece of healthy skin in the middle of the white patch
3. a week
4. On clothing and on the walls of a house
5. No. murder and adultery, and most other serious sins.