

This week is פרשת שמייני, which follows immediately after פרשת תזריע-מצורע. The second half of פרשת שמייני discusses the הלכות of כשרות regarding animals, birds, fish, and insects. Then, in פרשת תזריע, the תורה transitions to the הלכות that apply to human beings - the laws of birth and, later, the הלכות of נגעים. This shift serves to instill a sense of הכנעה. Although human beings consider themselves the pinnacle of creation, the תכלית of the בריאה, the order of these laws reminds us that we come after all the other creatures. This should humble us, placing us in our proper place and a little הכנעה goes a long way.

Now that we've established this, let's focus on the fascinating הלכות of תזריע. Once again, we see the superiority of human beings, and particularly of ישראל. The concepts of טומאה and טהרה are unique to ישראל, and therefore, they are placed at the very beginning of פרשת תזריע, in a position of prominence. The פסוקים describe the process a woman undergoes after childbirth (12:2-4): אִשָּׁה כִּי תֵזְרִיעַ וְיָלְדָה זָכָר וְטָמְאָה שְׁבַע יָמִים כִּימֵי נִדַּת דְּוֹתָהּ תִּטָּמָא: וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בָּשָׂר עָרְלָתוֹ: וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁלֹשָׁת יָמִים תֵּשֵׁב בְּדָמֶי טָהֳרָה - For a baby boy, the mother is טמאה for seven days, followed by a period of 33 days in which she remains טהור. After this, she brings her קרבנות and can return to the בית המקדש. However, in פסוק ה, the תורה states: וְאִם נִקְבָּה תֵלֵד וְטָמְאָה שְׁבַע יָמִים כִּימֵי נִדַּתָּהּ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁלֹשָׁת יָמִים תֵּשֵׁב עַל דָּמֶי טָהֳרָה - If the newborn is a girl, the mother's טומאה period lasts for two weeks instead of seven days, and her טהרה period is extended to 66 days instead of 33. Afterward, she brings her קרבנות אֶל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֶל הַכֹּהֵן.

The מפרשים analyze why there is a difference in time between the birth of a זכר and a נקבה. This leads us to a fundamental discussion: What is טומאה and טהרה? In a very condensed explanation, טהרה is the ability to transcend one's natural state and come closer to Hashem. The נשמה, which is inherently טהור, strives for spiritual elevation, while the גוף pulls it downward, requiring constant effort to achieve greater קדושה and טהרה. What, then, is טומאה? In the simplest sense, טומאה is the absence of טהרה. When טהרה departs from a place, it creates a void, which is defined as טומאה. The clearest example is death: when a person passes away, the נשמה, which embodies טהרה, leaves the גוף. This absence of טהרה results in a state of טומאה.

Applying this to childbirth: When a woman is pregnant, she carries within her another נשמה, adding an extra level of טהרה. Upon giving birth, when that נשמה leaves her body, a void is created, resulting in טומאה. She must then undergo a purification process to return to a state of טהרה. However, if the baby is a נקבה, that female child carries within her the potential to one day bear children herself, meaning she inherently contains an additional capacity for טהרה. Since there was an even greater level of טהרה during the pregnancy, the departure of that טהרה at birth results in a stronger presence of טומאה.

This distinction is not, as a certain faction of modernistic people would say, a denigration of women - פונוקט פארקערט! It is precisely the opposite. It highlights the elevated spiritual status of the נקבה and the unique greatness of the אידישע מאמע. The extended period of טומאה following the birth of a girl is not a mark of impurity, but rather a recognition of the immense level of טהרה that was present and has now departed. Since the mother was carrying not just another נשמה but one that itself will one day have the ability to bring new נשמות into the world, the טומאה that follows is proportionately greater. Good Shabbos!

