

א שטיקל תורה A LITTLE SLICE OF TORAH

פון פרשת דער וואָך FROM THE WEEKLY PORTION

April 13, 2024



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה:

“Tachometer Torah”



...read down to the red line

Parashat-haShavu'a Stats

Weekly Portion: Tazri'a

Consists of: Leviticus 12:1-13:59

Sequence—

in annual Torah cycle: 27<sup>th</sup> of 54 < mid-point

in Leviticus: 4<sup>th</sup> of 10

- A Salient Selection from the Portion -

Leviticus 12:1-8

Context: *Leviticus, third of the Five Books of the Torah, is a catalogue of ceremonial laws, dealing in large part with the sacrificial offerings made on God's Altar. Although named for the Levitical priests who officiated at the Altar, it defines the ritual and spiritual norms for all of Israelite society.*

Content: *This week's portion describes the ritual (and associated social, psychological, and spiritual) aspects of a woman who has recently given birth.*

12:1] - The Eternal One spoke to Moses, saying [12:2a] - “Speak to the Israelite people, telling them:

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר דַּבֵּר  
אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר

12:2b] - “A woman, when she has produced seed by birthing, if she bears a male is to be regarded as *t'mei'ah* seven days— *t'mei'ah* just as at the time of her routine menstrual segregation. [12:3] - On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin is to be circumcised; [12:4a] - but **she remains in a state of blood purification** for [an additional] thirty-three days.

אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וַיִּלְדָּה זָכָר וְטָמְאָה  
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כִּימֵי נִדַת דְּוֹתָהּ  
תִּטְמָא וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בָּשָׂר  
עַרְלָתוֹ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים  
תֵּשֵׁב בְּדַמֵּי טְהָרָה

12:4b] - “She may not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the Sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed.

בְּכֹל קֹדֶשׁ לֹא תִגַּע וְאֶל הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא  
תָבֹא עַד מְלֵאת יְמֵי טְהָרָה

12:5] - “And if it is a female she has borne, she shall be *t'mei'ah* two weeks— as during her menstruation— and **is to remain in a state of blood purification** for [another] sixty-six days.


וְאִם נִקְבָּה תֵּלֵד וְטָמְאָה שְׁבַע יָמִים  
כַּנְּדָתָהּ וּשְׁשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁשֶׁת יָמִים  
תֵּשֵׁב עַל דַּמֵּי טְהָרָה

- more over


12:6] - “Now once **the days of her purification**— for either a **son** or a **daughter**— have been completed, she is to bring to the officiating priest at the entryway of the Tent of Meeting a yearling lamb, for a burnt-offering, and some kind of dove or **a turtledove**, for a sin-offering. [12:7- The priest] is to offer it up before The Eternal One, to make expiation on her behalf; **she shall then be pure from the well-spring of her blood.**

וּבְמִלַּאת יְמֵי טְהָרָהּ לְבֵן אוֹ לְבַת  
 תָּבִיא כֶּבֶשׂ בֶּן שָׁנָתוֹ לְעֹלָה וּבֶן יוֹנָה  
 אוֹ תֹר לְחַטָּאת אֶל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד  
 אֶל הַכֹּהֵן וְהִקְרִיבוּ לְפָנָי יְהוָה וְכִפֶּר  
 עָלֶיהָ וְטָהְרָה מִמִּקְוֵי דַמְיָהּ

יוֹנָה “a dove” = class *Columbidae* [50 genera, 352 species]



בְּנֵי יוֹנָה  
 “pigeon” (rock dove)  
*Columba Livia*



תֹּר European turtledove  
*Streptopelia turtur arenicola*

12:7b] - “That is the procedure for one who births either a male or a female. [12:8] - (Although if her means do not suffice to provide a lamb, she may bring **two turtledoves** or other kinds of doves— one as a burnt-offering, and one as a sin-offering— for the priest to make expiation on her behalf so that **she may be pure**)’.”

זֹאת תֹּרַת הַיִּלְדֹּת לְזָכָר אוֹ לְנִקְבָּה  
 וְאִם-לֹא תִמְצָא יָדָהּ דֵּי שָׂה וְלִקְחָהּ  
 שְׁתֵּי-תְרִיסִים אוֹ שְׁנֵי בְנֵי יוֹנָה אֶחָד  
 לְעֹלָה וְאֶחָד לְחַטָּאת וְכִפֶּר עָלֶיהָ  
 הַכֹּהֵן וְטָהְרָהּ

**- Dealing With A Spurious Dialectic -**

ט-מ-א		ט-ה-ר	
verb	טָמָא “to defile”	→	טָהַר “to purify”
noun	טְמֵאָה “impurity”	→	טְהָרָה “purification”
adjective	טָמֵא “impure”	→	טָהוֹר “clean, pure”
	feminine טְמֵאָה		feminine טְהוֹרָה

A) Isaiah 6:5 -

אִישׁ טְמֵא-שְׁפָתַי אֲנֹכִי  
I am a man of **unclean** lips,  
וּבְתוֹךְ עַם-טְמֵא שְׁפָתַי אֲנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב  
and among a people of **unclean** lips do I  
reside!

B) Ezekiel 22:11 -

וְאִישׁ אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ רִעֵהוּ עָשָׂה  
תּוֹעֵבָה  
Every man has done with his neighbor's  
wife what is unseemly;  
וְאִישׁ אֶת-כַּלְתּוֹ טְמֵא בְזָמָה  
each has **defiled** his daughter-in-law with  
licentiousness.

כל הטעון ביאת מים מדברי תורה

C) Mishnah Parah 11:4 - Anyone who is obligated by the Torah to immerse in water [to rectify their condition of currently being *tamei*]:

**מטמא את הקודש** ואת התרומה ואת החולין ואת המעשר  
prior to that immersion their physical contact] **defiles sacrificial offerings**, and the priest's-  
due, and non-sacrificial slaughterings, and tithes [presented by devotees in tribute to God]—  
**ואסור על ביאת המקדש**  
so **they are forbidden to enter the Sanctuary**.

לאחר ביאתו **מטמא את הקודש** ופוסל את התרומה  
Once they have immersed[– but prior to the setting of the sun constituting a new day in which  
they are restored to full ritual purity– their physical contact] **defiles sacrificial offerings**, but  
only renders the priest's-due invalid.

ומותר בחולין ובמעשר ואם בא אל המקדש בין לפני ביאתו בין לאחר ביאתו  
**חייב**

Non-sacrificial slaughtering and tithes are permitted to them; nonetheless, whether such a  
one has already immersed or not, **if they enter the sacred precincts** [prior to the setting of  
the sun] **they become liable** for bringing a sin-offering.

12:4b] - “She may not touch any consecrated  
**thing**, **nor enter the Sanctuary** until the  
days of her purification are completed.

**וְאֵל הַמִּקְדָּשׁ**  
**לֹא תִבֵּא** עַד מְלֵאת יְמֵי טְהָרָה

**טְמֵאָה** *tum'ah* in the Mishnah –

שמן טמא	oil that is <b>defiled</b>	[consecrated to an idolatrous deity]
בשר טמא	meat that is <b>unclean</b>	[not consistent with Leviticus 11:2-3]
דג טמא	a fish that is <b>unclean</b>	[not consistent with Leviticus 11:9]
עוף טמא	a bird that is <b>unclean</b>	[not consistent with Leviticus 11:13ff]
דם טמא	blood that is <b>defiled</b>	[by virtue of having been shed]
בית טמא	a house that is <b>defiled</b>	[by virtue of the presence of a corpse]
מקום טמא	a place that is <b>defiled</b>	[through dedication to false gods]

- more over

**...but then, a strange idiom: “rendering the hands *tamei*.”**



Mishnah P'sachim 10:9      **the Passover sacrifice**, after midnight.  
 הפסח אחר חצות מטמא את הידים

Mishnah 'Eduyot 5:3      the **Book of Ecclesiastes**.  
 קהלת מטמא את הידים

Mishnah Yadayim 4:5      the Aramaic portions of **Ezra and Daniel**.  
 תרגום שבעזרא ושבדניאל מטמא את הידים

**כתבי הקודש מטמאין את הידים**

D) Mishnah Yadayim 4:6 -      **The sacred Scriptures render the hands *tamei***,  
 וספרי הומריס אינם מטמאין את הידים  
 while the books of Homer do not render the hands *tamei*.

	<u>Moses</u>	vs.	<u>Homer</u>	
				
<b>חמשה חומשי תורה</b> <i>Five Books of the Torah</i>				<b>Ἰλιάς</b> <i>About Illium</i>
				<b>Ὀδύσσεια</b> <i>About Odysseus</i>

E) David Feinstein (1929-2020), *Kol Dodi* - In talking about a woman who bears a male child, the Torah mentions that she “produces seed.” A few verses later, however, concerning the birth of a female child, there is no mention of the seed. What is the reason for this disparity?



According to Torah law, a male remains associated with the family of his parents throughout his whole life. This has implications as far as his halachic status— *Kohen, Levi, Yisrael*— is concerned, as well as his rights of inheritance.

On the other hand, a woman passes into the family of her husband when she married. Thus, when the daughter of a *Kohen* marries a *YisraeEil*, she loses the right to eat from the priestly portions. And, of course, her children are *YisraEilim* and as such derive no benefit from their maternal grandfather's priestly status.

It is to this arrangement that the Torah alludes, when it mentions the woman's “seed” in connection with the birth of a son, but not the birth of a daughter.

F) Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), *T'rumat Tz'vi* - As we have pointed out elsewhere in connection with *b'rit-milah*, one of the basic traits of the Jewish woman, as a

**- continued**

true daughter of Sarah, is her willingness to subordinate herself to that attribute of moral responsibility of which the male is constantly reminded by the circumcision on his flesh. So it is that **the laws of *tum'ah* and *taharah*** to be observed by Jewish women **serve as forceful aids in training the woman for purity of character.**

The day when the father performs circumcision, which is the first duty a man must perform for his son, imbues the father with the sacred resolve to raise his son to walk in moral strength before God—the God of the Torah—and to serve his son, by his own conduct, as a model for such a way of life. Similarly, the fact that **the woman's path to purity following the birth of a daughter is twice as long as after the birth of a son** certainly should impress upon the mother with all the solemnity and grandeur of her own task to become teacher, guide, and model for the Jewish woman of the future. After all, **a mother's influence in molding the moral standards of her daughters is twice as great as her influence on the moral development of her sons.** With daughters, the mother is not only their role model, but also the molder of their character.

G) Seymour Rossel (1945- ), *The Torah Portion by Portion* - *Tazri'a* means “she brings forth seeds.” Of course, women do not really bring forth children the way plants bring forth seeds. But in a way, every child is a seed of the next generation.

The state of **blood-purification** spoken of in this portion is significant. Blood is the stuff of life, and humans have always known this. In the Story of Creation, the Torah Book of Genesis connects the Hebrew word for “human” אדם *Adam*” to two words: אדמה *adamah* “earth” and דם *dahm* “blood.” Our human-ness comes from the earth, and when we die our blood returns to the earth. When the new mother's time of **blood-purification** was over, she would bring a sin-offering—but not because there was any sin in giving birth! Giving birth was a time of joy. **The sin-offering was for the blood spilled in giving birth.** The blood of the sin-offering was returned to the earth, and the mother was then clean.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)  
from “Intimations of Immortality”

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar;  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But **trailing clouds of glory do we come**  
From God, Who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

H) Tamara Cohn Eskanazi (1951- ), *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* - When the mother reaches either the fortieth or eightieth day post-partum, she must take **the necessary ritual steps to regain access to the holy sphere.** Leviticus does not prescribe immersion for the woman's post-partum **purification** (although the Rabbis assume a second immersion at this point, in addition to the ritual bathing at the end of seven or fourteen days). Rather, **two sacrifices** mark the end of the period of **impurity**:

Burnt-offering – Hebrew עֹלָה *'olah*, which elsewhere has several functions: to atone for sin, **to offer thanksgiving**, or **to pay homage to God** (on all of which, see Leviticus 1).

Purgation offering – Hebrew חַטָּאת *chattat*, which cleanses the Sanctuary of the **impurity** generated by the mother's severe discharge. While **human blood or discharge is a source of impurity**, **the blood of an animal sacrifice is a ritual detergent** that counteracts **its effect on the sphere of holiness.**

- more over

I) Ellen Frankel (1951- ), *The Five Books of Miriam: A Woman's Commentary on the Torah* -

The Rabbis explain: A woman who bears a daughter remains ritually impure for twice as long as a newborn son, because of the physical difference between the genders. As with all distinctions, this one needs to be marked.

The Sages in our time add: This double period of quarantine was the Torah's way of acknowledging that a newborn female child would herself become a mother someday, and would therefore become a source of blood defilement, like her mother.

Leah the Namer explains: The Hebrew phrase that opens and names this *parashah*, *tazri'a v'yaldah*, means "bears seed and gives birth." The term *tazri'a* is used in reference to a male child only, not a female. For only a male child will one day "seed" a child himself.

The Rabbis continue: After the initial one- or two-week period of separation, the woman is allowed to sleep with her husband again, but is still barred from the Sanctuary and from contact with "sacred things," such as priestly tithes if she is of a Levitical family. This period is called "blood-purification" *damei taharah*— literally, "pure blood." Though no longer compared to menstrual discharge, this "birth blood" is still considered a ritual contaminant and therefore is off-limits to sacred things.

Our Daughters ask: This doesn't make any sense. Why, if this blood "contaminates," is it called "pure"?

Beruriah the Scholar answers: Elsewhere in the Torah, notably in the case of the Red Heifer, we find similar examples of this paradox: contact with holiness, perhaps because it is so fraught with the danger of death, make a person ritually impure. In this case the woman, through her newborn, has forded a dangerous birth canal— and survived. Before she rejoins the community, she needs time to recover fully from her near-death experience.

Principal causes of maternal mortality:		
prior	15%	complications from unsafe abortion
	10%	hypertension during pregnancy (pre-eclampsia and eclampsia)
	28%	pre-existing conditions (anemia, cancer, diabetes, hypertension...)
process	6%	obstructed labor
post	3%	blood clots
	15%	post-partum bleeding
	8%	post-partum infections
up to six weeks post-partum; half within 24 hours		

- Maternal deaths per 100,000 live births [2020] -					
Norway	2	U.S.	33.4	Indonesia	173
Israel	3	Argentina	45	global	223
U.K.	10	Iraq	76	Afganistan	620
Egypt	17	India	103	Nigeria	1,047
China	21	Bolivia	161	South Sudan	1,233

U.S. figure of 33.4 per 100,000

*1,205 maternal deaths in 3,605,201 live births*  
55<sup>th</sup> (after Russia); last among wealthy industrialized nations

- continued

Our Daughters ask: Why is the woman who's given birth required to bring two sacrifices: a sin-offering (*chattat*) and a burnt-offering (*'olah*)? **Why a sin-offering? What's she done wrong?**

Leah the Namer explains: “Sin” is a mistranslation of the Hebrew word *chattat*. It's **more accurately translated as “purification.”**

Huldah the Preacher elaborates: The purpose of this offering is not to atone for any wrongdoing but rather to “decontaminate” the woman from the ritual impurity that threatens to endanger others. Only after she brings these to the priest will she be declared “pure” enough to re-enter the community.

Leviticus 8:15 -  
וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הַדָּם וַיִּתֵּן  
עַל-קַרְנוֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב  
בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ וַיַּחֲטֵא אֶת-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ  
Moses took the blood [of the *chattat*] and placed some on each of the corner-posts of the Altar with his finger **so as to purify** the Altar.

Miriam the Prophet adds: The Torah calls the blood that flows during this time a “source” or “fountain” (*makor*), a classical feminine image for **the many fluids**— milk, menstrual and birth blood, tears of joy and sympathy— **that flow from women's bodies and sustain others.**

---

J) Abraham Samuel Benjamin Schreiber (1815-1875), *K'tav Sofer* -

**Conclusion of LAST Week's Parashah**

11:46] - These are the instructions concerning **animals, birds, all living creatures** that move in water, and all creatures that swarm on earth, [11:46] - **for distinguishing between the *tamei* and the *tahor***— between the living things that may be eaten and the living things that may not be eaten.

**Beginning of THIS Week's Parashah**

12:1] - The Eternal One spoke to Moses, saying [12:2] - “Speak to the Israelite people, telling them: ‘**A woman, when she has produced seed** by birthing . . . **is to be regarded as *t'mei'ah* seven days; *t'mei'ah*, just as at the time of her routine menstrual segregation.**”

Why is it that these adjoining weekly portions in Leviticus **discuss the laws of *tum'ah* and *taharah* pertaining to birds and fish and animals before addressing the laws of *tum'ah* and *taharah* in human beings**, whom the Creator had marked at the outset of the Torah, in chapter 1 of Genesis, as the pinnacle of Creation? Should not we all-but-Divine beings, formed “in the Image and Likeness of God” [Genesis 1:27], take precedence over— and, accordingly, be discussed prior to— any of the lesser creatures?

One answer is that of our classical Midrash [Leviticus Rabbah 14:1], in which Rabbi Simla'i points out the simple chronological reality that— with humanity not having been formed until late in the afternoon of The Sixth Day of Creation [Genesis 1:26-30]— it is only reasonable that the Creator should promulgate in Leviticus the purity regulations regarding the other creatures that had previously been brought into being earlier that same Day [Genesis 1:20-25].

However, there is a much greater dynamic underlying God's choice of subjects between Leviticus 11 and Leviticus 12. That is because the self-same midrash just cited [Leviticus Rabbah 14:1] also offers the assertion of Rabbi Shim'on ben-Lakish that **the Creator declares to a person who is not worthy: “Even the gnat came before you.”**

Human beings are, in fact, vastly weaker and more poorly adapted than any other living thing. Moreover, whereas all other creatures can secure their sustenance from field and forest without preparation or toil, and do not require any kind of clothing, human beings must labor to secure our food and shelter. In spite of that, humans are declared to be **higher and more important than all the other living things on earth because we, alone, have been entrusted by God** with the task and purpose of serving God and studying God's Torah.

However, **we retain our position of importance only so long as we prove to be worthy by working to fulfill our Divinely-ordained purpose.** Once we become unworthy, by neglecting that task set for us as human beings, we reduce ourselves to being lower than all of the other creatures. “Even the gnat came before you.”

<b>“Departure”</b> : an important Rabbinic idiom (Mishnah, Talmud, and subsequent legal codes)		
past-tense verb	לצא	“[one] has gone out”
shorthand for	לצא בידי חובתו	“[one] has fulfilled one's obligation”
participle verb as adjectival noun	לצאי	<i>lit.</i> “going out” <b>“in compliance; has checked the box.”</b> “one having fulfilled a religious duty.” “a faithful servant of The Eternal One.”