

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Tazria / Metzora	21 Apr 2018	6 Iyyar 5777	Lev. 12:1-15:33	2Kings 7:3-20	Mark 1:35-45; Luke 2:22-35

In Leviticus chapter 12, the Torah describes a woman who became impure after giving birth. For a baby boy, she is impure for seven days. On the eighth day, he is to receive *brit milah*. The new mother will continue to be unclean for thirty-three days. After forty days, she is to make offering to “make keporah for her, and she will be clean.”¹

If the baby is a girl, the new mother will be unclean for eighty days. She is then required to bring offerings to a kohen who will “make *keporah* for her, and she will be clean.”²

In Genesis chapter 1:28 and in chapter 9:1, Hashem commanded us to “be fruitful and multiply in number.” Yet, after the birth, the new mother shall be unclean forty days for a boy or eighty days for a girl because of her impurity. By bringing new life to this world is Hashem’s commandments and yet the new mother is impure for fulfilling His commandment? It doesn’t make sense.

Before we go any further, we need to learn the blessings in the wedding and the marriage. The sages teach when a man and a woman unite in marriage, they receive seven types of blessing: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and conquer it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and every living creature that crawls upon the earth.³ Therefore, they resemble a divine couple, Shekinah and Tiferet, who receive a flow of seven blessings from Binah through Yesod.

The Torah does not explain impurity of a mother who just gave birth: 40 days for a baby boy and 80 days for a baby girl. What is the reason for mother to bring sacrifice to the kohen (priest) to atone for her sin? These are the law known as *chukim* (decree) which means “laws only Hashem understands.” However, the Torah lists eight types of impurity. There are five in this week’s parasha and three in parashat Sh’mini.

1. Woman after giving birth. (Lev. ch. 12)
2. Leprosy (Lev. ch. 13)
3. Tzav (disease, puss, discharge) (Lev. ch. 15)
4. Seminal discharge (Lev. ch. 15)
5. Niddah (Lev. ch. 15; menstrual cycle)
6. Touching dead animal (Lev. ch. 11)
7. Touching unclean animal (creeping things) (Lev. ch. 11)
8. Touching deceased human body (Lev. ch. 11)

This week’s Torah portion has two parashot. They are Tazaria (Conceived) and Metzora (Leper). The sages explain the Torah was given to the Israelites to share its teachings to other nations. The northern tribes (10 tribes) were assimilated and scattered while the southern tribes (mainly Judah) held on to the Torah but did not teach other nation when the Torah was given approximately 3,400 years ago. For this reason, a religion was created about 2,000 years ago by the pagans in response to the reluctance of the southern tribes. Because the main reason the Torah was given was to educate, to teach, and to warn what would happen if they do not follow the Torah.

¹ Leviticus 12:8

² ibid

³ Genesis 1:28

The *pashat* (literal) level of understanding is that when a baby girl is born, she has potential to grow to have a baby of her own. Therefore, it is 80 days long for impurity for a baby girl.

The sages also explain that when a mother gives birth to a baby, she is unclean because of the curses that includes from “I will not have another child” to “never again.” The mystical explanation is that when a mother carries a baby in her womb, she has reached highest spiritual level by carrying a baby in her womb. When she gives birth, her spiritual level reaches lower level than before. Therefore, she is required to bring a sacrifice to block or stop her spiritual level from falling lower.

It is at this point (low spiritual level) that *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) enters her mind when she is weak. One of the example is sadness, and this is impurity. The sadness causes a person to lose its ability to fight, unfocused, cannot think clearly, etc. The sages conclude it is rooted from the Tree of Knowledge when Chava (Eve) ate its fruit. When Adam and Chava ate from the Tree of Knowledge, all involved parties including the snake and the ground received 39 different types of punishments.

When the Messiah returns, the women will no longer have pains during her menstrual cycle nor during birth as these are punishments for disobey Hashem’s commandments. The ground was cursed because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. And that impurity passes on to every living beings connected to the ground, to animals, and to humans.

We can equate sadness and happiness today to impurity and purity. When a fly gets captured by the cobweb, it struggles to free itself. After it spends all its energy to escape, it gives up and the spider feeds on its blood. The *yetzer hara* strikes when we are at the weakest point in our life. It is to manipulate a negative situation to hopelessness. We can overcome such situation through the study of Torah and the Gemara to bring supernal energy to us.

A leprosy occurred to Miriam, a sister to Moshe (Moses) while the Israelites were in the Wilderness. Her comments were not derogatory against him, but she was concerned about him.⁴ Yet she was struck with leprosy. The Torah forbids anyone to *lashon hara* (slander) against another person even when he/she is speaking the truth. This is especially true in marriage. As mentioned before, the marriage of a couple is ordained from Hashem Himself. Who are we that we interfere with His plan?

What do the Scripture say about *lashon hara*? Here are few examples.

1. You shall not go up and down as a slanderer among your people. (Lev. 19:16)
2. Lord, who shall abide in your tent? Who shall dwell in your holy mountain? He who walks uprightly, and does what is right, and speaks the truth in his heart. He who does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor. (Psa. 15:1-3)
3. Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good. Seek peace, and pursue it. (Psa. 34:13-15)
4. To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone. (Titus 3:2, NIV)

⁴ Numbers 12:1

5. Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor? (James 4:11-12)
6. The Talmud says: Anyone who shames another in public it is as if he sheds blood. (Bava Metzia 58b) The upright may be insulted but never insult, hear themselves maligned by do not respond. (Yoma 23a).
7. Slander destroys three persons: Him who speaks evil, him who listens to it., and him who is being slandered. (Ar. 15b)
8. Rabbi Halevi, a 13th century commentator – Man was given two ears and one tongue, so that he may listen more than speak.

We spoke in detail of lashon hara last year and we will review the situations listed below as a refresher.

Group Exercise: Allowed or Not Allowed (Chofetz Chaim, a 19th century sage)⁵

1. “Joe Cohen doesn’t give any money to charity.” **Not allowed**, even if it’s true. It’s damaging. If it’s false, all the more reason it is not allowed, as being a false witness is forbidden by the Ten Commandments.
2. “Joe Cohen doesn’t give any money to charity. He openly tells everybody that he doesn’t believe in charity.” **Not allowed**. Joe’s opinion does not change the fact that it puts him in a negative light.
3. “Amy Levy has a bad temper. I don’t mean that negatively: Sometimes that temper served her well.” **Not allowed**. It’s still damaging and negative, in spite of denial.
4. “I have a bad temper.” **Not allowed**. You are not allowed to put yourself down!
5. “Dear Sir: You asked me for a letter of recommendation for Barry Katz. He is a very affable young man, easy to get along with, and competent in your area of concern. I fear, however, that he does not possess the kind of endurance and creative powers you are looking for, and he tends to work short hours and give up easily when confronted with difficulties.” **Allowed**. A candid letter of recommendation, requested and sent in confidence, is OK, as the prospective employer needs to know.
6. “Joe is in jail. He has been convicted on five counts of theft, breaking and entering.” **Allowed**. It’s a matter of public record and can be used as an example of what happens to those who break the law.”
7. “Joe is in jail. He has been convicted on five counts of theft, breaking and entering. But did you know he also beat his wife regularly?” **Not allowed**. One cannot “dump” beyond what the justice system established.
8. “Joe spent time in jail for theft a few years ago.” **Not allowed**. Joe is entitled to a clean slate.
9. “Hitler was the very incarnation of evil.” **Allowed**. History must be told.
10. “Joe, who died last week, was an adulterer and a scoundrel.” **Not allowed**. The rules against slander apply to the dead as well as to the living.
11. “Don’t mention Jeremy to me, because I don’t want to get into the things he did!” **Not allowed**. It implies he did terrible things and allows people to imagine even more damaging things than what you thought he did. One does not even have to say slanderous things to cause damage.

⁵ Guard Your Tongue, Adapted from Chofetz Chaim

12. "Joe was not drunk last night." **Not allowed.** It implies that he usually is.
13. "Jennifer's two-year-old is ugly, cranky, and always slobbering." **Not allowed.** While you cannot slander a two-year-old, the statement does reflect poorly on her parents.
14. "Yes, Your Honor, I did see the defendant shoplift that shirt at Macy's and leave without paying for it." **Allowed.** One must tell the truth under oath in court.
15. "No. Stop. Don't kill him. I tell you what you want to know. Yes, Sam did steal those documents and try to frame you for it." **Allowed.** The saving of a life overrides the prohibition against lashon hara'. It's called *pikuach nefesh*.
16. "Don't buy from this merchant. Last week he overcharged me, sold me low quality merchandise that was not as advertised, and his scales are rigged." **Allowed.** But only if it reflects your own personal experience, not if relays somebody else's. Buyers must be warned.

R' Israel Salanter, the 19th century Lithuanian rabbi who founded the Mussar movement, a Jewish spiritual and ethical movement. He said: Normally we worry about our own material well-being and our neighbors' souls. Let us rather worry about our neighbors' material well-being and our own souls.