

The Bulletin is sponsored by Mimi & Barry Weinraub with gratitude to Hashem on celebrating the Bar Mitzvah of their grandson, Ezra Amicha, on Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Parshat Tazria-Metzora



CANDLE LIGHTING 7:20 PM | 1 IYAR | APRIL 18, 2026 | HAVDALA 8:24 PM

**ב' דראש חדש
שבת פרשת תזריע-מצורע
2ND DAY ROSH CHODESH
SHABBAT PARSHAT
TAZRIA-METZORA**

Two Sifrei Torah. Maftir is from Parsha Pinchas, Numbers 28:9-15 (וביום השבת & ובראשי חדשיכם). Haftorah for Shabbat/Rosh Chodesh is השמים כסאי (Isaiah 66:1-24, repeating verse 23 at the end). No צדקתך צדק or אב הרחמים at Mincha. Pirkei Avot Chapter 2.

FRIDAY EVENING

MINCHA	7:25 PM
SHKIA	7:38 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	8:18 PM

SHABBAT

HASHKAMA	7:45 AM
SHACHARIT - MAIN	9:00 AM
POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR	≈ 9:30 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:34 AM
FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR	≈ 11:30 AM
PRE-MINCHA SHIUR	6:30 PM
MINCHA	7:10 PM
SHKIA	7:39 PM
MAARIV	8:24 PM

YOM HA'ATZMAUT KIDDUSH

From falafel to Prigat! Thank you to our sponsors!

SEUDAH SHLISHIT/TODAH

Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Shirley & Avi Vann to commemorate the Shloshim for their son Yitzchak Dovid Vann^{ת"ע}. The Vann family would like to thank Rabbi Ely Shestack, Ahavat Achim and the Fair Lawn community for their support and comfort so generously and sincerely extended as they anguished the loss of their son, brother and father, Yitzchak Dovid^{ת"ע}.

**APRIL BIRTHDAY/
ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH**

Next Shabbat is the birthday/anniversary kiddush! \$36 per family for all birthday/anniversary March listings. Sponsor/provide names here: SIMCHA, by tomorrow night.

**YOM HA'ATZMAUT
CELEBRATION**

Tomorrow, Sunday, April 19, adults & kids join us for a fun-filled afternoon celebrating Israel from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. Cost is \$10 per adult/\$5 per child. RSVP here: ISRAEL.

MAZEL TOV

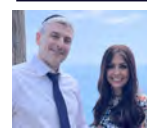
Mazel tov to Michelle & Zvi Dubin on the birth of a grandson to Tamar & Meir Brodsky.



יגדלוהו לתורה ולחופה ולמעשים טובים ויכניסוהו לבריתו בזמנו ובעתו. May they raise him to Torah, chuppah and good deeds, and may he be entered into the covenant of Abraham.

MAZEL TOV

Mazal tov to Janie & Hymie Kirschenbaum on their son Stephen's engagement to Rachel Sarah Jacobs.



יעלה הזיווג יפה ויבנו בית נאמן בישראל. May the beautiful couple be elevated in the building of a faithful house of Israel.

MITZVAH FAIR

Time to gear up for Mitzvah Day, which is happening on Sunday, May 3, 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

Register (suggested \$5/person or \$10/family max) or become a sponsor here: MITZVAH FAIR. Sponsorship levels are: Yuharah (\$1,000), Mehadrin Min haMehadrin (\$360), Mehadrin (\$180), D'oraita (\$72), and D'rabanan (\$18).

 ORTHODOX UNION תורה ומצוות Enhancing Jewish Life	SUNDAY 4/19	MONDAY 4/20	TUESDAY 4/21	WEDNESDAY 4/22	THURSDAY 4/23	FRIDAY 4/24
WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM						
SHACHARIT	8:00 AM	6:15 AM	6:25 AM	6:15 AM*	6:15 AM	6:25 AM
2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM		7:25 AM	7:25 AM	7:25 AM	7:25 AM	7:25 AM
MINCHA/MAARIV	7:29 PM	7:30 PM	7:31 PM	7:32 PM	7:33 PM	7:30 PM
ZMANI						* Yom Ha'atzmaut
Earliest Talit	5:13 AM	5:12 AM	5:10 AM	5:08 AM	5:07 AM	5:05 AM
Gedolah	1:30 PM	1:30 PM	1:29 PM	1:29 PM	1:29 PM	1:29 PM
Shkia	7:41 PM	7:42 PM	7:43 PM	7:44 PM	7:45 PM	
Tzait	8:21 PM	8:22 PM	8:23 PM	8:24 PM	8:25 PM	

UPCOMING EVENTS

Apr. 19 - Yom Ha'atzmaut Celebration, 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Apr. 25 - Rabbi Binny Freedman SIR.

Apr. 26 - Community Hike. RSVP: HIKE

May 3 - Mitzvah Fair, 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM.

May 17 - Boker Tov Sivan - Musical Hallel & Community Breakfast, sponsored by the Czinn family in honor of Judah's 5th Hebrew Birthday.

June 23 - Annual Membership Meeting, 8:30 PM.

IN OUR FUTURE - KIDDUSH, SEUDAH SHLISHIT, & ETC.

Apr. 25 - Birthday and Anniversary Kiddush

May 2 - Birthday and Anniversary Kiddush

June 6 - Birthday and Anniversary Kiddush

June 20 - Kiddush is sponsored by Shelly & Steve Winchester celebrating Daniel's Auf Ruf and upcoming wedding to Yael Simons.

BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH

To add a birthday or anniversary to our April list (next Kiddush on Shabbat, April 25), click here: [SIMCHA](#). Listings/sponsorships are \$36 per family per month. RSVP for the April birthday/anniversary Kiddush by Sunday night, April 19.

SHIURIM

- PESHAT OF THE PARSHA, Tuesdays at 1:00 PM, click here: [Parsha](#).
- TORAH FOR YOUR COMMUTE, via Whatsapp, with 3-minute daily Halacha insights. To join email Rabbi Shestack at rabbishestack@gmail.com.
- TORAH FOR YOUR COMMUTE is available on Spotify or on other applications with an RSS code. Click here: [PODCASTS](#).
- POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR, alternates between examining the development of Halachot and analyzing Mishlei (Proverbs)
- FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, after Kiddush.
- SHABBAT SHIUR, **SANHEDRIN CH. 8**, 40 minutes prior to mincha.
- TZURBA M'RABANAN w/ Zack Doberman, Wednesdays at 8:30 PM. In-person at the shul and via Zoom.
- HALACHA SHIUR FOR WOMEN, Monday nights, 8:15 PM on Zoom - **HIATUS**
- SEDER ON THE SIDDUR, at Seudah Shlishit

BOARD MEETINGS 8:15 PM

Apr. 28 - At shul w/Zoom option.

May 26 - At shul w/Zoom option.

OU WOMEN'S INITIATIVE

Apr. 19 - Count & Cultivate - A Powerful Sefirat HaOmer Program, exploring what real growth looks like and how we cultivate it during the days of Sefirah, 7:30 PM. Location to be provided.

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה YOUTH EVENTS

May 23 - Interactive Youth Shavuot program with dinner.

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



● SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS:

3RD - 5TH: SOPHIA

K - 2ND: ARIELYS & ABBY

3 YRS - PRE-K: ARNELLA & MAYA

- Youth groups for 3rd through 5th Graders starts at 9:00 AM (Drop Off) in the Youth Room on left on entering the social hall.
- Youth group for children 4 years old through 1st Grade starts at 9:00 AM (Drop Off) in the Youth Room on the right upon entering the social hall.
- Parent & Me, 9:00 AM in the Beit Midrash.
- Rabbi Meet & Greet, Friday night, kids can come over to the Rabbi after davening to receive a cup of grape juice and a ticket!
- Children earn tickets for coming to minyan (Friday night and/or Shabbat day), asking the rabbi questions or attending parent-child learning programs! Tickets can be redeemed for prizes.
- Children's corner at Seudah Shlishit, 1st to 5th graders will get 10 Torah questions in 10 minutes from Rabbi Shestack, with special snacks, tickets and more.

Friday Evening, April 17



Saturday Evening, April 18



Sunday Evening, April 19



Monday Evening, April 20



Tuesday Evening, April 21



Wednesday Evening, April 22



Thursday Evening, April 23



18-25 Saddle River Road
Fair Lawn, NJ 07410
201.797.0502

<http://www.ahavatachim.org>

Mishlei/Proverbs
Post-Hashkama Shiur 24 – The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

אָן חכּם מוּסר אָב וְלִצַּן לֹא־שָׁמַע גְּעֵרָה: מִפְּרִי פִי־אִישׁ יֹאכַל טוֹב וּנְפֹשׁ בַּגְּדִים חֲמָס: יִנְצֹר פִּי שְׁמֵר נַפְשׁוֹ פֶּשַׁק שְׁפָתָיו מִחַתְּהָלוּ: מִתְּאֵנָה וְאִין נַפְשׁוֹ עֲצָל וּנְפֹשׁ חֲרָצִים תִּדְשֹׁן: דְּבַר־שִׁקֵּר יִשְׁגָּא צְדִיק וְרָשָׁע יִבְאִישׁ וְנַחֲפִיר: יְצַדִּיקָה תִּצָּר תִּסְגְּרוּ וְרָשָׁעָה תִּסְלַף חֲשָׂאת: יִגֵּשׁ מִתְעַשֵּׁר וְאִין כָּל מִתְרוֹשֵׁשׁ וְהוֹן רַב: כִּפְּרַר נַפְשׁוֹ אִישׁ עֲשָׂרוֹ וְרָשׁ לֹא־שָׁמַע גְּעֵרָה: אִו־ר־צְדִיקִים יִשְׁמַח וְגַר רָשָׁעִים יִדְעוּד: רִקְבִנְדוֹן יִתֵּן מִצָּה וְאֵת־נְוִעֲצִים תִּכְבֹּה: הוֹן מִהֲבֵל יִמְעֵט וְקֹמֵץ עַל־יַד יִרְבֶּה: יִתְחַלֵּת מִמְשָׁכָה מִחֲלָה־לֵב וְעֵץ חַיִּים תִּפְּנֵה בָּאָה: יִבֹּז לְדַבֵּר יִתְכַּבֵּל לֹו וִירָא מִצְוֶה הוּא יִשְׁלָם: —

1A wise son [seeks] his father's discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. 2From the fruit [gained] from a man's mouth he will eat well, but the craving of the treacherous is violence. 3One who guards his mouth protects his soul; [but for] one who [thoughtlessly] opens his lips wide there is ruin. 4The soul of the lazy man desires but has nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be sated. 5The righteous hate falsehood, but the wicked are vile and disgraceful. 6Righteousness [charity] guards one who is steadfast in his way, but wickedness brings ruin upon the sinner. 7Some flaunt wealth but have nothing; [while] others act poor but possess great riches. 8A man's wealth can redeem his soul [via charity], but not if the poor man is rebuked [for taking it by the man giving him the charity]. 9The light of the righteous radiates, but the lamp of the wicked flickers out. 10Arrogance leads only to quarrels, but wisdom belongs to those that seek counsel. 11Wealth that was not earned will be lost, but wealth gathered through the efforts of one's hands will increase. 12Hope unrealized sickens the heart, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life. 13He who despises a precept will suffer as a result, but he who reveres the commandments will be rewarded.¹

A. The first half of chapter 13 focuses often on distinguishing different kinds of people.

1. The proactive/disciplined versus the lazy/erratic:

- V. 1 → A wise son [seeks] his father's discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
 - o Rashi interprets the first half of the couplet as missing a verb, and understands the implied verb as indicating that it is the son's choice to seek מוּסר. Malbim seems to understand מוּסר as the verb, and a wise son being a result thereof.
- V. 2 → From the fruit [gained] from a man's mouth he will eat well, but the craving of the treacherous is violence.
- V. 3 → One who guards his mouth protects his soul; [but for] one who [thoughtlessly] opens his lips wide there is ruin.
- V. 4 → The soul of the lazy man desires but has nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be sated.
 - o Some translations do not include a reference to the soul, and presumably these translations see the words of וּנְפֹשׁ and נַפְשׁוֹ as being built into the verbs.
- V. 6 → Righteousness [charity] guards one who is steadfast in his way, but wickedness brings ruin upon the sinner.
- V. 10 → Arrogance leads only to quarrels, but wisdom belongs to those that seek counsel.
- V. 11 → Wealth that was not earned will be lost, but wealth gathered through the efforts of one's hands will increase.
 - o Elite professional athletes, actors and musicians make millions of dollars, and often seem to later lose it all. Would Shlomo see these earnings as coming from “מִהֲבֵל”?

2. Those who earn and use their wealth wisely versus those that do not:

- V. 7 → Some flaunt wealth but have nothing; [while] others act poor but possess great riches.
 - o Meiri sees both parts of the couplet as unvirtuous behavior.

¹ Mishlei Chapter 13.

- Vilna Gaon understands this metaphysically. There are rich people (in fact), that will receive no share in the world to come (and therefore in fact have nothing), and poor people that will be attain stature in Olam Haba.
- V. 8 → A man's wealth can redeem his soul [via charity], but not if the poor man is rebuked [for taking it by the man giving him the charity].
 - A common lesson in life that spoken words can undo a good deed.
- V. 11 → Wealth that was not earned will be lost, but wealth gathered through the efforts of one's hands will increase.

3. Distinguishing good people from bad:

- V. 2 → From the fruit [gained] from a man's mouth he will eat well, but the craving of the treacherous is violence.
- V. 5 → The righteous hate falsehood, but the wicked are vile and disgraceful.
 - Leaving aside which people would fall into the category of “wicked”, we note that Shlomo refers to them as vile and disgraceful. The Alshich says that Shlomo is emphasizing their being vile and disgraceful so that we don't silently acquiesce with their wickedness.
 - **Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba says that Rabbi Simai says: Three noteworthy people were consulted by Pharaoh in that counsel where Pharaoh questioned what should be done with the Jewish people. They were Balaam, and Job, and Yitro. . . . Balaam, who advised Pharaoh to kill all sons born to the Jewish people, was punished by being killed in the war with Midian (see Numbers 31:8). Job, who was silent and neither advised nor protested, was punished by suffering, as detailed in the eponymous book in the Bible. Yitro, who ran away as a sign of protest, merited that some of his children's children sat in the Sanhedrin in the Chamber of Hewn Stone, as it is stated: “And the families of scribes who dwelt at Jabez, . . . were the Kenites who descended from Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab” (I Chronicles 2:55). And it is written: “The children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law” (Judges 1:16).**²
- V. 6 → Righteousness [charity] guards the steadfast, but wickedness brings ruin upon the sinner.
- V. 9 → The light of the righteous radiates, but the lamp of the wicked flickers out.
- V. 10 → Arrogance leads only to quarrels, but wisdom belongs to those that seek counsel.
 - We noted that a fool's actions were right in his own eyes, but that the wise sought counsel (Mishlei 12:15). Here the “cure” is the same (seeking counsel), but the culprit is not the fool whose choice is based on desired outcomes, but one whose arrogance prevents him from accounting for information contrary to his already determined conclusions.
- V. 13 → He who despises a precept will suffer as a result, but he who reveres the commandments will be rewarded.

B. “Hope unrealized sickens the heart, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”³

- Rashi sees this heartbreak as caused when one's friend fails to come through.
- At Berachot 32b, Rabbi Yochanan sees this “hope” refers to prayers unfulfilled. But he then connects this to the Tree of Life reference at Mishlei 3:18, and says one must include Torah study along with prayers to increase the chance that the prayers (desires) will be fulfilled.
- Similarly, the Vilna Gaon sees prayers as potentially going unfulfilled causing heartbreak, but Torah study will always fulfill desire by giving one a share in the world to come.

² Sotah 11a, Koren Translation.

³ Mishlei 13:12. This is the third reference (of four) to a Tree of Life. At Mishlei 3:18, the Torah was a Tree of Life (i.e., wisdom, a metaphor for Torah), at Mishlei 11:30 it was the fruit of the righteous (i.e., good deeds), and at Mishlei 15:4 (to be discussed) it is comforting words.



AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL



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Yom Ha'atzmaut

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Sunday, April 19th
1-3pm**

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Teaneck Event

SUNDAY, APRIL 19TH

7:30 PM-9:30 PM

Maayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls
1650 Palisade Avenue, Teaneck, NJ

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*What is Growth?
Personal Insights & Experiences
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ACHAREI MOT-KEDOSHIM
APRIL 24–25, 2026**



Rabbi Binny Freedman is Rosh Yeshiva, founder, and Dean of Yeshivat Orayta. He is a highly engaging and inspiring educator who has the gift for synthesizing difficult, sophisticated material in a way that inspires both the novice and the scholar. His proficiency in applying Jewish concepts to contemporary life in a personal and meaningful manner has made him a sought-after speaker and educator around the world. Rav Binny is an IDF Company Commander who came to Israel as a lone soldier in 1982.

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AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL



Spring Hike at Ramapo Valley County Reservation

**SUNDAY,
APRIL
26**

10:00 AM
Meet at the main
parking lot

Ramapo Valley Rd
(Route 202),
Mahwah, NJ

- Only ~20 minutes away from Fair Lawn!



HIKE OPTIONS:

A. SCARLET OAK POND TRAIL

- STROLLER FRIENDLY!
- PAVED LOOP AROUND THE POND
- PICNIC AREAS FOR RELAXING AND ENJOYING THE VIEWS

B. RIDGE LOOP - VISTA LOOP TRAIL

- ADVANCED OPTION, ~3 MILES
- SCENIC VIEWS WITH A RIVER
- A UNIQUE VIEW POINT WITH NATURAL CACTUS!

**RSVP HERE
BY 4/24**

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/AASPRINGHIKE26](https://tinyurl.com/aaspringhike26)



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Mitzvah Fair

Sunday, May 3rd, 11AM-2PM

VENDOR & CRAFT FAIR
LIVE DEMOS

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\$10/family



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SUNDAY MAY 17TH

9:15 AM SHACHARIT (Hallel at 9:40)

10:00 AM ARTS & CRAFTS for Kids

10:30 AM BREAKFAST

[RSVP AT TINYURL.COM/BOKERTOVSIVAN](https://tinyurl.com/bokertovsivan) BY 5/13



Covenant & Conversation

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

TAZRIA-METZORA • תזריע-מצורע

FROM THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS זצ"ל

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel. "I have loved the Torah of R' Chaim Schimmel ever since I first encountered it. It strives to be not just about truth on the surface but also its connection to a deeper truth beneath. Together with Anna, his remarkable wife of 60 years, they built a life dedicated to love of family, community, and Torah. An extraordinary couple who have moved me beyond measure by the example of their lives." — Rabbi Sacks

This year's series of essays were originally written and recorded by Rabbi Sacks זת"ל in 5773 (2012–2013). These timeless messages are accompanied by a new [Family Edition](#) created to inspire intergenerational learning on the Parsha.

Holiness and Childbirth

The sidrot of Tazria and Metzora 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.

Rambam explains:

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.

Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, III:12

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 latter 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 God of redemption is also the God of creation. The physical world we inhabit is the one God made and pronounced "very good." To be a hedonist

is to deny God. To be an ascetic is to deny the goodness of God'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 Parsha 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.

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 God 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 . . .

Whispers of Immortality, T. S. Eliot

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) “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). As we open a Sefer Torah we say: “All of you who hold fast to the Lord your God are alive today” (Deut 4:4). The Torah is a tree of life. God is the God of life. As Moses put it in two memorable words: “Choose life” (Deut. 30:19).

It follows that *kedushah* (holiness) – a point in time or space where we stand in the unmediated presence of God – 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. God’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:

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.

The Kuzari, II:60

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 Shunamite 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 God. 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 God himself. That, incidentally, is why women are closer to God than men, because they, unlike men, know what it is to bring new life out of themselves, as God 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 Chava “for she is the mother of all life.”

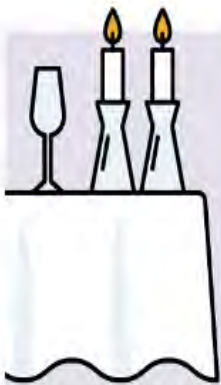
We can now speculate about the laws relating to childbirth. When a mother gives birth, she undergoes great risk. Throughout the centuries, childbirth has been a life-threatening danger to mother and baby alike, and even today there are ever-present risks for many.

Furthermore, during the process of childbirth, a woman is separated from what until now had been part of her own body (a foetus, said the rabbis, “is like a limb of the mother”) 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 God’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 halachic principle: “One who is engaged in a mitzva is exempt from other mitzvot.” It is as if God were saying to the mother: 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 God.

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.



Around the Shabbat Table

1. In Judaism we often sanctify the physical world. Where in your life can you elevate an everyday act into something holy?
2. How might seeing every childbirth as a miracle change the way we think about families and parenting?
3. A new mother is exempt from the Temple because she is already experiencing holiness. What does this teach us about where to find God?

● These questions come from this week’s **Family Edition** to Rabbi Sacks’ Covenant & Conversation. For an interactive, multi-generational study, check out the full edition at <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tazria/holiness-and-childbirth-5786/>