

וּכְפַר עֲלֶיהָ, "and atone for her, etc." The word כִּפּוּר, "atonement," is never used except when applicable to a sin. This is why the very institution of the sin-offering which the woman who has given birth has to bring strikes one as just as unique as that which the Torah demanded of the Nazir, the person who voluntarily abstained from wine, grape-associated products, and impurity (**Numbers 6,14**). What sin did the woman commit at the time she gave birth that the Torah should impose upon her the need to offer a sin-offering? If this sacrifice were meant to express her gratitude that she was saved from the danger attending every birth, the Torah should have prescribed that she bring a קרבן תודה, a thanksgiving offering! Why demand that she bring a sin-offering?

It is possible to understand the reason for this offering as not so much related to her as to her "mother," i.e. the first woman Chavah, who had committed the first sin as a result of which all women subsequently had to endure painful deliveries, pains of menstruation, separation from their husbands, etc. Had Chavah not been guilty of introducing disobedience to G'd's command women would have been spared all this. The whole process of giving birth would have remained as natural a process as for trees to yield their fruit. Trees do not have to experience desire in order to become fertilized and to yield their fruit year after year. This woman who gave birth now may be perceived as the branch of a contaminated root, daughter of a corrupted mother and as such some of the mother's contamination was transmitted to her. Hence the Torah requires that she atones for this by bringing a sin-offering after giving birth. By doing so she does her part in helping to atone for the original sin of Chavah. *Rabbeinu Bechaya Vayikra 12:7*

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כי תזריע. The primary meaning of זרע is "seed of a plant"; hence the expression עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע denotes the seed-forming process in plants for the continuation of the species. By extension, the term זרע is applied to human beings, and is the common expression for offspring, which propagate the human species.

The only other instance of the word תזריע is in *Bereshis 1:11-12*, where it denotes the process in plants for the continuation of the species. Scripture's use of this same expression here indicates that the mother's role in the formation of the child is likewise viewed as a purely phys-

iological process. This one word, then, characterizes the whole concept of טוּמְאָה under discussion here. The highest and noblest task on which the whole future of the human race depends and in which the uniqueness of womankind finds its highest expression — the mother's effort and labor in producing a child — is merely a physical process. Man is formed, takes shape, and grows like a plant, and the most wonderful name that the human tongue can utter — the name "Mother" — reminds us, at the same time, of the purely physical process of our coming into being, which is not by our own free will.

For this reason the moral freedom of man, who is *brought into being*, must be stressed precisely here. For the mother — under the fresh impression of her passive and painful submission to the physical forces of nature while fulfilling her loftiest task as a woman — must now renew her consciousness of her moral stature. Only after this impression has receded should she return to the Sanctuary with an offering. With this offering, and in moral freedom, she is to rededicate herself to her calling — as a wife and mother — despite the painful moments.

Rav Hirsch

Vayikra 12:2

ושלשים יום ושלשת ימים, "and thirty three days, etc.," the thirty three days plus the first seven days combine to make forty days, the number of days that are required until the male fetus has developed its features. The female fetus requires twice this number of days as has been proven conclusively. (based on the Talmud tractate Niddah folio 30) *Chizkuni Vayikra 12:4*

... Because the constitution of the female is cold and wet, and the dampness in the womb of the mother is very great and cold. And therefore, she gave birth to a female. And hence she requires a big cleansing because of the multitude of dampness and the blood decaying in her and because of her coldness. And it is well-known that the cold sicknesses require a longer time to be cleansed than the hot ones. *Ramban Vayikra 12:4*

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On the day of the מילה the father fulfills the first of the duties incumbent upon a father concerning his son. At this time the father resolves to prepare his son for the life that lies ahead: He must train him to walk before God, in complete adherence to the Torah (cf. *Bereshis 17:1*); and through his own conduct he must serve as a role model for his son to emulate on his future path.

So, too, following the birth of a daughter the mother's path to טהרה is twice as long as after the birth of a son. This should impress upon the mother the full solemnity and magnitude of her task — to be an example and role model for the Jewish woman of the future. Indeed, the mother's influence on the moral standards of her daughters is twice as great as her influence on the moral development of her sons. With sons, the crucial part of their education comes from the father, as the sons see in him a model for their own future male role. With daughters, however, the mother is both a role model and a molder of character. Hence, after the birth of each daughter she must doubly prepare herself — for her own sake and for the sake of her newborn daughter — to ascend the path of purity and morality to the lofty heights of the Sanctuary ideal.

Ramban Vayikra
12:4-5

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The students of Rabbi Shimon ben Yohi asked:

Why does the Torah say a new mother should bring sacrifice?

He answered:

When she is giving birth—lit. in the hour when she is kneeling in childbirth—she swears not to have intercourse with her husband

Therefore, the Torah prescribes she bring sacrifice. *Nidda 31b*

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The kohein will atone for her. Some say that this atonement is for the oath that she swears at the time of childbirth that she will never again be with her husband (*Niddah 31*). For this reason, when she gives birth to a boy she [forgets her pain and] regrets making the oath quickly due to the great rejoicing [of the bris], and therefore her atonement comes sooner. When she gives birth to a female, however, she still has pain and does not regret quickly, so her atonement is delayed. *Kli Yakar Vayikra 12:9*