

When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male. (12:2)

The *Parshah* begins with the laws that apply to a woman following childbirth. The *Bais HaMikdash* is off-limits to her for a set period of time following the birth,

subsequently, she brings a *korban*, offering. After she has completed the time of spiritual defilement, followed by the *korban*, she may once again visit the *Bais HaMikdash* and partake of *Kodoshim*, sanctified foods.

The *Shem MiShmuel* observes three distinct phases in the *taharah*, spiritual purification process of the *yolodes*, woman who gives birth, in which she is considered *tamei*, spiritually defiled: a) the first seven days, following the birth of a boy; and the first fourteen days, following the birth of a girl. During this time, she may neither have physical relations with her husband, nor may she eat *Maaser Sheni* (the second tithe in the seven-year cycle of tithes, whereby the owner may eat the produce in Yerushalayim). b) The next time frame in the process is forty days after the birth of a boy and eighty days after the birth of a girl. The mother may now eat *Terumah* (which is the tithe given to the *Kohanim* and shared by their immediate families). c) After this 40/80 day period has elapsed, the *yolodes* brings the appropriate *korban* and may enter the *Bais HaMikdash* and eat *Kodoshim*.

The *Arizal* compares *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the Egyptian exodus, to childbirth. The commonality between the two is the pain. A woman's labor pains intensify as the moment of birth nears. Likewise, the plagues that overwhelmed the Egyptian populace with misery increased until that seminal moment when the Jewish People were expelled from Egypt – as a people on the way to nationhood. With this in mind, the *Shem MiShmuel* extends the comparison to the next level, demonstrating that the three-stage purification process of the birth mother is very much like the three phases of the process that cleansed the Jewish People from their Egyptian defilement.

In describing the Egyptian exodus, the Torah writes: "And it was when Pharaoh sent out the people" (*Shemos* 13:17). *Chazal* observe that the Torah is intimating that Pharaoh played a significant role in their leaving. We know, of course, that this is not true. Hashem took them out. Pharaoh realized his loss a few days later and changed his mind. How are we to understand Pharaoh's sending out the Jews?

The *Shem MiShmuel* quotes his father, the *Avnei Nezer*, *zl*, who points out that this means that the Jews were not free of their Egyptian oppressors. You can take the Jews out of Egypt, but taking Egypt out of the Jews is an entirely different matter. The spiritual pollution which suffused Egypt became infused in the Jews, who had been its inhabitants for over two centuries. This contamination was a very real danger to the Jews. Only when the Jews walked through the Red Sea and saw their Egyptian oppressors drown in its waters were they finally rid of the spiritual impurity that had "accompanied" their exodus.

The actual liberation concluded by the crossing of the Red Sea took seven days. This period may

be likened to the seven-day *tumah*, unclean period following childbirth, during which the husband and wife are not permitted to engage in any physical relations. After these seven days, their relations may resume, and the woman may now partake of *maaser sheni*. Up until now, the *tumah* had been in full force. Likewise, *Klal Yisrael's* liberation was incomplete and, in fact, quite shaky, while they waited for *Krias Yam Suf*, the Splitting of the Red Sea, which tempered their *emunah*, faith, in Hashem. They now sang the *Shirah*, Song of Praise, and were prepared for the *Manna*, the Heavenly food which was to be their staple for almost forty years.

The first stage in the process of complete liberation had passed. They were now prepared for step two. They prepared themselves for the Revelation at Sinai and their acceptance of the Torah. This is quite like the woman who waits out her forty days until she may eat *Terumah*. At this point, the nation made its seminal declaration, *Naaseh v'Nishma*, "We will do and we will listen."

This declaration catalyzed their advancement to the next level. Just like the woman who has completed her forty day period and may now eat *Terumah*, *Klal Yisrael* was one stage further removed from their original level of spiritual impurity. Being one stage removed from their impurity meant being one stage closer to their ultimate objective, which is where they were on *Rosh Chodesh Sivan*, six days before they accepted the Torah. Their ideal state was one stage away.

On the fifth day of *Sivan*, the nation brought offerings on the Altar and made a covenant with Hashem, during which some of the animal's blood was sprinkled upon them and the rest sprinkled on the Altar. This was the moment for which they had been waiting. Similar to the *yolodes* who brings a *korban* at the culmination of the purification process, *Klal Yisrael* had achieved complete purity. As the woman may now eat all *Kodoshim*, holy foods, so, too, were the Jewish People ready to become Hashem's nation, with the greatest moment of communion in the history of the world – *Mattan Torah*, the Giving of the Torah.

A powerful lesson can be derived from the above. Renouncing a life of spiritual defilement and acquiescing to a life of commitment, observance and obedience constitute a gradual process. There are stages of advancement whereby one abandons the past and embraces the future. First, it is *Maaser Sheni*, followed by *Terumah*. Ultimately, all *Kodoshim* is permitted. One who decides to skip a stage – who is neither prepared, nor has a strong desire to study Torah – along the way to spiritual ascendancy, will not become truly close to Hashem. This will taint his observance and, quite possibly, cause its premature failing. Becoming close with Hashem is a process that must be bolstered with Torah study and increased commitment every step of the way. Otherwise, one might remain a spiritual cripple, hurting himself and others. When *Klal Yisrael* left Egypt, they regrettably took their Egyptian baggage along with them. It took *Krias Yam Suf* to impress upon them that Egypt must be left behind in Egypt. Likewise, when one ascends to a new life, he must leave his baggage and become wholeheartedly involved in his new life. The gradual stage-by-stage, step-by-step process is the only road to success.