

The Experience of Childbirth

The laws of this week's Torah portion give us insight into the power of childbirth.

When Gifts Are Justified

People often give gifts to honor special occasions. Sometimes the gifts are justified and sometimes there seems to be no good reason for the gift.

Why do children receive gifts on their birthdays? Is it because they were born or is it because they grew another year? In either case they don't deserve the gift. They had no part in their being born and it is through no effort of their own that they are growing. Yet they get gifts every year.

The gift received at bar and bat mitzvahs is a different story. Traditionally it is called "*derasha geshank*, speech reward"; it is supposed to compensate the child for the hours of preparation the speech and the Torah reading took. Such gifts could be called justified.

At weddings it is the custom to shower the newlyweds with gifts. The traditional reason is, as Torah tells us (sefer ta'amei haminhagim) "One who partakes of a wedding feast but does not bring joy to the bride-groom has transgressed." Since not everyone can bring the groom joy with their dancing abilities, instead we present presents - a much surer way to bring the

young couple joy.

And in our day and age the very fact that two people of our modern self-centered society are willing to give up some of their own “space” and make room for someone else might be reason enough to reward him with a shower of gifts.

Spouses give each other gifts on their anniversary. Perhaps the reason is because each spouse claims credit for the success of the marriage. It is he/she who is always compromising and sacrificing his/her own comfort for the other’s sake. We would really prefer to reward ourselves with a gift, but it’s not politically correct so we therefore, to prevent any fights or hard feelings we “humbly” present our “better halves” with expensive gifts.

Yet there is one occasion for which everyone in the world agrees hands down that gifts are in order: Childbirth. After a woman has endured childbirth including nine months gestation with morning sickness for the first three months, backaches and sleepless nights for the next six, followed by hours of labor and, finally, delivery — she definitely deserves expensive gifts.

Especially when you consider the fact that woman are not even obligated to have children! Maimonides clearly states, “The man is obligated to be fruitful and multiply - the woman is not.” She puts herself through childbirth basically for his sake!!

Mothers are more than deserving not just of gifts but of trophies and medals!!

Why the Sin Offering?

In light of the above, the opening of this week's parsha is very disturbing. This week the Torah tells us that when women give birth, they must bring a Olah sacrifice and a sin offering – as if by having the child, by fulfilling the Torah's very first commandment, they've done something wrong!

The Olah is understandable. It is a thanksgiving sacrifice. She must thank G-d that she survived the labor and delivery. But what sin has she done by giving birth?!

This question was asked of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the author of the Zohar. He explained that when a woman delivers a child she sometimes is in such pain that she swears never to bear children again. However, sometime later she will inevitably regret having taken such an oath and she must bring a sin offering to atone for taking an oath that she will not keep.

(There is another reason for the sin offering. Childbirth was not always painful. The pain is Eve's punishment for eating from the tree of knowledge and tricking Adam into eating from the tree. Every time a woman goes through a painful delivery she atones for Eve's sin. And atonement must be accompanied by a sin offering.)

A Deeper Reason

As you know, I have quite a few children, thank G-d. People have asked me "How can you have so many children? Don't you have any consideration for your wife?" The truth is, it is my wife that really wants all the kids. She's the one who constantly asks and encourages me to have more children. This is true about

most couples. The wife is the one who wants the kids and the husband isn't so sure...

It's a backwards world. The men whose mitzvah it is to have children don't want them while the women who are not obligated and suffer the childbirth and carry the burden of raising them are more than willing.

Many women describe childbirth as a spiritual experience. A woman giving birth feels and experiences the power of the creator in her own body. She feels the development of the child within her and how G-d is creating life through her. She feels part of the step-by-step process of bringing another child into the world.

For her, the pain that comes with childbirth pales in comparison to the incredible miracle she experiences in childbirth.

According to this, we can better understand why a woman must bring a sin offering.

The Hebrew name of the sin offering is "Chatat." Besides for meaning "sin," Chatat also means "a lack." In other words, when the woman brings the offering, she is not atoning for a sin, rather she is atoning for an insufficiency in something.

Allow me to explain:

Once a woman experiences the miracle of childbirth, everything else becomes insignificant. She used to worry about unimportant things and get upset over them. Childbirth brings the realization that everything else is just "narishkeit", silly,

empty, worthless activities for there is so much one can accomplish in the world. Therefore, she wants to bring a Chatat now. She has reached a much higher level after the birth and she feels she must atone for her previous pettiness.

Only a woman, who experienced bringing new life to the world, can truly appreciate why she brings this sacrifice. The childbirth lifts her up to such heights that men, no matter how lofty their level, really cannot relate...