

## Why Does the Mother After Childbirth Bring a *Hatat* Offering?

### 1. Leviticus 12:1-8

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וַיֵּלֶדָה זָכָר וְטִמְאַה שְׁבַע יָמִים כִּי־יָמִי נִדָּת דּוֹתָהּ תִּטְמָא: וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בְּעֶרְלָתּוֹ: וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁלֹשַׁת יָמִים תֵּשֵׁב בְּדַמֵּי טְהֻרָה בְּכָל־קֹדֶשׁ לֹא־תִזְעַע וְאֶל־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא תָבֹא עַד־מְלֵאת יְמֵי טְהֻרָה: וְאִם־נִקְבְּהָ תֵלֵד וְטִמְאַה שְׁבַע־יָמִים כַּנְּדָתָהּ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁשָׁת יָמִים תֵּשֵׁב עַל־דַּמֵּי טְהֻרָה: וּבַמְּלֵאת | יְמֵי טְהֻרָה לְכוֹן אוֹ לְבַת תִּבְיָא כֶּבֶשׂ בֶּן־שָׁנָתוֹ לְעֹלָה וּבֶן־יוֹנָה אוֹ־תֹר לְחֻטָּאת אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד אֶל־הַפֶּהֶן: וְהִקְרִיבּוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וּכְפָר עָלֶיהָ וְטְהַרָה מִמָּקַר דַּמֵּיהָ זֹאת תּוֹרַת הַיִּלְדוֹת לְזָכָר אוֹ לְנִקְבָּה: וְאִם־לֹא תִמְצָא יָדָהּ דִּי שִׂיָּה וְלִקְחָהּ שְׁתֵּי־תֹרִים אוֹ שְׁנֵי בָנֵי יוֹנָה אֶחָד לְעֹלָה וְאֶחָד לְחֻטָּאת וּכְפָר עָלֶיהָ הַפֶּהֶן וְטְהַרָה:

God spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelite people thus: When a woman at childbirth bears a male, she shall be impure seven days; she shall be impure as at the time of her condition of menstrual separation. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. She shall remain in a state of blood purification for thirty-three days: she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until her period of purification is completed. If she bears a female, she shall be impure two weeks as during her menstruation, and she shall remain in a state of blood purification for sixty-six days. On the completion of her period of purification, for either son or daughter, she shall bring to the priest, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. He shall offer it before God and make expiation on her behalf; she shall then be pure from her flow of blood. Such are the rituals concerning her who bears a child, male or female. If, however, her means do not suffice for a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. The priest shall make expiation on her behalf, and she shall be pure.

### 2. Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 31a

שאלו תלמידיו את רבי שמעון בן יוחי מפני מה אמרה תורה יולדת מביאה קרבן? אמר להן בשעה שכורעת לילד קופצת ונשבעת שלא תזקק לבעלה לפיכך אמרה תורה תביא קרבן. מתקיף לה רב יוסף והא מזידה היא ובחרטה תליא מילתא ועוד קרבן שבועה בעי איתויי.

**The students of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai asked him: For what reason does the Torah say that a woman after childbirth brings an offering? He said to them: At the time that a woman crouches to give birth, her pain is so great that she impulsively takes an oath that she will not engage in intercourse with her husband ever again, so that she will never again experience this pain. Therefore, the Torah says that she must bring an offering for violating her oath and continuing to engage in intercourse with her husband.**

**Rav Yosef objects to this answer: But isn't the woman an intentional violator of her oath? And if she wishes that her oath be dissolved, so that she may engage in intercourse with her husband, the matter depends on her regret of her oath. One is obligated to bring an offering for violating an oath of an utterance only if his transgression is unwitting. And furthermore, if the purpose of the offering that a woman brings after childbirth is to atone for violating an oath, then she should be required to bring a female lamb or goat as an offering, which is the**

requirement of one who violated **an oath**, rather than the bird offering brought by a woman after childbirth.

### 3. Leviticus 4:2

דִּבֶּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר נֶפֶשׁ כִּי־תַחַטָּא בְּשִׁגְגָה מִכֹּל מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תַעֲשִׂינָהּ וְעָשְׂתָהּ מֵאַחַת מֵהֵנָּה:

Speak to the Israelite people thus: When a person unwittingly incurs guilt in regard to any of God's commandments about things not to be done, and does one of them—

### 4. Sifra Tazria 4:3

כל מקום שהיא באה על חטא הקדמים חטאת לעולה. כאן, שאינה באה על חטא, הקדמים עולה לחטאת.

Wherever a sin offering is brought for a sin, the sin offering is mentioned before the burnt offering. Here, since it is not brought for a sin, the burnt offering is mentioned before the sin offering.

### 5. Mishnah Keritot, Chapter 2

אלו הן מחסרי כפורים. הנזב, והנזבה, והיולדת, והמצרע.

**And these are the four individuals who lack atonement: The man who experiences a gonorrhea-like discharge [זאב], the woman who experiences a discharge of uterine blood after her menstrual period [זאבה], the woman after childbirth, and the leper.** In all four of these cases, although the individual has completed all of the other steps of the purification process, the process is not complete until the atonement offering has been brought.

### 6. Rashi, Keritot 8b

ארבעה מחוסרי כפרה - מביאין חטאת ולא על חטא אלא לאכול בקדשים:

“Four individuals who lack atonement” – they bring a sin offering (*batal*), not because of a sin, but in order to eat sacrificial meat.

### 7. Babylonian Talmud, Shavuot 8a

אימא יולדת דחלק דמייתא עולה ויורד? אמר רב הושעיא (ויקרא טז, טז) לכל חטאתם ולא לכל טומאתם. ולר' שמעון בן יוחאי דאמר יולדת נמי חוטאת היא מאי איכא למימר?

The Gemara asks: Why not **say** instead that the goat offering atones for **a woman after childbirth, as** the Torah **differentiates** her from other people who must bring a sin-offering following a period of impurity in **that she brings a sliding-scale** offering, whereas others bring a fixed sin-offering? **Rav Hoshaya said:** The verse states: **“For all their sins”** (Leviticus 16:16), **and not: For all their impurities.** Accordingly, since the offering brought by a woman after childbirth is not to atone for a sin, but due to the fact that she went through a period of ritual impurity, the goat offering will not atone for her.

The Gemara asks: **But** if so, **according to Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai, who says: A woman after childbirth** brings an offering because **she is also a sinner, what is there to say?**

#### 8. Tosafot Shavuot 8a, "But if so, according to Rabbi Elazar HaKappar"

ומאשר חטא על הנפש הוי לרבנן לשון חסרון כמו (מלכים א א':כ"א) והייתי אני ובני שלמה חטאים וכמו (שופטים כ':ט"ז) אל השערה ולא יחטיא.

For the *bata* incurred through the corpse" (Numbers 6:1). According to the Sages this is a "language of lacking (or missing out), as in Kings I, 1:21, "My son Solomon and I will be regarded as *bataim*" and like in Judges 20:16, "Every one of them could sling a stone at a hair and not miss". (*yabati*)

#### 9. Ramban, Leviticus 4:2

ד"ה נפש כי תחטא: בעבור היות המחשבה בנפש והיא השוגגת הזכיר "הנפש": וטעם הקרבנות על הנפש השוגגת, מפני שכל העוונות יולידו גנאי בנפש והם מום בה ולא תזכה להקביל פני יוצרה, רק בהיותה טהורה מכל חטא, ולולא זה היו טפשי העולם זוכים לבוא לפניו. ולכן הנפש השוגגת תקריב קרבן שתזכה לקרבה אל האלוקים אשר נתנה, ובעבור זה גם כן הזכיר "נפש".

#### 10. Sforno, Leviticus 12:8

**וכפר עליה.** כי כל ימי זוב טומאתה תהיינה כל מחשבותיה פונות אל עסקי כלי הזרע ופעולתם, ולא תהיה ראויה למקדש וקדשיו עד שתביא כפרתה ותפנה אל הקודש:

"Shall make expiation on her behalf" for during all the days that she had been excreting blood her thoughts had been preoccupied with the phenomenon of semen and their actions, and she had therefore not been in a fit state of mind to enter the precincts of the Temple and offer sacred matters.

#### 11. Meshekh Hochmah, Leviticus 12

והעולה הוא, כפי הנראה, אחרי שהיתה אסורה לבוא אל הקדש כל ימי טהרתה וכעת באה אל הקדש ובתודה לשמו יתברך על אשר שבה לאיתנה לא יראה פניו ריקם והוא כעין קרבן ראיה.

The burnt offering (*olah*) is, it seems, after she has been forbidden to enter the holy place all of the days of her purification, and now she comes to the holy place, with thanks to God that she has returned to her full strength, and "they should not appear before God empty-handed" (Deuteronomy 16:16). This is like a *reiyah* sacrifice (given on the pilgrimage festivals).

#### 12. Kuzari II:60

כי המות הוא ההפסד הגדול, והאבר המצרע כמות והזרע הנפסד פן, מפני שיהיה בעל רוח טבעי מוכן להיות טפה שיהיה ממנה אנוש, והפסדו כנגד כח החיות והרוח.

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.

#### 13. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Covenant and Conversation, "Holiness and Childbirth"

When a mother gives birth, not only does she undergo great risk (until recently, childbirth was a life-threatening danger to mother and baby alike). She is also separated from what until now had been part of her own body (a fetus, 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 mitzvah 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.