

The Potential of Tumah

With the exception of Adam and Chava, the first man and woman, every individual is born from the union of a man and a woman. This special relationship between husband and wife begins under the chupa, becoming the most intimate of relationships through physical bonding. Engaging in intimacy is a moment of holiness as we embark on a quest of echoing God's creation of a new human. Thus, we contribute to the continuity of humanity on earth. Without this union, the future of the human race would be at risk.

The Spiritual Role of Childbirth

At the heart of a husband and wife's relationship is their complete union. As the Zohar teaches, this isn't just two people meeting; it's akin to returning to the whole, united state of Adam. This deep connection brings the Shechina into their relationship, forming a hermetic bond that encompasses the physical body (Guf), soul (Neshama), spirit (Ruach), and being (Nefesh), culminating in bringing a child into this world.

One might expect that after achieving the significant feat of bearing a child, a direct reflection of the Divine act of creation, the Torah would elevate the spiritual status of those involved. Surprisingly, however, the Torah states that a woman becomes ritually impure after childbirth. This seems almost like a punishment. Why is it that engaging in such a holy act, giving life, results in being considered impure?

Understanding the Impact of Sin on Soul and Body

To fully grasp the concept of Tumah, a deeper understanding is essential. In the Torah and Chazal, the relationship between Am Yisrael and Hashem is likened to a relationship between a man and a woman. The Shechina, as referred to in Chazal as Knesses Yisrael, is the collective soul of Am Yisrael. Though Am Yisrael comprises diverse individuals, it functions like one entity with many facets, akin to a body possessing a grand Neshama. This entity, Knesses Yisrael, is formed by every individual across generations.

When we say that we are Tachas Kanfei HaShechina, we mean that we are part of this body called Knesses Yisrael. The Shechina represents the *tzimtzum* (contraction) of Hashem, a process allowing Hashem's immense light to be channeled to the world. This is a simplified explanation of a concept extensively explored in countless sefarim, far deeper and esoteric than I can understand.

In this analogy, the Shechina is likened to the female, and Hashem to the male - Hashem being the giver and Am Yisrael the recipients.

Hashem is described as existing in the highest realms, while Knesses Yisrael and the Shechina can be in the lowest. The connection between Guf and Neshama mirrors the link between the upper and lower worlds. This connection allows Am Yisrael to receive Shefa (abundance) from Hashem and bring it down to Earth. This concept is often termed *Yichud Kudsha Brich Hu U'Shechintei*, the unification of the Holy One and the Shechina.

Now let's get back down to earth for a moment. We are born in this world where it is considered part of the natural human state that females menstruate. However, this wasn't always considered the true nature of women. According to our mesorah, menstruation wasn't part of the female's original creation, but a result of the Chet of the Etz Hadaas .

Originally, Adam and Chava were created in a state of perfection, free from illness, pain, or any discomfort. Additionally, the Midrash describes their skin as translucent, emitting light so bright that

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Adam Harishon's heel shone brighter than the afternoon sun.^{1]}

This idyllic state ended abruptly when Adam sinned. This sin caused his body to have a Zuhama, a filth, covering it. This filth veiled the inner light, akin to dragging a piece of gold through mud, diminishing its brightness and appeal.

The introduction of this filth to the Guf created a divide, a separation from the Neshama. This separation dimmed the soul's light, reducing its enlightening capacity significantly.

The Path to Restoration Through Teshuva

The quest for every individual now became a mission to cleanse this filth and allow the light of the Neshama to shine more strongly through the Guf. It's somewhat like cleaning your air conditioner's filters to improve the air quality.

This blurring between the Neshama and Guf affects not only our Avodas Hashem and the light of the Shechina descending to us but also fundamentally impacts human creation. The Torah refers to this as *'B'Etzev Teildi Banim'* – *'in pain you shall bear children.'*^{2]} This is because the creation of a new life occurs at the moment of a complete connection between the Guf and Neshama. With Zuhama creating a barrier between these two, conception isn't always successful; alignment between Guf and Neshama sometimes fails, leading to what can be seen as 'death.'

Menstruation represents life that could not be created. Each month, during ovulation, a woman has the potential to bring life into the world. If unsuccessful, this potential life disintegrates and exits the body as blood, causing pain and discomfort.

The curse of *'in pain you shall bear children'* encompasses all related suffering, including menstrual cramps, pregnancy, childbirth, and miscarriages. When there is a complete tikkun of the Chet of Adam on a collective level for Am Yisrael, there will be no more Zuhama, and each attempt to conceive would result in successful childbirth.

One of the special gifts Hashem has bestowed upon us is the concept of Teshuva. At its core, Teshuva is about returning something to its original, pristine state as it was first created.

Rav Reuven Sasson elucidates that the curses inflicted upon Adam and Chava are not simply punishments. As daunting as they may seem, they actually serve as pathways for Tikun. Indeed, death, illness, pain, and suffering are challenging, but they also provide a pathway to cleanse the filth that obscures the connection between the Neshama and the Guf. Each experience of pain contributes to this cleansing process, scrubbing away the layers of dirt until everything is restored to a clean and shiny state. This purification process highlights the unique and significant role of Jewish women.

The Tumah associated with menstrual blood is not an inherent negative trait of the woman, but rather it arises because of the blood itself. This blood, once capable of fostering life and now unable to do so, is considered akin to Tumas Meis, the impurity associated with death. A deceased person represents the most intense form of impurity, regardless of their righteousness in life. It's not that the person was impure, but rather that their body becomes Tamei after death.

Similarly, the Tumah in a woman is not a part of her essence. Instead, it is linked to the overall Tumah introduced into the world when Adam ate from the Etz Hadaas.

1] Midrash Rabba Acharei Mos 20

2] Bereishis 3:16

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Tumah is the expression of the void that emerges following the departure of life and light. It signifies that there is always potential for improvement and renewal. Each instance of “death” or loss provides an opportunity for tikkun, suggesting that life can emerge anew. Tumah teaches us that potential exists in all things.

For instance, when the Jewish people left Mitzrayim, they were at the 49th level of Tumah, nearly at the lowest spiritual point. Yet, from this depth, they were able to look up and realize their potential as a nation.

Before the sin of Adam, the body and soul were in perfect alignment, making the act of infusing a body with a soul effortless and joyful. However, Adam’s sin disrupted this harmony, setting the body and soul at odds. As the Ramchal notes^{3]} that the soul is now held in the body against its will, and the inherent coarseness of the body diminishes the soul’s luminosity.

Consequently, childbirth, which brings a new soul into the world, is fraught with difficulty. This difficulty is the inner secret of the pain of childbirth, and of the sorrow and danger that accompany the wondrous birth. Despite these challenges, childbirth remains a profound union of the soul and body, though it is not without impurities which cling to the edges of the birth.

Throughout pregnancy, menstrual blood is not shed, as it contains vital nutrients and hormones, supports the fetus’s development. Post childbirth, this blood and other tissues, no longer needed, are expelled from the body, similar to menstruation. This natural process, while necessary, brings about ritual impurity associated with childbirth, and lets us see the potential in the life we are bringing into the world.

The pain of childbirth and adherence to the laws of Niddah are a tikkun for the sin of Adam. These processes purify the body, aligning it more closely with the soul, and pave the way for a future where the union of the higher and lower worlds can occur without suffering.

Generations have passed since that initial sin, and every new union moves us closer to this tikkun. We don’t have access to the divine dashboard in heaven and we equally aren’t privy to understand why conception comes easier to some while is a major struggle to others, but we understand that every step of the way is a tikkun towards restoring the allure and shine of the Neshama to the Guf, when there will be a complete Yichud (unification) of Hashem and His Shechina

(This essay is primarily based on Sefer Maayan Ganim by Rav Reuven Sasson, available at <https://www.mhd.co.il/%d7%97%d7%a0%d7%95%d7%aa/>)

3] Derech Hashem part 1, Chapter 4