

Tazriah When a Woman Delivers

April 9, 2016

This Week's Text

אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וְיָלְדָה זָכָר--וְטָמְאָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים

Leviticus 12:5 If a woman at childbirth delivers a son, then she will be impure seven days

Linking Our Text to Modern Israel

The chapters leading up to *Tazria* discuss the rules of *Kashrut*, telling us that we are impure when certain things enter INTO our bodies. Conversely this *parashah* and the next focus on the ways we can become impure when certain things come OUT of our bodies.

We read about swelling, scaly rashes, skin discolorations, boils, discharges, and fungal growths. The infected person is essentially quarantined in what seems a safety measure for both the afflicted and the community. Continually checked and cared for by the priest, the person, when finally deemed safe, reenters the community through a special ritual.

It seems strange that this litany of conditions that make us unclean begins with a woman who gives birth. Does the very act of a child exiting the womb cause a woman to become impure? Consider the fact that childbirth was once (and in some countries still is) considered quite dangerous, and potentially life-threatening. Perhaps it makes sense that a woman should be isolated, for her own protection. When it was clear that she would survive the dangers following childbirth, she could make offerings through the priest before reentering the larger community.

Israel's health care protocols are no longer determined by priests. Instead, there is a governmental system tasked with ensuring the safety of individuals and the communities in which they live. This system, called *Kupat Holim* (The Sick Fund), emerged as a consequence of an injury sustained by an agricultural laborer in December 1911. Almost immediately, Zionists established a medical organization based on the principle of providing a mutual/benevolent assistance to all laborers. In 1920, the *Histadrut* united several individual clinics scattered throughout the emerging communities and the new conglomerate, *Kupat Holim Clalit* (General Sick Fund) of the Hebrew Laborers, began overseeing health facilities in *Eretz Israel*. For minimal monthly membership, the health needs of laborers and their families were fully covered. Now, individuals choose from one of four plans offered in Israel's system of universal coverage.



Credit: Ancho Gosh for *Ha'aretz*

Additional Resources:

<http://israeled.org/kupat-holim-clalit-established/>

<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/female-purity-niddah>

<http://www.ahavat-israel.com/eret/health>

<http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Culture/Mystical-medicine-394006>

Treatment facilities include 1,427 clinics, 14 hospitals, 450 pharmacies, 90 emergency centers, 40 centers for children's health, and an equal number of centers for women's health. In addition to these health care facilities, there are clinics known as *Tipot Halav* ("Family Centers") with specific focus on maternal, infant, and early childhood health. The health bureaus in each community operate the 58 *Tipat Halav* centers scattered throughout Israel. Their on-line help site and in-person services are available in 6 languages: English, Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish, French, and Russian - a testament to Israel's public health care accessibility.

Israel's public insurance is comprehensive for women's health. The plans cover preventive care such as prenatal monitoring, maternal wellness, postpartum care, mammograms, and reproductive health, as well as more elective and individual issues like fertility treatments and management of specific conditions. Not surprisingly, because of the heavy influence of Orthodox ideology on government policies, the Israeli system was slow to cover contraception. However, feminist and civil rights organizations — including the policy-analyst organization *Adva* — petitioned the Supreme Court. They asserted that the exclusion of contraceptives in the benefits package constituted discrimination. With ongoing pressure from these groups, national healthcare policies in Israel have begun to cover certain methods of contraception for women.

While the system is not without some challenges (such as adequate facilities and staff in peripheral communities that serve minorities), most of the population of the country today has membership in one of the Sick Funds that regularly treat seven million citizens. The Ministry of Health is unequivocally committed to taking responsibility for the health of the general population.

Like our biblical ancestors, Israel's health care concerns, including those of expectant mothers, are attended to with careful attention. The assurance of the best possible care by the best possible professionals so that the least amount of time is spent in isolation is as crucial now as it once was in ancient days.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the commonalities and differences of the Bible and modern day Israel concerning mothers immediately after childbirth?
2. How do you think religious values dictate the priorities for women's healthcare in Israel today?
3. The Zionist movement's concern for a healthy population derived from the principle that a well-cared for, healthy individual will be hard-working and productive. How does that compare to the *Toraitic* and *Talmudic* laws governing health? Are they mutually exclusive?