

Parshat Tazria

1. Rituals of purification for a woman after childbirth
2. Methods for diagnosing and treating a variety of skin diseases.

Tazria means “she brings forth seeds”. Of course, women do not really bring forth children as a plant produces seeds but in a way every child is a seed for the next generation.

The opening of Tazria talks about blood and how it is the life force. In the first lines of Tazria, the parsha talks about the blood that is present at childbirth. This is natural, and the ancient Israelites accepted that God made things this way. Tazria discusses how blood that has not been covered by the earth is unclean. And we learned in the last parsha that anything that touches something unclean also becomes unclean. That is why women who go through child birth become unclean.

After giving birth to a boy the mother waits seven days. Then for the next thirty three days she may not touch anything holy. If she gives birth to a girl the wait time is twice as long. Not one really knows why this is the case.

After this time period the mother brought a sin offering which was for the blood spilled in child birth. The blood of the sin offering was returned to the earth and the mother becomes clean again.

Tzara'at

The remainder of Tazria deals with diseases called Tzara'at. Many translations of Tzara'at are leprosy, but many believe that this word was mislabeled. Unlike leprosy, most of the skin diseases in the Bible clear up after a short period of time. The priests were supposed to be the diagnosticians of ancient Israel. The priests were called to diagnose the various skin diseases and offer treatment.

The person who contracted “leprosy” were seen as afflicted by a divine affliction in punishment for slander or talebaring. The Rabbis understood the word metzora (leprosy) as motzi shem ra (bringing a bad name to another person).

Listeners who encourage slander were also guilty.

The laws of tzara'at speak of common skin ailments like eczema or psoriasis. There are also laws regardign tzara'at of wool, linen and leather. They were probably mildew or fungus.