

Childbirth

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Much in the part of the Torah we read this week, sounds antiquated and obscure to most of us. The main theme is about unusual states of bodies, diseases and infections that affect humans, but clothes and buildings as well. The Torah describes the process of calling in the Cohen, who often served as the medical expert, to evaluate the problem, perhaps recommend quarantine and then the stages of healing or repairing that culminate in offering thanks for the resolution.

But first the Torah refers to childbirth. Until recently childbirth was dangerous and often fatal. In previous generations so many mothers and children died in the process of birth. Yet it is the greatest miracle of human life. Still, what starts with the greatest pleasure can end in the greatest pain.

The Torah always combines the physical and the spiritual. Its approach is what we now call 'holistic.' The rituals presented here in the Torah are designed to give time and care to the mother to enable her to regain her strength and recover from what is often a traumatic experience. And she needs time to adjust from the stress and dislocation of birth before returning to normal life. Men often take this almost cataclysmic state of a woman's body being so dramatically changed, for granted.

By juxtaposing childbirth with illness in the Torah, the message is that whenever the body goes through a shock or a transformation, we need to be sensitive to what people are going through and help them in the process of healing and getting back to normal. Not only but any crisis we go through in life should give us a heightened sense of the glory of life when things function properly and an appreciation of God in helping our recovery. A holistic solution includes both the physical and the spiritual.