**[The Fullness of the Earth – Parshat Tazria](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-fullness-of-the-earth-parshat-tazria)**

*A Psalm of David: The earth and all her fullness is of the Divine – the world and all who dwell within her…Who may ascend the mountain of the Divine? Who may stand in the holy place? One who has clean hands and a pure heart… This is the generation of those who turn to the Divine, who seek Your presence… Be uplifted, openings to the Eternal, so that the King of Presence may enter! Who is the King of Presence? The Divine, mighty and strong, strong in battle!*(Psalm 24 excerpt)

 לַֽ֭יי הָאָ֣רֶץ וּמְלוֹאָ֑הּ – *The earth and all her fullness is of the Divine…*

The fullness that we seek, that sense of Peace and Wholeness, is already within the fullness of this moment; *ha’aretz um’lo’ah –* all the “earth” partakes of this fullness.

מִֽי־יַעֲלֶ֥ה בְהַר־יְהוָ֑ה וּמִי־יָ֝קוּם בִּמְק֥וֹם קָדְשֽׁוֹ *– Who may ascend the mountain of the Divine? Who may stand in the holy place?*

Here is the hint: we can transcend the experience of limitedness or constriction by asking the question, *Who?*

נְקִ֥י כַפַּ֗יִם וּֽבַר־לֵ֫בָ֥ב – *One who has clean hands and a pure heart…*

We are “purified” – meaning, we can clear our inner space through the practice of inquiring, “Who is this Presence that fills this moment?”

מְבַקְשֵׁ֨י פָנֶ֖יךָ *– those who seek Your Presence…*

This simple question is a path to finding the Wholeness. But then, the psalm seems to offer a contradictory image:

*Be uplifted, you Openings into the Eternal, so the King of Presence may enter! Who is the King of Presence? The Divine, mighty and strong, strong in battle!*

How can the Presence “enter” if It already fills all Existence? Why does there need to be a “battle?”

Because the unconscious tendency is for the mind to be filled with thoughts, and this is what creates the barrier that hides the Presence. We don’t need to battle against the thoughts, but we do need to battle against our unconscious tendency to *get drawn into our thoughts.* We do that by simply turning our attention to the underlying Presence; we ask, *Who?* – and in the asking, a space is cleared; we actually *are* that space:

וְֽ֭הִנָּשְׂאוּ פִּתְחֵ֣י עוֹלָ֑ם – *Be uplifted, you Openings into the Eternal…*

That is, be the open space within which thought arises by being aware of Presence behind your thoughts, and you open to the Eternal dimension of your own being, the Presence that you are. This dimension is your own Divine nature; it is an inner strength available to us when we recognize that it comes from beyond the “me”; it is the *Melekh HaKavod,* the “King of Presence.”

There is a hint in the *parshah:*

אִשָּׁה֙ כִּ֣י תַזְרִ֔יעַ וְיָלְדָ֖ה זָכָ֑ר וְטָֽמְאָה֙ שִׁבְעַ֣ת יָמִ֔ים כִּימֵ֛י נִדַּ֥ת דְּותָ֖הּ תִּטְמָֽא
*When a woman gives birth to a male, she shall be* tamei – *separate from the sacred* –*for seven days; she shall be* tamei *as in the days of* niddah *– separate from sexual intimacy.*
(Leviticus 12:2)

*V’tam’ah shivat yamim – separate from the sacred for seven days…*

That is, when *Binah,* the thinking mind, gives birth to thought, this causes a feeling of separation from the sacred dimension. This is because thought takes us into the world of time, and out of the present; this is “seven days.”

But then,

וּבַיּ֖וֹם הַשְּׁמִינִ֑י יִמּ֖וֹל בְּשַׂ֥ר עָרְלָתֽוֹ
*On the eighth day, the flesh of his skin shall be circumcised.*

The *orlah,* the “skin” that is “circumcised,” is the sense of separateness that arises with the “birth” of thought. After experiencing the separateness inherent in thought and time (the “seven days”) we can remove the barrier and enter the “eighth day” – that is, the Eternal dimension.

How do we do that?

Be like מְבַקְשֵׁ֨י פָנֶ֖יךָ *m’vakshei fanekha – those who seek Your Presence.* After you engage in a thought process in order to accomplish some purpose, ask: *Who? Who is the Presence behind these thoughts? Who is the Presence behind all being?*

מִ֥י זֶה֮ מֶ֤לֶךְ הַכָּ֫ב֥וֹד – *Who is the King of Presence?*

Exactly! The question *Who?* brings forth our potential to become masters of our own minds, masters of being present…

Principio del formulario

***More on Tazria...***

[**The Waiting Room – Parshat Tazria**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/parshat-tazria)

רַבִּי יַעֲקֹב אוֹמֵר, הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה דּוֹמֶה לִפְרוֹזְדוֹר בִּפְנֵי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. הַתְקֵן עַצְמְךָ בַפְּרוֹזְדוֹר כְּדֵי שֶׁתִּכָּנֵס לַטְּרַקְלִי

​*Rabbi Yaakov says: This world is like a waiting room before the World to Come. Fix yourself in the waiting room so you may enter the banquet hall!*
(Pirkei Avot 4:24)

One of the most basic dualities on the spiritual path is the “before” and “after” of waking up. Both the “banquet hall” and “the World to Come” are metaphors for this aim of the path: the complete “fixing” of our sense of incompleteness and arriving into wholeness. Before that, we may get glimpses of the Wholeness – the door cracks open and for a moment we can see…

Once, a disciple complained to his rebbe that when in the rebbe’s presence, Divine Reality is palpable and he has peace. But as soon as he leaves the rebbe’s presence, it all vanishes and his suffering returns.

“This is like a person who gropes about in the dark forest,” answered the rebbe, “and someone comes along with a lantern and walks with him for a while. For a time, he can see where he is going. But eventually, the guy with the lantern goes his own way, and the person is left alone again in the dark. This is why it’s so important to carry your own lantern!”

When we get that glimpse – either through a rebbe or any other means – it should remind us to work on igniting our own flame. *Hat’kein atzm’kha –*we have to “fix” ourselves in the “waiting room.”

How do we do that?

Take the time to simply “wait” – be aware of the inner darkness – that is meditation. The awareness is itself the Light – it is your own inner Light. But if you spend all your time in thought and activity, you may not notice…

וְאִם־בַּהֶרֶת֩ לְבָנָ֨ה הִ֜וא בְּע֣וֹר בְּשָׂר֗וֹ ... וְהִסְגִּ֧יר הַכֹּהֵ֛ן אֶת־הַנֶּ֖גַע שִׁבְעַ֥ת יָמִֽים׃
*And if it is a white discoloration on the skin of his body ... the priest shall isolate the affected person for seven days…*
(Leviticus 13:4)

This week’s *parsha* talks about *tzara’at* – an affliction of the skin that renders a person *tamei* – ritually unfit to enter the Sanctuary. The affected person has to be quarantined for a period to become purified.

The skin is a metaphor – it is the physical boundary of self, representing that inner sense of oneself as separate, called ego. The “affliction” hints at the ego’s feeling of incompleteness, of being disconnected, of having “not yet arrived.”

The remedy: withdraw from the world of time, into solitude with the feeling. Be the Light, illuminating the darkness in solitude for “seven days” – meaning, until you reach *Shabbat!* *Shabbat* is that arriving into the spaciousness that is your deepest essence – the field of awareness itself, within which this moment arises.

So next time you find yourself in a waiting room, or waiting in line, remember the opportunity for illumination that comes as a hidden gift in those moments...

Good Shabbos!

[**Cage Free – Omer and Tazria – Metzorah**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/cage-free-omer-and-tazria-metzorah)

In the supermarket, you may see eggs and chicken that are labeled “cage free.”  This is supposed to make you think that these chickens aren’t confined to tiny little cages as are most commercial chickens, but are instead running around the farm, happy and free.

I used to buy “cage free” eggs, until I was told that actually, “cage-free” doesn’t really mean cage-free at all. It means that for a certain portion of the day, the doors on the cages are opened so that the chickens can escape the cages if they want to.

But, they don’t. The chickens always choose to stay in their cages. If you want chickens that actually walk around the farm, you have to buy “pastured” eggs and chickens.

But why don’t the chickens leave their little cages when the doors are opened?

Because they’re conditioned to be in their cages; they don’t realize they can leave, even when the door is opened. Perhaps, if they had more time, their instinct for freedom would eventually lead them to discover the opening. But, the doors aren’t open long enough for that; they’re only opened long enough for the company to be able to legally label the product as “cage-free.”

And, it’s the same with us.

At the *Pesakh seder,* we label ourselves as free: *Avadim hayinu, v’ata b’nai khorin –* *we were slaves, but now we are free.* The cage door is actually always already open, ready for us to step through. But do we step through? Like the chickens, we only step through if we have the time to discover that open door, if we have the time for that impulse for freedom to grow within. And, after we walk through the door, we need time to discover how to roam the farm, to explore the wild terrain of the uncharted *midbar,* rather than return to the security of the cage.

Like the Israelites, the tendency is to revert, to backslide: *“Hamib’li ayn k’varim b’mitzrayim l’kakhtanu lamut bamidbar? Weren’t there enough graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness?”*

So, there is an aspect of awakening that is unbound by time, that takes only an instant to realize: the cage door is open. The cage is made from the patterns of your thoughts and feelings; it’s your identity. But the open space is your own awareness right now. It is the field of consciousness, within which your experience in this moment is now appearing. Everything within your experience arises from and falls back into this open space, including the cage of identity. In truth, it’s not that you must go through the open space, you *are* the open space. And you can realize this, right now; it takes no time at all to simply recognize – you are already free. Perhaps a moment ago, *Avadim hayinu, we were slaves,*but now, *ata b’nai khorin – now we are free.*

So, in a sense, freedom is the easy part. We are already free – free to be you and me. All we have to do is remember – *l’ma’an tizkor et yom tzeitkha me’eretz mitzrayim, kol y’mai hayeikha – so that you may remember the day you went out from Egypt all the days of your life.*

But, to then go and live that freedom, to not only see the open door, to not only see the unboundedness in the midst of the cage, but to step out and live your freedom, that’s the hard part. That part takes time, it takes constant practice. It’s not instantaneous. It’s *not* about: get out of Egypt really fast and don’t let the dough rise. The *matzah* is instant realization. No more separation of dough caused by yeast bubbles that take time to ferment!

But this second, time-bound aspect requires living into this question: how may we translate the freedom that we are into words and deeds, into a way of living?

The *Sefirat HaOmer* is a prompt to that question. The practice is, count each of the 49 days between *Pesakh* and *Shavuot,* count the path from liberation to revelation – from the instantaneous realization of freedom to the long-term project of living that freedom.

The *Sefirat HaOmer* gives us a map of seven times seven Divine qualities: *Hesed –Lovingkindness* – are you motivated by love? That sounds really good, but what about when something that doesn’t feel loving happens to you. Can you be warrior of the love motivation, or do you become a victim? Life has plenty of the opposite of love in it. But living freedom means expressing your freedom to choose to live from love, even when external and even internal forces are pushing you in other directions.

Which brings us to *Gevurah* – *Strength.* In *Pirkei Avot,* Ben Zoma says, *Ezehu gibor? Who is strong?* Who has *Gevurah?* *Hakoveish yitzro –* one who masters their own motivation. Because then you’re not tossed around by circumstances – then you can radiate gracefulness, equanimity. And that’s the third quality – *Tiferet, Grace, Beauty.*

And through this equanimity, you can be victorious over the powers of time and change, knowing *HaMakom,*the Eternal Space within which everything is happening, and knowing yourself as that Space. That’s *Netzakh,* which means *Victory,* but also *Eternity.*

And from that rootedness in the Eternal, arises a gratitude for the ever-present simple blessings, a humble gratitude for the simple privilege just to be. That’s *Hod,*which means *Gratitude* and *Humility.*

And out of the positive vibration of this simple humility and gratitude arises the pleasure of connection – the Eros, the joy, of living, of communing with the Presence as it manifests in this moment. That’s *Yesod,*which means Foundation, because the enjoyment of life is the foundation of life. If you can’t enjoy, then all the richness of meaning and value will slowly drain away.

But with that joy, there can also arise a deep sense of trust, a trust that transcends all the tragedy and sorrow, and impels us to trust the process, to trust that Reality has its own endgame, in a sense. That’s *Malkhut,* which means Kingdom, pointing to the idea that all Reality is really a Divine Kingdom/Queendom, but that union of King and Queen, of *Kudsha Brikh Hu Ushekhintei,* the Holy Transcendent Space with the Imminent Presence, happens through us, through our *Pesakh* realization and our *Shavuot* application, through our counting of the qualities and bringing them into being in our own lives, day after day, each day anew, *amein.*

There’s a story that a disciple of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev came to the master and asked: “In the Talmud it says that a *tzaddik,* a perfect person, can’t stand in the place of the *Ba’al T’shuvah,* one who was wicked but who has turned to the Divine and transformed. According to this, one who has been blameless from youth is at a lower level than one who has done many misdeeds. How can this be?”

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak replied, “A person who perceives a new light every day, light that wasn’t perceived the day before, must leave behind the way they lived in the past, and start afresh to embody the new light. The blameless ones who believe they are already perfect, don’t perceive the new light, and so there is no transformation.”

May the counting of the Omer remind us to constantly open ourselves to a new light every day, to find a fresh path for embodying the freedom that we are.

[**Birth – *Tazria***](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/birth-parshat-tazria)

***“… ishah ki tazria v’yaldah zakhar-*** *when a woman conceives and gives birth to a son, she’ll be ritually unfit for seven days just as in the days of her menstrual separation, and into the sacred space she may not enter...”*
​
On the plain level, this is talking an ancient ritual purity law.

But on the metaphorical level, what does it mean to give birth? It means to create something new. And whether or not you have children, all of us are constantly creating. On the deepest level, our creation begins with the spontaneous arising of thought that happens almost constantly for most people. Then, as our thoughts become externalized in our decisions and actions, we literally co-create our life situations along with all of our fellow beings. And whenever something new appears on the horizon of our consciousness, whether it’s a blossoming of thought, or sensation, or feeling, or something happens around us like- someone knocks at the door, or you go and knock on someone else’s door, or the kitchen sink breaks, or it starts to rain, or you decide on a new career- whatever new is arising, it doesn’t matter- there’s the tendency to lose your connection with eternal dimension of Being- that open space of the Present which is not separate from your own consciousness- and instead get tangled up in whatever particular experience you are having. And that’s how we lose our freedom- we forget all about the space of this moment and get stuck in whatever is going on. Then, once you’re in that state of being stuck, even if you bring yourself back to a state of presence at that point, you may still feel stuck.

*That’s because before you can transform, you first need to simply be present with whatever mind state you’re already in.*

The trick is not to become disheartened and give up- just be wherever you’re at. That’s *v’tamah shivat yamim-*being*tamei*- or ritually unfit to enter the *mikdash-*the sacred space- for seven days. “Seven days” means the world of time which is created by the mind that imagines past and future. This is hinted at in the story of the seven days of creation. *“…kimei nidat dotah tima”-* like the time of *niddah,*which means “separation.” Because when you get caught by your experience, you lose connection with your inherent wholeness, and you feel separate from how you imagine you’d like to feel.

But if you stay with it, being conscious of any feelings of constriction as they arise in your body and continuously bring your attention back again and again to your sensations and your breathing, the barrier to wholeness will drop away at some point. As it says:

*“Uvayom hashmini yimol b’sar orlato- On the eighth day, the male baby’s foreskin will be circumcised.”*

The foreskin- the *orlah-*is a metaphor- a strange metaphor perhaps, but as a barrier, it hints at the feeling of separation that the ego feels. The number eight represents Eternity, as it’s one step beyond seven, plus the number eight on its side is the infinity symbol.

So the idea is that when your consciousness gives birth to a new experience, there’s an inherent *orlah-*a feeling of separation that arises when you get absorbed into the drama of whatever is going on, and that’s okay and natural. When you’re in the “seven days” of disconnection from the *mikdash-*from the sacredness of Presence- just be there. It’s only temporary. Stick with the practice and draw your awareness into your body with *Gevurah-*with strength and persistence. If you do, you will come to *yom hashmini-*this moment of Eternity where all barriers drop away and you return ever more deeply to the openness of Presence.

So on this *Shabbat Tazria-*The Sabbath of Birth, let’s remember to fully accept and be with whatever states we find ourselves in, and in the freedom of Presence, seek to birth a more kind, loving and conscious world. Good Shabbos!

[**The Great Mother- *Parshat﻿ Tazria***](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-great-mother-parshat-tazria)

This past Shabbat, my wife Lisa went off to Punta Mona in the jungles of Costa Rica to take some much needed rest from the constant demands of motherhood.

While it was certainly a tiny drop in the bucket of what she really deserves (may she receive it fully and swiftly), I was happy she took the time to drink a little of the nectar of renewal. I am *so* grateful for her unending motherly devotion, and look forward to supporting more of that! And, I was happy to have some more devoted time with our children for a few days before my trip back to the Bay Area, during which she’ll be left alone with the kids for the next ten days.
​
​I’m reminded of a conversation I once had with my sister-in-law, in which she said she understood the traditional Jewish idea that mothers are exempt from time-bound *mitzvot-*Jewish practices that happen at particular times, such as morning prayers, for example.

“Why is that?” I asked.

“Because mothering can be all consuming,” she replied. “Being a mother is not necessarily good for you. It’s a fire of suffering- the lack of sleep, the constant neediness of the child. But, it’s a suffering of love, a fire of love.”

Her words made me think of the two kinds love as explained in the classic work of Kabbalah and Hassidic philosophy, the Tanya.

According to the Tanya, the first kind of love happens when you experience the Divine as your very own life force. Since people naturally love their own life, seeing God as your own life force means that you love God just as you love your own life. In fact, the two are not separate; you love God *as*your own beingness.

The second kind of love happens when you experience God as your parent. The *Tanya*talks about the example of certain children who love their parents so much, they’re willing to sacrifice their lives for their parents.

The first type of love is non-dual; God is not something separate from your own being. The second type is dualistic; God is separate from me, even possibly negating me if I sacrifice my life.

Which one is higher?

You might think the non-dual one is higher, that it’s more authentic to see yourself as not separate from the Divine. However, the *Tanya*says otherwise.

It goes on to explain that when you know the Godliness within, there is a pleasure, a spiritual bliss that comes with being in touch with your own inner Divinity. But, if you see God as separate, and you’re willing to give up your very life for God, that’s far more transcendent and selfless.

When my sister-in-law was talking about the all-consuming love of mothering, she was basically talking about the Tanya’s self-sacrificing love, except it was inverted- rather than the rare child that would sacrifice its life for the parent, this was the very common example of the parent who’s constantly sacrificing her life for the child!

Which brings us to this week’s reading, *Parshat Tazria:*

*“Ki tazria v’yalda zakhar-*

*“When a woman conceives and gives birth to a son, she is ritually un-fit for seven days-  like the days of her menstrual separation, she is ritually un-fit…she shouldn’t touch any holy thing, and into the holy she shall not come…”*

It’s talking about how a woman who gives birth shouldn’t touch sacred things or come into the temple for a certain period of time. Let’s look more deeply at what this is talking about:

The word for “holy” is *kodesh,*which means separate.

However, it means a special kind of separate. It doesn’t mean separate as distant or removed, but rather as central and exclusive. For example, where is the holiest place? It’s not some distant site outside the camp. It’s the very center of the camp, in the very center of the Sanctuary, in a special room where the priest goes once per year to be in special intimacy with God.

Similarly, the intimacy of marriage is also a “holy of holies”.

It is holy in its unique togetherness, holy because of the closeness that happens there. So *kodesh*doesn’t exactly mean separation, but really means “separation from all separation.” It means separateness in that it’s the closest, and therefore separate from all other things that are less close.

The menstrual period is considered a time of *nidah,*which also means “separation”. During this time there is traditionally no sexual intimacy, no *kodesh,*no “separation-from-all-separation”.

*Nidah,*therefore, really means “separation-from-the-separation-from all-separation”.

These two states, *Kodesh*and *Nidah,*really parallel the two kinds of love- love of the Divine as your own self *(Kodesh)*and love of the Divine as your own parent- or, as many of us have experienced, as your own child *(Nidah).*

Seen in this way, the opening of the *parsha*is really describing these two kinds of love and service.

The new mother is in a state of *Nidah*because she’s not concerned with the experience of Divinity in her own being; she’s completely at the service of the newborn. This is itself a swing of the pendulum because she just gave birth- and what could be more Godly than giving birth? Her own body just created another living being. She is a Goddess- a Creator. And now she swings from Goddess to servant, burning in the painful love of motherhood.

But this does not- and cannot- go on forever.

She’s in a *Nidah-*like state only for a short time. Then she returns to connection with the *Kodesh.*She must do that, because to be only in the selfless service of another would be self-destructive, and therefore destructive to the baby as well.

In one way or another, life brings us between these poles- sometimes being an *Eved Hashem-*a servant of God, devotedly (or sometimes drudgingly) giving of ourselves, not “getting” anything out of it.

Other times, we are *B’tzelem Elohim,*manifestations of the Divine, enjoying the renewal and bliss of the Divine energy that is our essential nature.

Even in our *Avodah,*our daily spiritual practice, these two poles exist. Sometimes there’s a palpable flow of blissful connection with the One- and the One is not other than our own being.

But sometimes, that connection is not felt, and your commitment to your *Avodah* must come from a deeper motivation- one of service. That’s why the prayer that happen in synagogue is called a “service.” You may not feel like you’re getting much out of it, but you do it because you’re devoted, because you’re committed.

These two poles even manifest in the two main forms of *Avodah-*meditation and prayer.

In the stillness of meditation, the Completeness of the present moment is not something other than your own being. But in the fire of prayer, the self’s longing for Completeness reaches out for help from That which is infinitely greater than the self.

Yet there comes another point- perhaps that point is now- when these two poles meet, when they’re not separate at all, when the fire of love and service is the very thing that opens the door to your own inner Divinity.

It’s said that once the Baal Shem Tov heard a *Bat Kol-* a Heavenly Voice- tell him that for some little sin he had committed, he would be denied life in the World to Come. When he heard this news, he began dancing for joy.

The Voice then asked, “Why are you so happy? I just said you will have no life in the World to Come!”

The Baal Shem replied, “I dance because now I am free to serve God for it’s own sake, without ulterior motive.”

On this *Shabbat Tazria,* the Sabbath of Conception, may we deeply realize this paradox of Being God and being a servant of God, and may we fall into this *Shabbos* as a child falls into her mother’s arms.

And, may all mothers find the time and support to renew in the bliss if the *Kodesh,*and may we give that support when it is needed! *Amein, Selah!*

[**﻿The Higher Separation- Parshat Tazria**
​](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/1)
When it comes to the spiritual practices of meditation and prayer, you might practice for a while without getting any compelling result. But if you continue to practice, you will find something that you can only get through putting in that daily effort.

Some say that what you find comes into you from the outside. It is pictured as a transcendent Light that flows into your being from the *Ain Sof-*the Infinite*.*Others say that the Light is your own nature; that it comes from within you.

But these explanations are simply maps which come from the practices themselves: when you pray, it makes sense to think of the Light as given from the outside. When you meditate, it makes sense to think of It as coming from within.

The Hassidic text called the *Tanya*talks of these two ways of seeing in terms of two kinds of love. The first kind of love happens when you experience the Divine as your very own life force. Since people naturally love their own life, seeing God as your own life force means that you love God just as you love your own life.

The second kind of love happens when you experience God as your parent. The *Tanya*talks about the example of certain children who love their parents so much, they are willing to sacrifice their lives for their parents.

The first type of love is non-dual; God is not something separate from your own being. The second type is dualistic; God is separate from me, even possibly negating me if I sacrifice my life.

Which one is higher?

You might think the non-dual one is higher, that it is more authentic to see yourself as not separate from the Divine. However, the *Tanya*says otherwise:

When you see the God within, there is a pleasure, a spiritual bliss that comes with being in touch with your own inner Divinity. But if you see God as separate, and you are willing to give up your very life for God, that is far more transcendent and selfless.

Last night I was having a conversation with my sister-in-law, and she was saying that she understood the traditional Jewish idea that mothers are exempt from time-bound *mitzvot,* because mothering can be all consuming. Being a mother is not necessarily good for you. It is in fact a fire of suffering- the lack of sleep, the constant neediness of the child. But, she said, it is a suffering of love, a fire of love.

Her example made me think of the *Tanya’s* idea of the dualistic, self sacrificing love, except it was inverted- rather than the rare child that would sacrifice its life for the parent, this was the very common example of the parent who is constantly sacrificing her life for the child.

Which brings us to this week’s reading, *Parshat Tazria.* It opens, *“…ki tazria v’yalda zakhar-*when a woman conceives and gives birth to a son- *v’tamah shivat yamim-*she is ritually un-fit for seven days- *kimei nidah dotah titma-*like the days of her menstrual separation, she is ritually un-fit… *b’khol kodesh, lo tiga-*she shouldn’t touch any holy thing- *v’el hamikdash lo tavo-*and into the holy she shall not come…”

It is talking about how a woman who gives birth should not touch sacred things or come into the temple for a certain period of time. Let’s look more deeply at what this is talking about:

The word for “holy” is *kodesh,*which means separate. However, it means a special kind of separate. It doesn’t mean separate as distant or removed, but rather central and exclusive. For example, where is the holiest place? It is the very center of the temple, in a special room where the priest goes once per year to be in a special intimacy with God.

Similarly, the intimacy of marriage is also a “holy of holies”. It is holy in its unique togetherness, holy because of the closeness that happens there. So *kodesh*doesn’t exactly mean separation, but really means “separation from all separation”. It means the separateness of being the most close.

The menstrual period is considered a time of *nidah,*which also means “separation”. During this time there is traditionally no sexual intimacy, no *kodesh,*no “separation-from-all-separation”.

*Nidah,*therefore, really means “separation-from-the-separation-from all-separation”.

These two states, *kodesh*and *nidah,*really parallel the two kinds of love- love of the Divine as your own self *(kodesh)*and love of the Divine as your own parent- or, as many of us have experienced, as your own child *(nidah).*

Seen in this way, the opening of the *parsha*is really describing these two kinds of love and service. The new mother is in a state of *nidah*because she is not concerned with the experience of Divinity in her own being; she is completely at the service of the newborn. This is itself a swing of the pendulum because she just gave birth- and what could be more Godly than giving birth? Her own body just created another living being. She is a Goddess- a Creator. And now she swings from Goddess to servant, burning in the painful love of motherhood.

But this does not- and cannot- go on forever. She is in the higher and selfless *nidah-*like state only for a short time. Then she must return to connection with the *kodesh.*She must do that, because to be only in the selfless service of another would be self-destructive, and therefore destructive to the baby as well.

In one way or another, life brings us between these poles- sometimes being an *eved Hashem-*a servant of God, humbly giving of ourselves, not “getting” anything from it. Other times, we are *b’tzelem Elohim,*manifestations of the Divine, enjoying the renewal and bliss of the Divine energy that is our essence.

May the dual practice of meditation and prayer help us all to more deeply realize this paradox of Being God and being servants of God; may we fall into this *Shabbos* as a child falls into her mother’s arms. And, may all mothers find the time and support to renew in the bliss if the *kodesh,*and may we all give that support when it is needed! *Amein, Selah!*