

The Wonder That Is Woman

By: Yanki Tauber

And G-d spoke to Moses, saying: "A woman who shall conceive and give birth . . ." (Leviticus 12:1–2)

It happens 250 times a minute, almost 15,000 times every hour. It happens after years of effort and anticipation, or "by accident." It occurs on every socioeconomic level, in every country and village in the world. But no matter how frequently it transpires, no matter how commonplace an event it is, we always stand back in awe and say: a miracle.

That one being should give birth to, should *create*, another. If there is any area in which a creature emulates its Creator—if there is any act by which we express the spark of divinity at our core—it is the miracle of birth.

Yet it is in this, the most G-dly of our achievements, that we also most reveal the limitations of our individuality. Feeding, sleeping, thinking, producing a work of art or building a house—virtually everything we do, we can do on our own. But giving birth to a child is something we can only do together with another person. To give birth, we must cease to be an entity unto ourselves and become a part, a component, of a community of two.

Because if we are only what we are, we are most decidedly not divine. As beings unto ourselves, we are finite and self-absorbed things, manufacturers rather than creators. To create, we must rise above our individuality. To actualize our divine essence, we must transcend the bounds of self.

It is the woman, not the man, who gives birth. It is the woman who is most fulfilled in parenthood, and who most acutely feels the lack when parenthood is denied her. It is the woman who continues to mother her child long after the man has fathered it. It is the woman, according to Torah law, who exclusively determines the spiritual identity of her child.

Because it is the woman who most surrenders her selfhood to create life. She is the passive and receptive element in the procreation process. For nine months, her very body ceases to be hers alone as it bears and nurtures another life. So it is the woman, rather than the man, who "conceives and gives birth," and to whom motherhood is a state of being, rather than an "achievement" or "experience."

Yet everyone can become a "mother." What comes naturally to the female half of creation can be learned and assimilated by all, and not only in giving birth to children but in every one of life's endeavors. We all have the power to recognize that there is more to our existence than the narrow confines of individual identity.

We all have the power to become more than we are and to do more than we can—by becoming receptive to the divine essence that underlies the self and pervades the whole of existence.

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1 April | 26th Adar II
Tazria and Hachodesh

Shabbat Begins: 7:19 pm
Shabbat Ends: 8:23 pm