

OzTORAH

The Mother's Offering

When a woman bears a child the Torah says she has to bring an offering to the Mikdash (Vayikra 12).

So far so good, and we would probably interpret the offering as a mark of gratitude to God who made it possible for her to bear the child. But the Torah describes her offering as a chatat, a sin-offering (verse 6), and this use of words baffles us immensely. How can one possibly impute a sense of sin to the woman, in whatever sense we understand the word?

If we interpret the offering midrashically, what the mother may be doing is apologising to her child for bringing it into the world. Kohelet 3 tells us that there is a time for everything. People think, says the Midrash, that when there are two ships in the harbour, one about to set out and the other back in port after completing its voyage, it is right to rejoice over the ship that is leaving port, because so much excitement and discovery awaits it.

No, says the Midrash: it is better to rejoice over the ship that has completed its voyage and returned safely. Whatever problems it faced are now over, and it is appropriate to say Mazal Tov.

Using this approach, the mother may be saying to her child,

“Welcome to the world, but I know you didn’t ask to be born and you might not find life an unmitigated joy and blessing. In case you wonder one day whether life has been worthwhile, know that I (and your father) apologise in advance...”

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