



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

Rolls & Scrolls

Details of childbirth. Definitions of infection. Treatments. Isolation wards.

It sounds like a medical textbook. In fact it is this week's Torah reading. And as usual it can be read as subtext as well as text.

An example of the subtext is Rabbi Simlai's statement in the Talmud (Nida 30b) concerning the unborn child: "To what may a foetus in its mother's womb be compared? To a scroll that is rolled up. But when the child emerges into the world, that which is shut is opened and a light shines on its head."

The unborn child is not yet a fully recognised person in the eyes of Jewish law. That is why abortion, though a very serious moral offence, is technically speaking not murder.

On the other hand, it cannot be brushed aside as unimportant; the foetus, though not fully a person, is a potential person, and it is entitled to be born and to bring its own blessing into the world.

There are other areas of life in which potential must have a chance to be

fulfilled, like the scroll which needs its chance to be unrolled.

A person's mind needs its opportunity to stretch and grow; what a pity it is when we do not utilise 100% of our brain power and remain living on a superficial level.

One's heart needs to have its chance to love, care and share; it is a shame when you live for yourself without reaching out to others and evoking answering love.

The light of self-fulfilment will not shine above your head unless you allow your scroll to open.

Being Alone

Isolation wards derive from the rule regarding the m'tzora, "He shall dwell alone: outside the camp shall his habitation be" (Vayikra 13:15).

To isolate the m'tzora was necessary in order to protect the community. Precautions had to be taken to reduce the possibility of contagion.

But the subject of isolation does not begin or end with the m'tzora. There are other kinds of isolation which are essential.

- Avraham isolated himself from the corrupting, idolatrous environment; he was AVRAHAM HA-IVRI, concerning which our tradition says that he stood on one EIVER - one side of the world - and his contemporaries on the other.

- Moshe isolated himself when he ascended Mount Sinai; to commune with God he needed to separate himself from the pressures and problems of leadership.

- Bilam isolated himself; VAYEILECH SHEFI, "he went to be alone" when he had a great decision to think through.

- Eliyahu isolated himself: when Achav was after him and he needed to find serenity of spirit he went into the wilderness where there was no noise but only KOL D'MAMA DAKA, "the sound of thin silence".

As community-minded people, we believe in being with others. We do not believe in monk-like withdrawal from life. But you can have too much of the noise, the bustle, the pressure and the demands of always being surrounded by others. There are times to be alone.

A Chassidic teacher says, "A person who does not have an hour to him or herself every day is not a person."

-OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH