



# פרשה Parsha Insights & News

Parshat Tazriah-Metzorah APR 21, 2007 – 3 Iyar 5767

The Orthodox Union West Coast Office 9831 W. Pico Blvd., LA, CA 90035 Please visit [www.ouwestcoast.org](http://www.ouwestcoast.org)  
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I will never forget a highly influential discussion I had in my youth about spirituality. A rabbi and I debated the nature and importance of the human soul, and my interlocutor made one comment that has forever stuck with me. He stopped the intense discussion in its tracks and asked me point blank, "Do you really believe that you have a soul?" The question was simple but poignant, and after a few moments of contemplation I responded, "Yes, of course, I absolutely believe that I have a soul!" "Wrong!" he retorted, "Judaism says that you don't have a soul!" I was shocked, but intrigued. How could he say such a thing?!? What was he getting at? Finally, he turned to me and said with a gentle confidence, "You don't have a soul, you are a soul!"

This powerful statement struck a deep chord within me, and I have contemplated its meaning and significance ever since. An intriguing Midrash on this week's Parsha leads me to the best explanation of this idea that I have come across. The first verse of this week's Parsha uses the term, "isha ki tazria," a woman who has given birth. The Midrash expounds upon this to discuss the birth and formation of a child, and quotes the verse in Psalms (139:5) which states, "before and after you have created me." The Midrash explains, "If one merits, they say to him, 'You preceded everything else in the creation of the world.' If one does not merit, they are told that they were created even after the worms and gnats."

The Chassidic Master, the Shem Mishmuel, explains that the soul was created on the first day of creation and the body on the last. "If one merits" by making the soul the primary concern, and the body secondary, that individual is considered to have "preceded everything else in the creation of the world." However, if one minimizes his or her focus on the soul and is preoccupied only with their physical side, one is then told, "that they were created even after the worms and gnats."

We thus see that the choice is up to each of us. If an individual is focused primarily on the spiritual side, his or her soul is granted dominance and they are elevated above other created objects. Such a person is essentially a soul. However, if one is overly engrossed in the body, the physical side, then he or she is essentially just like any other physical object in the world, or even lower for having forfeited the unique human opportunity to elevate the soul.

The question I was asked, "Do you have a soul?" is critical indeed. For it is not as simple as the answer I was given. We are not born as spiritual beings that happen to be connected to a body. Rather, we are charged with a divine goal, a process of

becoming more soul-focused. Though we certainly should not deny our physicality, our bodies must serve a holy function in the world as we work to direct our sensitivity and primary attention to our spiritual side. We need to make sure that our body is merely a tool in the service of the soul and not the reverse!

Rabbi Jason Weiner  
Rabbinic Fellow, Young Israel, Century City

## IN MEMORIUM

We offer our sincere condolences to  
**Mark Hess**  
and  
**Helen Hess**  
on the passing of  
**Harry Hess**

Dear Father and Husband  
**המקום ינחם אתכם**  
**בתוך שאר אנבי ציון וירושלים**

Mark was past President of OU West Coast and is a National OU member of the Board

Our best wishes to the extended family.

Shiva is taking place in Israel:  
12 HaShayarot, Apt. 3, Katamon,  
Jerusalem 92544, Israel.

Home: 011-972-2-567-0089

Cell: 011-972-547-684-176

The family has requested donations be made to  
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EVENTS

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In Memory of Emanuel Stern ז"ר  
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