



## PROTECTING MOTHER AND CHILD

19 Kislev, 5747-1986

*This week's Torah Portion begins with laws relating to childbirth.*

It is a Jewish custom that upon the birth of a Jewish child –indeed, even beforehand– we post the Shir Hama'alot psalm beside the baby's crib, above the door, etc. Some don't suffice with this; they add similar items.

Most of these customs –and a Jewish custom is part of Torah– have become established in all Jewish homes.

It's important to note something peculiar: Once, babies were born at home and when a Jewish baby was born, the Shir Hama'alot and other holy items that were in the house, surrounded the baby with holy articles.

Nowadays however, for various health reasons, almost all children are born in hospitals. Some people now make various excuses, attributed to “respect for Torah” and “respect for the Shir Hama'alot;” and don't post these items in the hospital.

With the slightest effort –by only mentioning it– there is no doubt that they will gladly be permitted, without difficulty, to post the Shir Hama'alot, amulets or Mezuzahs, each place according to its custom –even in the hospital, in the delivery room. Surely in the room where the baby spends the hours and days which follow.

It is a Mitzvah to encourage this, not only here in New York where Jewish influence is strong and this can be achieved easily; but in every place where there is a Jewish family preparing for the blessing of having a child, this can be easily arranged in advance, –even before mother and baby arrive there.

Certainly when one understands –until it is an article of simple faith– that this is not a plain custom; even with regard to regular customs we say “A Jewish custom is Torah.” But this particular custom will ensure that labor and delivery proceed smoothly, and for the child to be healthy and the days following the baby's birth –wherever that is– should be well; a revealed and apparent good.

It is also a proper preparation to rear the boy or girl to Torah, marriage, and good deeds – that these central items in life will be achieved with greater perfection and greater ease. Undoubtedly this will be arranged, even in a place where there is only one Jewish woman. As long as she understands the importance –or it will be explained to her– “words which come from the heart” will certainly succeed, even if she's the only Jew in the entire hospital. How much more so, in most hospitals, in most countries it's possible to find other Jews who could help her organize the Shir Hama'alot, and will do so gladly.



## פרשת תזריע

If one asks the permission of even a non-Jewish doctor, and will explain to him what it is about, he will respond that according to medical science one is required to do so –For anybody who requires medical assistance, even more so for a woman giving birth, when it is especially important that she be calm and not have any uncertainties or worries. It is important for her, for the baby, so it is also important for the husband and the entire family. It is even important to the doctor!

For if, G-d forbid, there is a problem, a truly committed doctor will himself become distressed and concerned. It makes no difference what nation he belongs to or what faith he belongs to –whether he is a believer or not; whatever he ascribes to– deep in his heart he knows that if these items are there she will be calmer, and he will be able to administer better treatment; without distractions.

As stated, this is a new concern in our times. In the past, a child was born at home and the mother, grandmother or husband were on hand. Today however, for various medical reasons, babies are delivered in hospitals, –the practice makes good medical sense – and in the hospital setting, the medical doctor has authority.

But this is not inconsistent with the above-mentioned practice.

