

TO CONTINUE TO CONTINUE

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM spoke to Moshe, saying: "Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male...On **the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.** (Vayikra 12:1-2)

On the eighth day the flesh of his skin shall be circumscribed: It's not written here that there should be any expense for the event of the circumcision. Come and see how dear this Mitzvah is to Israel that they go through great expense to guard and rejoice in it... (Midrash Tanchuma)

It is a wondrous phenomenon that of all Mitzvos Bris Mila should remain as a lasting symbol of Jewish loyalty. It is also no mistake that it is one of only two "positive" or action-Mitzvos in the entire Torah that we are warned that the failure to perform would result in "kores" -being "cut- off". (The other one is the Korban Pesach) The greater amazement is that Jews for thousands of years celebrate in grand fashion what amounts to minor surgery on a tender infant. Why when I left the dentist's office the other day no one was there to greet me with a piece of gefilte fish? What's so critical about these two Mitzvos that they persist while other may tend to fade sooner for so many?

First of all, the punishment for failure to perform is not an arm twisting technique to get people to conform or a cruel response from an unfeeling deity, as some may crudely imagine hearing such words. No! It's a cause and effect caution. If a doctor tells his diabetic patient that if he fails to comply with the dietary restrictions he can look forward to blindness and amputations and the like, the doctor is not being unduly harsh. He's expressing his compassion. So it is here with circumcision and with Pesach. When someone is packing to go on a long journey the first things to go into the suitcase are the last items to be confronted. Once removed the package is rendered empty. These two Mitzvos are really firsts individually and nationally. Once one has discarded his connection to these two firsts that join us to HASHEM as persons and as a people then the description of the result is something with a severe sound to it "kores". This is installed in the psyche of Jews.

Years ago I heard in a speech from Rabbi Donner in England an account of something that had occurred in the Soviet Union during the darker days of pure communism. Even after seventy years of repression and oppression under an iron blanket the irrepressible spirit of this Mitzvah as an essential for Jewish living continually shined forth in many instances. In this one particular episode a Jewish woman, not particularly religious, was expecting a child. The doctor warned her harshly that if it was a male child that she had better not dare perform any barbaric blood rituals. When she gave

birth to a baby boy she wanted very badly to give her child a circumcision but it was determined that it was not politically safe. Strangers were espied hovering nearby. The eighth day passed. A month later the couple evaluated again the possibility of making a Bris but they sensed a watchful eye and so again nothing was done.

Eleven months later the signal was given. The coast was clear. Friends and family entered the apartment intermittently so as not to arouse suspicion and they were joined by a Mohel. Quietly the child was entered into the covenant of Avraham, an unbroken chain reaching back 3600 years to the original event.

After the baby was given his Jewish name he was returned to the arms of his mother and brought to a separate room. In the meantime, people were sitting down to enjoy a festive meal, when they were interrupted by a sudden thud and a cry. They ran into the room and discovered the baby was crying and the mother had fainted out cold. As she was being revived people were theorizing about what caused this to happen. Some said it was the excitement while others figured it was the extra blood due to the advanced age of the child. When the mother was revived she revealed the real reason.

She said, "I was afraid I would never make a circumcision for my boy so I vowed never to kiss my child until the day he had a Bris Mila." When after the Bris she gave her child a first kiss all that motherly love that she had stored up came rushing forward at once and that's what made her faint. That's what causes us even still **to continue to continue**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.