

A CONNECTED JEW

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 Action Mitzva is the Korban Pesach. Why are these two Mitzvos singled out for that serious consequence? What is their common denominator? Also, what's the great joy associated with making a Bris? It's a surgery! The kid is crying and all the adults are wishing "mazel tov" and eating lox. What's going on here?

It could be that these two Mitzvos are firsts of sorts. Avraham was first commanded to make a Bris prior to the conception Yitzchok. The Jewish Nation was commanded to bring the Korban Pesach before exiting Egypt. One represents a commitment to sublimate animal passions for holiness. The other is a rejection of the false and temptingly attractive belief systems of society. Avraham, the ultimate iconoclast, had accomplished as an individual what was later expected from the whole of the people as a final test before being born onto the stage of history.

By way of analogy, when one packs a large suitcase for a long journey, those items that were put in first are the last to be removed when one unpacks. So too, the Jew who throws away everything but still holds tenaciously to these two items is considered to not have unpacked his bags entirely. However, once he has jettisoned Bris Mila and Korban Pesach his bags are emptied from his connection to Jewish history and destiny.

The Chidushei HaRim says that we may infer in the positive direction from the harsh result in the negative. If one is cut off for failing to comply with these two Mitzvos, then 500 times more so one is attached, connected, bonded for their performance.

We should and we should not be surprised that many thousands of Jews from the former Soviet

Union who had failed to receive a Bris when they were younger, chose to have a Bris as an adult. I had the honor of being the Sandek (one who holds the "baby" during the circumcision) twenty-five years ago for a twenty four year old Russian fellow, Yaakov. That was the name he got at that event along with twenty two stitches. I will never forget the intensity and brightness of the smile shining from his face at the meal following the Bris. The joy overrode the discomfort by volumes.

A few years ago we bumped into each other in Brooklyn and he was anxious to share with me an interesting postscript. He had an older brother living in Detroit. His brother was 19 years older. He had been bugging him incessantly for years to get a Bris Mila. His brother claimed that he was working hard and he could not take off three days to get it done. The truth is that he was wed to a certain situation that precluded his attachment or interest in anything Jewish. Yaakov told me his brother came to New York for a week when he, Yaakov, was making a Bar Mitzvah for his son. He urged his brother more than ever because now he was there for a whole week. His brother refused.

It was Chanuka time and one night while witnessing the little children lighting candles, something melted inside and the brother told him, "Let's go do it!" The next morning they were in Monsey with Rabbi Fisher, the same Mohel as for Yaakov. That night at the Bar Mitzvah the brother was dancing with extra exuberance and declaring over and over again, "I feel different! I am a different person!" Yaakov told him, "That's what I told you!" Fast forward and as a postscript to the postscript Yaakov told me his brother called him to tell shortly afterwards, "Perhaps I can find a Jewish lady who can help me keep Kosher and Shabbos." He is now **a connected Jew!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.