

THE COVENANT

by Shlomo Katz

Parshios Tazria & Metzorah

The Covenant

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Near the beginning of this week's parashah, we find the mitzvah of brit milah. About this mitzvah, the Zohar (Lech Lecha 93a, as explained by the commentary Matok Mi'dvash) teaches: Rabbi Abba said: When a person brings his son to be entered into the Covenant, Hashem calls to His entourage and says, "Look at this creation that I created! He does not withhold his offspring; rather, he joyously brings his son to be offered as a korban before Me."

The Zohar continues: At the moment of the brit, Eliyahu comes there, having traversed the world in four strides corresponding to the four letters of the Name Y-K-V-K, to which the brit is connected [see below]. This is why we are taught that one should prepare a second chair, besides the chair on which the sandak sits, for the honor of Eliyahu Hanavi. One must say aloud, "This is the chair of Eliyahu Hanavi," for otherwise Eliyahu will not sit there. The reason is that the spiritual cannot rest on the physical unless one prepares the physical object with the spoken word. After the brit, Eliyahu goes up and testifies before Hashem that Yisrael observes the sign of the Covenant. [Until here from the Zohar]

What is the connection between the Name Y-K-V-K and brit milah? R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania, and a prolific author in all areas of Torah study) explains: Hashem conducts the affairs of His world in two ways. One is analogous to the orderly functioning of a government, where the king issues decrees and delegates their implementation to lower officials [i.e., angels]. The second is the way He brought about the Exodus; disregarding formalities and taking a hands-on approach, so-to-speak. The first is alluded to by the Name "Elokim," while the latter is alluded to by the Name "Y-K-V-K." Hashem does not reveal Himself in this latter way to just anyone. Rather, the Covenant with Avraham, represented by the brit milah, means that Hashem is willing to reveal Himself using the more "hands-on" approach for the benefit of Avraham's descendants. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Yad Mitzrayim)

"On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." (12:3)

Our Sages say that when a baby cries during his brit milah, it is an auspicious time for prayers to be accepted. Why?

R' Shlomo Amar shlita (Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel) explains: We read about Bnei Yisrael who were enslaved in Egypt (Shmot 2:24), "G-d heard their moaning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Yaakov." Moaning is an expression of feelings without using words. When one's pain is too great to express in words, he moans. This is why Hashem responded to Bnei Yisrael's moaning; it showed that the pain of their enslavement had become unbearable.

R' Amar continues: There is another reason why Hashem responds to Bnei Yisrael's moans. G-d made angels whose job is to keep out the prayers of unworthy individuals. However, angels cannot read a person's thoughts. Thus, a moan, a wordless prayer which might be accompanied by thoughts of repentance, cannot be kept from reaching G-d's Throne. This also is why the sound of the shofar is said to confuse the prosecuting angel. The sound of the shofar carries our thoughts to Heaven without words, so the angels whose job is to screen prayers cannot evaluate its worth. When the prosecutor sees that Hashem accepts this "prayer," he becomes flustered and is unable to continue.

Likewise, R' Amar concludes, the wordless cry of a baby at the time he enters the Covenant between Hashem and the Jewish People cannot be prevented from reaching the Throne. With it, it can carry the prayers that those assembled for the brit milah offer at that time. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Mi'yamim Yamimah p.123)

"She shall take two turtledoves or two young doves, one for an olah / burnt-offering and one for a chatat / sin-offering." (12:8)

Rashi z"l writes: The Torah places the olah first only by way of mention, but so far as offering it is concerned, the chatat precedes the olah."

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1784-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) asks: Why, in fact, did the Torah mention the olah first, since it must be offered second? He explains:

An olah is a voluntary offering which is considered a gift, whereas a chatat atones for a sin. The reason that the chatat is offered first is so that the person can be cleansed before bringing his gift (the olah), thus making his gift more appealing.

That applies to actually offering the sacrifices, R' Kluger writes. But, when a person designates animals for his offering, he should designate the olah first. The reason is that an olah, besides being a

gift, also atones for neglecting mitzvot asei / affirmative commandments [for example, missing the proper time for reciting krias shema]. Such neglect is far more prevalent than committing the relatively serious sins for which a chatat must be brought, and the rule is that when one has two mitzvot to do, the more prevalent one should be done first.

This, continues R' Kluger, is why, when we recite korbanot in the morning, the section regarding the olah precedes the section regarding the chatat. Our Sages say that one who studies the laws of a sacrifice is considered to have brought that sacrifice. This does not mean that he is considered to have offered the sacrifice, for how can a non-kohen offer a sacrifice! Rather, he is considered to have designated an animal as a sacrifice. And, as just mentioned, an olah should be designated before a chatat.

What is the purpose of designating sacrifices that we are not deemed to have offered? R' Kluger explains that once we "designate" them by studying their laws, we are deemed to have handed them off to the angel Micha'el, who is considered the Kohen Gadol in Heaven, and he offers them to Hashem. (Sefer Ha'chaim 1:5)

"The kohen shall go forth to the outside of the camp; the kohen shall look, and behold! -- the tzara'at affliction had been healed from the metzora." (14:3)

R' Shmuel d'Ouzida z"l (Tzefat, Eretz Yisrael; late 1500's) writes: It is well known that a patient's mental health has an important effect on his ability to recover from a physical ailment. One might have expected, therefore, that a metzora would not be quarantined outside of the camp all alone, but rather would have been told to remain in the most comfortable surroundings possible. The Torah is teaching, however, that tzara'at is not a physical ailment but rather a physical manifestation of a spiritual illness. The cure for tzara'at is not rest; it is teshuvah. This, explains R' Shmuel, is why our verse says, "the tzara'at affliction had been healed from the metzora." If the tzara'at is healed, it is "from the metzora" himself; because he found the strength within himself to repent. (Midrash Shmuel: Introduction)

"For the person being purified [from tzara'at] there shall be taken two live, kosher birds . . . and the one bird shall be slaughtered . . . he shall set the live bird free upon the open field." (14:4-7)

What is the purpose of taking a bird, only to release it back into the wild? R' Yehoshua Rokeach z"l (1825-1894; second Belzer Rebbe) explains:

The Zohar teaches that the tzara'at is not only a punishment for speaking lashon hara, it also is a punishment for those who, because of excessive humility, do not speak up when they should. A person needs to know that there is a time for silence, but also a time and place for saying what must

be said. This is symbolized by two birds--creatures that have a tendency to chatter. One is slaughtered, symbolizing the need to remain quiet, while the other is released, symbolizing the need to talk. (Sefer MaHaRY)

Letters from our Sages

This letter was written by R' Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky z"l (1899-1985; Bnei Brak, Israel; known as the Steipler Gaon) to a psychologist in Monsey, New York. It is dated during the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah 5732 (1971) and printed in Eitzot Ve'hadrachot p.50.

I received your letter regarding the young man who questions his own emunah / belief in the concept of reward and punishment [for mitzvot and sins]. I have seen this issue a number of times, and my advice is that he not think about the subject at all. Rather, such young men should study Torah and do mitzvot, even if it is only because they are in doubt [whether it is necessary]. There is no "natural" solution for this, only solutions which are "seguli" (i.e., not having an obviously rational explanation). One is to observe Shabbat with precise attention to every detail. This requires studying well the Shulchan Aruch with the Mishnah Berurah until one is expert in them. This study must be with the intent of putting into practice all that is written there. Also, he should not speak idle words on Shabbat except as necessary, and certainly he should not read newspapers or novels on Shabbat; all his time should be devoted to eating, sleeping or studying Torah. In a relatively short time, he will see wonders such that his doubts will not disturb him (although he will not yet have answers). This is a fact, but on the condition that he do this for the sake of Heaven or at least for the sake of improving his emunah. But, if his intention is to relieve his anguish, then it will accomplish very little.

It is tried and true that in this way one can attain pure emunah. This is why our Sages say, "If one observes Shabbat according to halachah, his sins will be forgiven even if they include idolatry." And, denying [the existence of reward and punishment] is similar to idolatry.

Also, he should recite the parashah of the korban tamid every day before shacharit and before minchah. This is based on the fact that an olah [the tamid is an olah] atones for improper thoughts and that studying the laws of a korban is like bringing that korban.

Another tried and true solution--albeit very difficult--is to be humble. If one truly considers himself to be nothing and to be unimportant, and if one subjugates himself to G-d, all doubts evaporate. However, as I said, true humility is difficult to attain.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with

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