

# A SHABBOS BRIS

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We read in our parashah, "On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." The Gemara (Sanhedrin 59b) says that, though this mitzvah was taught earlier in the Torah, it is repeated here to emphasize, "On the eighth day"--even when it falls on Shabbat.

Why does brit milah supersede the prohibitions of Shabbat?

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) explains: Unlike most mitzvot, brit milah and Shabbat both involve an act of self-sacrifice in the present that creates holiness affecting the person's entire future. When a baby is circumcised, he undergoes self-sacrifice--a physical operation--but is instilled with a spirit of kedushah that remains with him for his entire life and that influences his future actions. Likewise, when one observes Shabbat, he undergoes self-sacrifice--refraining from work--but is instilled with a neshamah yeteirah / "extra soul" which makes his Shabbat "m'ein Olam Ha'ba" / "a foretaste of the World-to-Come." Because brit milah thus complements the message of Shabbat, it is permitted on Shabbat.

The Gemara says that mitzvot mentioned in the Torah before the Giving of the Torah and repeated after (e.g., the prohibition on murder; see Bereishit 9:6) apply to both Jews and non-Jews. Why then, does brit milah (which is mentioned in Parashat Lech Lecha and here) not apply to both Jews and non-Jews? The Gemara answers that brit milah does not count as a mitzvah that is mentioned twice because it is repeated here only to teach the detail that it supersedes Shabbat. In light of the above, R' Kook adds, we can say that it is not merely a detail that brit milah supersedes Shabbat. Rather, this fact highlights the very nature of the mitzvah. (Shemuot Ha'Raiyah: Bereishit p.57)

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***"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)

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***"Upon the completion of the days of her purity for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring a sheep . . . This is the law of one who gives birth to a male or to a female. But if she cannot afford a sheep . . ."***  
**(12:6-8)**

R' Avraham Elkanah Kahana-Shapira z"l (1914-2007; rosh yeshiva of Merkaz Harav and Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel) quotes one of the Belzer Rebbes as asking: Why is the phrase "This is the law of one who gives birth" placed between the rich woman's korban and the poor woman's korban? Shouldn't this phrase be the conclusion after all of the childbirth-sacrifices have been described? The answer, said the Rebbe, is that after describing the rich woman's sacrifice, the Torah says, "This is the law of one who gives birth," as if to say: Ideally, this is the way it should be, i.e., all Jews should be financially comfortable. But, if there is a poor woman, she should bring the following sacrifice after giving birth.

R' Shapira adds: This may explain also why Yaakov blessed Yosef (Bereishit 48:20), "Through you shall Yisrael bless [their children] saying, 'May Elokim make you like Ephraim and like Menashe'." Why Ephraim and Menashe, not Reuven, Shimon, Levi, etc.? The answer is that all of Yaakov's sons experienced poverty and deprivation at some point in their lives, for example, in Lavan's house. When a Jew blesses his children, he should bless them with the ideal--that, like Ephraim and Menashe, who were raised as sons of the Egyptian viceroy, they should never know any deprivation. (Imrei Shefer)

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## A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

***"Four men, metzora'im, were outside the gate; each one said to his friend, 'Why are we sitting here until we die?'" (Melachim II 7:3 – from the Haftarah)***

R' Akiva Eiger z"l (1761-1837; leading Talmud commentator and halachic authority; rabbi of Posen, Germany) writes: A wise man asked me why these four men with tzara'at had been expelled from the city of Shomron when the Mishnah states that metzora'im must be expelled only from cities that had been walled at the time of Yehoshua bin Nun, who led Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Canaan. Shomron, in contrast, was a new city built by King Omri, as described in Melachim I (16:24): "Then he bought the mountain of Shomron from Shemer for two loaves of silver, and he built up the mountain, and he called the city that he built after Shemer, the master of the mountain of Shomron."

R' Eiger writes: I answered him that the Aramaic translation of Yonatan ben Uziel avoids this question by translating the quoted verse, "Then he bought the small city of Shomron from Shemer for two loaves of silver, and he built up the small city, and he called the metropolis that he built after Shemer, the master of the mountain of Shomron." In other words, according to Targum Yonatan, Omri did not build a new city, but rather expanded an ancient city that apparently was already walled in the time of Yehoshua bin Nun. (Tosfot R' Akiva Eiger: Masechet Kelim 1:7)

R' Meir Simcha Hakohen z"l (1847-1926; rabbi of Dvinsk, Latvia) offers another answer to the above question. Shomron was the capital of the Kingdom of Yisrael, which had seceded from the Kingdom of Yehuda. In an effort to legitimize their reign, the kings of Yisrael applied to their capital the same laws that applied to Yerushalayim. (Meshech Chochmah)

R' Yehuda Cooperman z"l (1930-2016; founder and dean of Michlalah College for Women in Yerushalayim; editor of an annotated edition of the above-mentioned Meshech Chochmah) offers an additional answer:

Our Sages say that these four men were Gechazi, the former servant of the prophet of Elisha, and Gechazi's three sons. We read earlier in Sefer Melachim that the Assyrian general Na'aman came to Elisha seeking a cure for his leprosy. Elisha cured him and refused to take compensation. Gechazi chased after Na'aman and told him that Elisha had changed his mind, thus obtaining gifts from the general under false pretenses. When Elisha heard about Gechazi's chillul Hashem, he cursed Gechazi (Melachim II 5:27), "Na'aman's leprosy shall therefore cling to you and your children forever!"

Ramban z"l writes that the tzara'at discussed in our parashah is not leprosy or any other medical condition, but rather is the physical manifestation of a spiritual illness. When a person contracted tzara'at, it was because G-d was sending him a message.

Therefore, observes R' Shimon Schwab z"l (1908-1995), there was no public health reason to isolate one who suffers from tzara'at. In contrast, we know that leprosy is considered a very serious public health risk.

Ramban writes further that the tzara'at of our parashah is a manifestation of Hashem's special relationship with the Jewish People. A Jew who has distanced himself from this special relationship may contract tzara'at as a warning. A gentile, like General Na'aman, could never contract tzara'at (as opposed to leprosy).

Thus, concludes R' Cooperman, Gechazi and his sons, who were cursed with "Na'aman's leprosy"--not tzara'at--were a public health risk. That is why they were expelled from Shomron, even if Shomron did not have a wall in the days of Yehoshua bin Nun. (Notes to Meshech Chochmah [4th edition,p.252])

Editor's note:

The preceding discussion appeared in Hamaayan ten years ago this week. At that time, R' Gedaliah Anemer z"l (Rosh Yeshiva of the Yeshiva of Greater Washington and rabbi of Young Israel Shomrai Emunah in Silver Spring, Maryland--the first shul in which Hamaayan was distributed; his seventh yahrzeit was this week) told this writer the following: On Shabbat Parashat Tazria-Metzora in 1951, R' Anemer ate lunch at the home of R' Aizik Ausband z"l (1915-2012; later co-Rosh Yeshiva of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio). At the meal, R' Ausband's then-four year old son, Avrohom (now Rosh Yeshiva of the Yeshiva of Telshe Alumni in Riverdale, N.Y.), asked: How could four metzora'im be sitting together when our parashah says (13:46), "He shall dwell in isolation?" Based on the above explanation, R' Anemer observed, the child's question is answered as well: The four people in our Haftarah had leprosy, not tzara'at, so the verse in our parashah did not apply to them.