

HOW DO YOU SPELL RELIEF: B-R-I-S-A-V-O-S

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Then will I remember My covenant with Ya'akov, My covenant with Yitzchak, and My covenant with Avraham. (Vayikra 26:42)

A full year has gone by and we have read thirty-one parshios. We are now poised to read the thirty-second and thirty-third this Shabbos, the second of which contains the blessings for obedience to Torah, and the curses, G-d forbid, for straying from our Mt. Sinai commitments.

The blessings are awesome and the curses are fearsome. However, whatever direction we take during the course of over three millennia, we have seen both the blessings and the curses, and the end result is the same: redemption. At some point in time it will be the Bris, the covenant G-d made with our ancestors, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, that saves the day, as it always did in the past.

When the time had come to destroy the first Temple in 3338/423 BCE, the Talmud says that G-d had thought to spare the righteous Jews of that generation. However, continues the Talmud, the Attribute of Justice objected, claiming that the lack of effort on their part to bring their wayward brethren back to the ways of Torah made them culpable as well, to which G-d, albeit begrudgingly, consented, as it says:

"Old man, young man and maiden, children and women, shall you slay to complete destruction; but do not approach any man upon whom is the sign. Begin from My Sanctuary!" (Yechezkel 9:6). (Shabbos 55a)

After, the Talmud adds:

Shmuel says: Z'chus Avos (Forefather's Merit) ended . . .

Meaning that, whatever merit our Forefathers built up over the course of their lifetimes of self-sacrifice for G-d, subsequent generations used up.

It is like a father who, during the course of his lifetime develops a respectable name far and wide.

Unfortunately, his children do not follow in his footsteps and constantly find themselves in trouble. Nevertheless, the father's good name constantly redeems them from their troubles, allowing them to escape the kind of punishment that normally would have been meted out to such agitators. For a time, that is.

For, a good name can only protect one's children from the anger and disdain of others for only so long. Eventually the law catches up with such people, and they are judged according to their own merit, which is next to nothing. It is not long before the children find themselves rejected from society and perhaps, even in jail, or in the case of the Children of Israel, left completely at the mercy of the nations of the world.

According to the Talmud, that should have been the case for Klal Yisroel long ago. And, that would have been the case long ago, says Tosfos, had our Forefathers not bequeathed to us something far more valuable than any merits they could have ever built up over their lifetimes:

Rabbeinu Tam says: Zechus Avos ended, but Bris Avos did not, as it says, "Then will I remember My covenant with Ya'akov . . ." (Tosfos, Shabbos 55a, q.v. Shmuel says)

SHABBOS DAY:

If any enemies attack you, G-d will make them flee from you in panic. They may march against you on one road, but they will flee from you in seven directions. (Devarim 28:7)

At first we might have assumed that there is little, if any, difference between Zechus Avos and Bris Avos. Each, it would seem, is something to balance the scales in our favor when necessary over the generations, to shield us from Divine wrath when our own merits cannot. However, according to Rabbeinu Tam, there is a fundamental difference between the two: merits run out; covenants last forever.

To understand (a little) of just how lofty and eternal the covenant Avraham made with G-d is, we have the following:

. . . This is done as a result of Bris Avos, which is in the 620 Amudei Ohr in Keser; there is the sod of Bris Avos and Yisroel, and from there the Torah was given, and this is the 620 letters of the Aseres HaDibros . . . (Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:3:16; Hakdamos v'Sha'arim 44a)

Sounds very Kabbalistic, doesn't it? It is. In fact, it is extremely Kabbalistic, referring to spiritual realities far above anything man can comprehend, at least while in a physical body. Not only is it talking about the Sefiros, the spiritual emanations that filter the light of Ain Sof so creation, and

ultimately free-will can exist. But, it is talking about a place in the Sefiros so high up in the system that we don't even really have permission to speak about it, so we won't.

However, what it means is that the concept of Bris Avos is intimately bound up with the entire purpose of creation, and Torah for that matter. In other words, long before there was even a physical creation, or an Adam HaRishon and the sin he performed to bring about exile from the Garden of Eden making possible a future Jewish nation, there was the concept of Bris Avos. It was and is an imperative of Creation, what G-d had in mind as He began the process that has resulted in the world we now live in.

Therefore, by definition, Bris Avos didn't just happen because Creation came into being. Rather, Creation came into being because there had to be a reality called Bris Avos, and if you think about it, this makes perfect sense.

For, what is Bris Avos but the very symbol of all that Creation came into being to provide: a relationship with the Creator Himself. And not just any relationship, but a relationship with as much intimacy that can exist between a being that is completely spiritual and beyond grasp, and a being that has a physical element to it and a limited spiritual side. It is the sign of an eternal relationship.

As such, it is our ticket to the World-to-Come, since the World-to-Come actually exists on a lower level in the Sefiros than the root of Bris Avos. Thus, when Avraham made the covenant with G-d back in Parashas Lech- Lecha, he didn't just make a deal to have descendants who would later inherit the Land of Israel, but he made a deal to grant himself and all of his descendants an eternal relationship that would eventually transcend this world, forever.

This led to a transformation in the very make-up of the Jew, infusing him with an element of the eternal while he still lives in the temporal. And many who have studied the Jewish people, including some of our worst enemies, have taken note of this, marveled at it, but remained baffled by it, not understanding the concept of Bris Avos and what it means.

Perhaps one of the most obvious places to see Bris Avos at work is during times of redemption, because:

... The beginning of redemption is not possible except from very high up in a place that the actions of men cannot affect - the beginning of the will for all revelations of G-d, and from there redemption from Egypt originated ... (Ibid)

This is because redemptions of the Jewish people usually rely heavily on miracles. We're always out-numbered and under-equipped. Our victories are usually against the odds, and naturally-

speaking, should never happen. And as one American training officer once told a secular, but Zionist Jew, "Son, there is no such thing as Israeli military strategy, because at the end of the day, it is always a miracle that saves them from the enemy." (The cadet, taken aback by this professional gentile soldier's analysis of Israeli survival, took it to heart and eventually became a Ba'al Teshuvah.)

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

I will pass My good in front of you. (Shemos 33:19)

But the victories DO happen and continue to happen because of Divine intervention, intervention that we are learning is the result of an emanation of light from the incredibly high level of Keser, the level that corresponds to the partzuf called Arich Anpin.

Literally, the term means "long face," and it is associated with G-d's patience and deep love for His people that it can only result in mercy, and never Divine judgment or wrath:

... It is above nature and above measure, and it is from the mystery of Bris Avos, which began to be revealed during the redemption from Egypt, and after that, it was made permanent at Har Sinai through Moshe Rabbeinu. (Ibid.)

Until the redemption from Egypt, G-d had never overtly intervened in history to the extent that He did during the Exodus since Creation. Even the Flood could have been dismissed as a freak natural occurrence, and was by many before, during, and after it occurred. This is why Pharaoh had such difficulty taking Moshe Rabbeinu and his demands seriously.

However, when G-d sent the Ten Plagues to overturn Egypt and free the Jews, a new chapter in the history of mankind had been written, as G-d Himself said would be the case:

"I will allow Pharaoh's heart to harden, and then multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt . . . I will put My hand upon Egypt and bring forth My hosts - My people, the Children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. Egypt will know that I am G-d, when I stretch forth My hand against Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from their midst." (Shemos 7:3-5)

However, this high-level spiritual relationship between G-d and the Jewish people did not become "cemented" until He appeared to them at Mt. Sinai, and gave them His Torah. G-d didn't just pass them a book of rules or a contract expressing both His and our part of a bargain. Torah is an aspect of that high-level light, originating from the same high spiritual source as Bris Avos, entrusted into our care so that we can use it to elevate ourselves and the world around us. Thus, the 620 Amudei Ohr refer to the 613 Mitzvos plus the seven rabbinical laws that eventually emerged.

Thus, G-d's answer to Moshe when he had asked G-d to reveal Himself:

I will pass My good in front of you. (Shemos 33:19)

This was in fact a reference to the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, by which we survive and live above nature. And, we make a point of invoking them whenever we require Divine forgiveness, like in Selichos and on Yom Kippur, as we learned from Moshe Rabbeinu. For, when Moshe was on Mt. Sinai begging for forgiveness on behalf of the Jewish people after they allowed the golden calf to be built, G-d revealed a secret to him. He taught Moshe the following words:

Hashem, Hashem, Omnipotent, Merciful and Kind, Slow to Anger, with tremendous [abundance of] kindness and truth. He remembers deeds of love for thousands [of generations], forgiving mistakes, rebellion, and error. He does not clear [the unrepentant], but keeps in mind the mistakes of the fathers to their children and grandchildren, to the third and fourth generation. (Shemos 34:6-8)

These words are called the Thirteen Attributes [The covenant of Milah] (was a made with thirteen covenants; Shabbos 132a), and when invoked have the ability to mitigate Divine judgment and decree. Why? Because it is through these words that we connect to the source of Bris Avos, and draw down upon ourselves its supernatural light. And,

All of this is because the mystery of Bris Avos is in the Ohr HaGanuz. (Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:3:16; Hakdamos v'Sha'arim 44a)

We already know that the Original Light of Creation, mentioned in the third verse of the Torah, was hidden in Creation. But where is it actually hidden in Creation? The answer: in the same source from which Bris Avos emanates, and thus invoking the Thirteen Attributes means invoking Bris Avos, and to access the Hidden Light of creation. No wonder it says:

In the merit of Bris Avos the world survives. (Ibid.)

MELAVE MALKAH:

Therefore, Zechus Avos is a merit based on the actions of the Avos. In their merit, G-d did favors for their children who have lacked sufficient merit of their own. However, the Avos did not live forever and the zechus, as the Talmud points out, had a limit. Were it not for Bris Avos, G-d would have turned His back on us long ago; there simply would not have been the miracles necessary to survive.

Instead, He is forever committed to us, forever involved in our affairs, as indicated in the Torah:

He [G-d] said to him [Avraham], "Take a three-year-old female calf, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon." He took all of these, and he split them in the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other half. However, the birds he didn't divide. (Bereishis 15:9-10)

Because other nations are compared to bulls, rams, and goats . . . whereas Israel is compared to young doves . . . He therefore divided the animals indicating that other nations will eventually perish. However, the birds he didn't divide, indicating that the Jewish people would live forever. (Pirkei d'Rebi Eliezer 28)

Thus, by necessity, even a curse:

I will heap My evils upon them, and expend My arrows on them. (Devarim 32:23)

And it also implies a blessing: My arrows will end, but they (the Jewish nation) will never end. (Rashi, Devarim 32:23)

And, this is confirmed elsewhere in the Talmud:

Rebi Yitzchak said: At the time of the destruction of the Temple, The Holy One, Blessed is He, found Avraham standing in the Temple. He said to Avraham, " 'What is My beloved doing in My house?' (Yirmiyahu 11:15)?"

Avraham answered, "I came to inquire about my children."

"Your children have sinned and were therefore exiled," explained G-d.

Thus, Avraham pleaded before G-d, "Maybe they sinned accidentally?"

Whereupon G-d replied, "'Seeing she has acted lewdly' (Ibid.)"

"But perhaps only a minority sinned," Avraham argues.

To which G-d responds, " 'With many . . .' (ibid.)"

"Still, you should have remembered Bris Milah!" Avraham pleads further.

But G-d responds, " 'The holy flesh has passed from you . . .' (ibid.)"

"Perhaps if You had waited they would have done teshuvah."

"When you do evil, then you rejoice.' (ibid.)"

Immediately, Avraham raised his hand over his head and began to weep, and lamented, "G-d forbid they will never be forgiven!"

Whereupon a Heavenly Voice said, "A leafy olive tree, fair with good fruit, the L-rd called your name.' (ibid.)"

In other words, just as the olive gives the best of its fruit at its oldest age, so too will Israel flourish at its very oldest age. (Menachos 53b)

Thus, the reality of Bris Avos and Bris Milah is that they are more than just agreements between G-d and the Jewish people. They are spiritual channels to access an extremely high level of Divine Light, capable of superseding the laws of nature and resulting in spectacular miracles. Some of these miracles were witnessed during the redemption from Egypt; most have yet to be seen, and according to tradition, won't be seen until the days of Moshiach and the Final Redemption, may it happen in our time.

Thus, in the posuk with which we began:

Then will I remember My covenant with Ya'akov, My covenant with Yitzchak, and My covenant with Avraham. (Vayikra 26:42)

Ya'akov is written: Yud-Ayin-Kuf-VAV-Bais, even though normally the Vav is left out. Rashi explains:

It is written in full in five places, and the name Eliyahu is written defectively (i.e., without the final Vav: Aleph-Lamed-Yud-Heh); Ya'akov took the letter from the name of Eliyahu as a pledge that he (Eliyahu) would come in the future and announce the redemption for his descendants. (Rashi)

And, the letter Vav always alludes to the trait of Yesod, the sefirah that governs this sixth and final millennium, during which the redemption must come. And, Yesod, spelled Yud-Samech-Vav-Dalet, stands for Yud-Sod, where the Yud alludes to the sefirah of Chochmah and Sod means mystery, or Kabbalah (Mesechta Atzilus), another allusion to how redemption, especially the final one, will be completely above the boundaries of natural Creation.

CHAZAK!

Have a great Shabbos,
PW Text

Copyright © by [Rabbi Pinchas Winston](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! www.thirtysix.org