

THE PERFECT COVENANT (PART 1)

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d appeared to [Avraham] at the Oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. (Bereishis 18:1)

Avraham was recovering from the Bris Milah he had just performed on himself. So, we are not finished with the topic of Bris Milah yet. How could we be, when it is so central to everything Jewish, especially the Geulah Shlaimah (Final Redemption)? We are in the final millennium of Yesod, the very symbol of Bris Milah, so close to the moment in time when the Atarah takes over, the essence of Bris Milah, ushering in Yemos HaMoshiach.

Thus, to better understand Bris Milah is to better understand the trials and tribulations of our generation, and how to survive them. As we saw last week in the name of the Holy Zohar, the upholding of Bris Milah counts more towards righteousness than most assume. Like living in Eretz Yisroel, to which Bris Milah is very closely related, it is the one mitzvah that incorporates all of the mitzvos, AND it makes closeness to G-d more possible, which is the goal of ALL of the mitzvos.

In the Talmud, Bris Milah is spoken about many times, but it is spoken about quite extensively in Tractate Nedarim (31b), beginning with the Mishnah:

Rebi Yishmael said, "Great is Milah, since thirteen covenants were made with respect to it."

Rebi Yosi said, "Great is Milah because it overrides the severity of Shabbat."

Rebi Yehoshua ben Karchah said, "Great is Milah, for which a complete hour was not suspended for the righteous Moshe."

Rebi Nechemiah said, "Great is Milah for it pushes over tzara'as."

Rebi said, "Great is Milah, for of all the mitzvos Avraham Avinu performed, it was for this one that he was called complete . . . and without which The Holy One, Blessed is He, would not have created His world."

The Talmud, as usual, elaborates:

It was taught: Rebi Yehoshua ben Karchah said, "Great is Milah, for all the meritorious deeds performed by Moshe, our teacher, did not stand him in stead when he displayed apathy towards circumcision, as it is written, 'And G-d met him, and sought to kill him' (Shemos 4:24)." Rebi Yosi said, "G-d forbid that Moshe should have been apathetic towards circumcision. Rather, he thought, 'If I circumcise [my son] and [immediately] go [on my mission], I will endanger his life, as it says [regarding the people of Shechem], "On the third day when they were sore..." (Bereishis 34:25). 'I could circumcise him and wait three days,' but G-d commanded: "Go, return unto Egypt" (Shemos 4:19). So why then was Moshe punished? Because he busied himself first with the inn as it says, "And it came to pass by the way, in the inn..." (Shemos 4:24)."

Just Imagine. Millions of Jews were suffering in Egypt, waiting for a redeemer and there was one who was on his way at that very time. However, he almost didn't make it because he pushed off the mitzvah of Bris Milah for less than an hour of time for a more menial task. It is definitely worth being on time for a Bris, even if you are not the mohel or the father of the baby. Something very special happens at the time of Bris Milah, and you don't want to miss it because of some mundane distraction.

SHABBOS DAY:

Behold the blood of the covenant, which G-d has made with you concerning all these words. (Shemos 24:8)

It was taught: Rebi said, "Great is Milah, for it counterbalances all the [other] precepts of the Torah, as it is written, 'According to these words' (Shemos 34:33) . . ."

This does not mean that one can expect the same reward in Heaven as if he has performed all the other mitzvos by only performing Bris Milah. Reward in Olam HaBah, as the Mishnah teaches, is based upon one's effort in this world in performing as many mitzvos as possible, with the best of intention. Then what does Rebi mean?

It means that all of the mitzvos come to do one thing: Open up the channels between G-d and man. Every mitzvah does this, but some do it better than others. Some remove the spiritual barriers that stand between us and G-d better than others, and Rebi is saying that, comparatively-speaking, Bris Milah does it to an extent that it would take all the other 612 mitzvos to work together to accomplish.

That is quite a statement, because there are some heavy-weight mitzvos in the other 612, a very long list, including love and fear of G-d. However, Rebi is saying, "Are such mitzvos really possible

without first removing the spiritual interposition that blocks the light of G-d from reaching our hearts?" In a very real reasonable sense, it is Bris Milah that makes possible the acceptance of and the performance of all the other mitzvos, which is why it is performed on a baby long before the other mitzvos become relevant. The Talmud's conclusion makes this clear:

Rav Ammi bar Abba also said: "Avraham was three years old when he acknowledged the Creator, as it says, 'Because (Ayin-Kuf-Bais) that Avraham obeyed My voice' (Bereishis 16:5): The numerical value of which is one hundred seventy-two." Rav Ammi bar Abba also said: "The numerical value of ha-satan is three hundred sixty-four."

This shows that the yetzer hara works 364 days a year, getting a day off only once a year on Yom Kippur.

Rav Ammi bar Abba also said: "[First] Avram is written, then Avraham: At first G-d gave him mastery over two hundred forty-three limbs, and later over two hundred forty-eight, the additional ones being the two eyes, two ears, and the place of Milah."

Thus, a Heh, which represents the number five, was added to Avraham's name. This is the same Heh spoken about regarding the word, "behibaram" (Bereishis 2:4), and therefore the same Heh with which this world was created, as the Talmud says (Menachos 29b), and the source of teshuvah. In fact, as the Zohar says, it is the final Heh of G-d's Four-Letter Ineffable Name, which must be attached to Yesod to receive the light of G-d and rectify Creation.

Rav Ammi bar Abba also said: "What is the meaning of, 'There is a little city, etc.' (Koheles 9:14)?"

'A little city' refers to the body;

'a few men within' to the limbs;

'and there came a great king against it and besieged [it]' to the yetzer hara;

'and built great bulwarks against it,' to sin;

'Now, a poor wise man was found within in,' to the yetzer tov;

'and he saved the city by his wisdom,' to repentance and good deeds;

'yet no man remembered that poor man,' for when the yetzer hara gains control, none remember the yetzer tov.

'Wisdom gives more strength to the wise man than ten rulers of the city' (Koheles 7:19)

'Wisdom gives more strength to the wise man,' refers to repentance and good deeds;

'than ten rulers of the city,' to the two eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet, membrum, and the mouth.

And, as the Zohar says, it is that wisdom, the wisdom that flows from the Yesod down to the Malchus, from the Vav to the Heh, that empowers the Jew to be a ruler in his own home, and a king in his own city.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

He [G-d] has said, "Because the hand is upon the Throne of G-d it is a war for G-d with Amalek in each generation." (Shemos 17:16)

We began by quoting:

Rebi Yishmael said, "Great is Milah, since thirteen covenants were made with respect to it."

What are the thirteen covenants to which this statement refers? In the posuk dealing with G-d's command to Avraham to circumcise himself, the word "covenant" occurs thirteen times. However, is there not a big difference between the usage of the word and thirteen separate agreements between G-d and Avraham based upon Bris Milah?

In this case, not exactly. Otherwise, Rebi Yishmael should have been more specific and said, "Great is Milah, since the word covenant was used thirteen times with respect to it." However, he did not say that, implying that each time the word was used, it represented another covenant between G-d and Avraham. What does that mean?

At the end of the parshah, is the account of the Akeidah. According to the Midrash, which Rashi brings down, one of the reasons for the Akeidah was a disagreement between Yitzchak and Yishmael. Apparently, Yishmael claimed superiority over Yitzchak, since he had to undergo Bris Milah as a young adult and suffer the pain, whereas Yitzchak was only an eight-day old baby at the time.

How old was Yishmael at the time of his bris? Thirteen years old, and to this very day, Arabs circumcise their sons at the age of 13. Yitzchak's response was: That is just one part of the body; if G-d asked me for my entire body, I would give it to Him gladly, and so He did.

Thus, in spite of all the other important things the Akeidah was meant to signify, it also signified the

extension of the commitment of Bris Milah to the entire body of the Jew. And, it represents the ability to go beyond any spiritual effect that the bris of Yishmael may have had, one of which has been the Arab's ability to not only conquer and live in Eretz Yisroel, but to even occupy and build on the Temple Mount something the Zohar says is only meant to last 1300 years, one hundred years for each year of Yishmael's life for his bris.

Hence, each of the 13 covenants is another layer of kedushah added to the essential mitzvah of Bris Milah in order to counteract the levels of spiritual impurity fighting against us, and over the Land of Israel. But, if it is 13 versus 13, then how can we win?

The answer is a combination of two parshios, Lech-Lecha and Beshallah. In Lech-Lecha, it says:

When Avram was ninety-nine years old, G-d appeared to Avram and said to him, "I am E"l Shadd"ai; walk before Me and be perfect." (Bereishis 17:1)

And in Beshallah, it says:

He [G-d] has said, "Because the hand is upon the Throne of G-d it is a war for G-d with Amalek in each generation." (Shemos 17:16)

It is here that the dye has been cast.

MELAVE MALKAH:

We'd like to believe that we are able to do everything necessary to bring the world to its final level of tikun (rectification). However, judging from the situation of the world as it presently stands, such a miracle is beyond our means, making us totally dependent upon G-d to end history and rid the world of evil. The truth is that our Holy Books, long before today became the present, taught us this reality.

From the posuk above, it seems as if Amalek can only be defeated by G-d. G-d has declared war against Amalek throughout the generations, and He did not pin that responsibility on us. Obviously, we have to contribute to the campaign whatever we can, but success is in the hands, or I should say HAND of G-d.

Indeed, the gematria of the hand (Yud-Dalet) that is upon G-d's throne is 14, or "dye (Dalet-Yud)" which also means "enough." Hence, the Name mentioned with respect to Bris Milah is Shadd"ai, which means, literally, "that it is enough." As we learn from Ya'akov Avinu in Parashas Mikeitz, it is the Name of G-d that alludes to spiritual limits, including the level to which the Light of Ain Sof

descended into the Challal the spiritual void that resulted from the initial tzimtzum, that is, constriction of the Light of Ain Sof, to make Creation.

By not descending to the bottom of Creation, G-d left room for evil to exist in order to make good AND evil possible, and to therefore create free-choice. It is these bottom 14 levels that gave rise to Amalek and support his existence. It is our role to try and draw the Light of Ain Sof to the bottom of these 14 levels, and to completely eradicate evil.

However, Bris Milah only allows us to draw that light down to 13 of those 14 bottom levels, greatly weakening the forces of evil, but not eliminating them. For, that is something G-d has reserved for Himself, just as it was He who redeemed the Jewish people from Egypt, and no one else. This way, He allows us to become partners with Him in Creation, while at the same time leaving room to show us the depth to which He is prepared to go for the sake of His beloved people.

However, that 14th level is built upon the thirteen levels that we perfect first, a power we gain through the 13 covenants associated with Bris Milah, which also helps to invoke the 13 Traits of Mercy, to help us do our job. And only then, can the redemption become complete, because the covenant associated with Bris Milah becomes fully executed. This is what G-d means when He says He will circumcise our hearts at the End-of-Days, when Eretz Yisroel will also be free from the grasp of other nations, and the Name of G-d will be One in the minds and mouths of all the nations.

Have a great Shabbos,
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