

## פרשת וירא

This week's Parasha begins with Hashem appearing to Avraham Avinu, as he was recovering from his Berit Milah.

The Gemarah Yoma 28<sup>b</sup> states, that Avraham Avinu observed every Misvah in the Torah. Avraham Avinu even observed the Misvot from the Rabbis such as Eiruvei Tavshilin (preparing food for Shabbat before a holiday begins).

If Avraham Avinu kept every Misvah in the Torah, why did he wait until Hashem commanded him to perform the Berit Milah? Why not do it earlier? It wasn't until he was 99 years old that he was commanded regarding the performance of the Berit Milah. Surely Avraham knew of this Misvah, what is the reason that he waited until he was commanded by Hashem?

One answer is that there is a rule "גדול מצוה ועושה יותר משאינו מצוה ועושה"- "greater is the one who was commanded and performs more than one is *not* commanded and performs". A person has an inborn nature *not* to take orders from others. It is therefore more difficult to *fulfill* a command, than to act on one's own accord. The Misvah of Berit Milah is a once in a lifetime Misvah, unlike other Misvot that can be repeated. Avraham Avinu knew that a commandment for the Berit Milah would be forthcoming; he therefore waited until he would be commanded to do so, in order to perform the Misvah as someone commanded to do it, and in this way his Misvah would be considered even greater.

The Shela Hakadosh answers that when the Gemarah says that Avraham fulfilled all of the Misvot, it meant that he fulfilled them only AFTER his Berit Mila. It was only then that he observed all the Misvot.

Another explanation is that there is a rule that one is not permitted to injure or wound himself unnecessarily. Until Avraham Avinu was commanded to perform the Berit Milah, the act of circumcision was considered wounding one's body. Once Hashem commanded Avraham Avinu to perform the Berit Milah, it became a Misvah and was no longer categorized as "wounding one's body unnecessarily".

Another explanation can be seen from a story in the Gemarah about Rabbi Akivah and Turnus Rufus. Turnus Rufus once asked R' Akivah; which is greater, what Hashem does or what man does? What Hashem does; answered R' Akivah. If so, asked Turnus, why do you take a baby, which is the creation of Hashem, and perform a circumcision on it? By doing so you are showing that Hashem's creation is incomplete and it is *we* that have to perfect and finalize it?? Let me explain; said R' Akivah. Just as you can understand that when a stalk of wheat emerges from the ground it is incomplete, it needs to be processed in many different ways until it is in its edible form of bread to be eaten. The reason for this is that Hashem sometimes creates certain things expecting man to complete them, so too the human body, Hashem left it to man to complete his creation.

We see that performing the Berit Milah completes the body which is the handiwork of Hashem. However, for Avraham to perform the Berit Milah before being commanded would be implying to Hashem that his work was incomplete! This would be a great disrespect to Hashem. It is only *after* Hashem had instructed us to complete his work, are we able to perform the Berit Milah. It is for this reason that Avraham Avinu needed to wait until he was commanded, for otherwise this would be considered disrespectful to Hashem by implying that his creation was incomplete.

Another explanation is from R' Levi Yishak Miberdidtchov, who explains that all of Avraham Avinu's limbs were holy and they were "connected" to the Misvot of Hashem. This enabled him to understand what the Misvot were that needed to be done, *even before* the Torah was given. His limbs "automatically" moved him to do the acts of the Misvot (with this concept Hacham Baruch A'h answered a question. Avraham was visited by Hashem, and when he saw the three angels he asked Hashem to excuse him so that he can tend to the guests. It says that from here we learn that גמילות חסד is even *greater* than accepting the presence of Hashem! Hacham Baruch A'h asked; this is how **we** know it, but how did *Avraham Avinu* know that this was the rule?! Who taught him that taking care of guests was more important than being with Hashem?! He answered that Avraham felt his legs suddenly "getting up" to run towards the guests, and from this he understood that it was the proper thing to leave the presence of Hashem in order to help the guests).

All of Avraham Avinu's limbs had "clear reception" to the will of Hashem and his Misvot. There was only one exception; the Berit Milah. This blocked his "spiritual transmission" to perceive exactly what the Misvah was that needed to be done with that part of the body and it is for *this* reason, that he did not know about the Misvah of Berit Milah before he was commanded.

Another answer given is based upon the opinion of the Rambam (Maimonides) and Ramban (Nachmonides). The Rambam explains the reason for the Misvah of Berit Milah. A man is created with lust and passions. The purpose of the Berit Milah is to “curb” these lusts and help a Jew overcome these desires. The Ramban however, argues and says that the Berit Milah is a sign in our skin. It is like a “stamp of Hashem” that we place on our bodies. Like it says in the blessing of the Berit Milah **אשר חתמת** "בבשרינו"-the Berit is a “seal of Hashem” upon our skin. Whether a person has desires or not, he needs the Berit Milah on his body.

Avraham Avinu first understood like the Rambam - that the reason for the Berit Milah was to control the lust. We see from various instances that Avraham Avinu had no lust whatsoever! (Ex; when Avraham said to Sarah “now I know you are beautiful”, until that point he had not even gazed upon her beauty!) For this reason Avraham Avinu felt that the Berit Milah was unnecessary for him. There was no desire that the Berit Milah needed to curb! Eventually, Hashem introduced to him the reason of the Ramban, that it was a seal of Hashem, notwithstanding any physical desires. It was only then that Avraham was taught this additional understanding in the purpose of the Berit Milah and realized that it applied to him as well!

Another answer is based upon the explanation of the Sforno. The Sforno says that "וירא אליו ה'"-(the opening incident of the Parasha when Hashem appeared to Avraham Avinu) transpired on the *day of* the Berit Milah (other commentaries understand it to be the **third** day after the Berit Milah). The Pasuk is telling us that Hashem came down to the Berit Milah of Avraham Avinu. Hashem does the same for the Berit Milah of every single Jew!

The idea behind Hashem “descending” for the Berit Milah is that the very nature of the Berit Milah is that it is a covenant between us and Hashem. We make a “treaty” to be loyal with Hashem and by its very nature, a treaty requires two parties. It is in order to make this “deal” with us that Hashem comes to every Berit Milah. The Sforno explains that it is for this reason that we place an empty chair next to the Sandak, in order to show Hashem’s involvement in the treaty we are about to forge with Him! It is like a business agreement, where two parties sit next to each other and agree on a deal.

Naturally, we are unable to make a treaty without Hashem being “ready” to make a treaty with us. It is because of this, that Avraham Avinu needed to wait until he was told to perform a Berit Milah. What good would it have been for Avraham to perform the covenant and treaty by himself, without Hashem being ready to forge it with him?!

Avraham Avinu therefore waited until he was told by Hashem that the time had come for this Misvah, and he was ready to make a covenant with him. (When Hashem came to Avraham Avinu's Berit he actually **helped** Avraham perform the Berit Milah upon himself. Avraham Avinu was 99 years old and his hand began to shake! Hashem "took hold" of that hand of Avraham Avinu, steadied it, and helped him with the act of circumcision. This is what is meant in the ויברך דוד portion of Shahrarit, when we say "וכרות עמו הברית", he forged the covenant *with him*. The act of the Berit Milah was done by Hashem together with Avraham Avinu).

Some commentaries explain that Hashem sends down an agent to "consummate the deal". Who is the agent of Hashem? It is Eliyahu Hanavi. Eliyahu Hanavi comes down as Hashem's "representative" to forge the treaty of the Berit Milah with every Jew. This is why we have the כסה אליהו by every Berit Milah.

How did it come about that Eliyahu Hanavi was given the responsibility to represent Hashem by every Berit Milah? This was actually a sort of punishment on account of an incident in the Neviim (מלאכים א'). There was a period in time when the Jews had been worshipping idols, Eliyahu said to Hashem in zealousness; "the Jewish people have forsaken the covenant"! Hashem answered Eliyahu; "I need my prophets to *advocate* for my people, not prosecute against them"! It was then that Eliyahu was given the task of attending every Berit Milah that would take place afterwards, and report back to Hashem that the Jews indeed are "keeping the covenant".

The question is asked, why is it considered a "punishment" for Eliyahu Hanavi to have to attend every Berit Milah? It seems as if this should be a reward?! One explanation is the connection between the פה-(mouth) and the מילה. Both are numerically 85. A spiritual deficiency in one, is linked to a deficiency in the other. When Eliyahu Hanavi spoke negatively against the Jews, this necessitated a rectification for his mouth-פה. This is hinted to in the Pasuk when Hashem told Eliyahu "מה לך פה" (lit;"what are you doing here"?), the word פה=85. Hashem was showing him what he now needed to rectify. For this reason he was given the task of attending the Berit Milah of the Jews since as mentioned, the Milah and mouth are spiritually related and this would rectify what Eliyahu said.

Another reason why it was considered a punishment is that in Olam Haba the Sadikim are learning Torah. Eliyahu Hanavi is of course among them learning. Having to stop study Torah in order to come to this world for a Berit Milah, causes Eliyahu to miss the novel Torah concepts taught in Olam Haba, and is therefore considered a punishment for him.

Another reason is that many times, there are multiple Berit Milah's occurring simultaneously. How does Eliyahu attend all of them at the same time?? The Zohar explains that the Neshama of Eliyahu Hanavi is forced to “split up” in order to be at all the Berit Milah's at the same time. This is a צער (spiritual pain) for the Neshama. This is alluded to in the Pasuk in Parashat Pinhas, which speaks of Pinhas (Eliyahu) הַנְּבִי נֹתֵן "הנני נותן" "behold, I give to him my covenant of peace", the ו' in the word שלום is a broken Vav. It is written in the Torah as a half Vav, missing its lower half. This is an allusion to the fact that the Neshama of Eliyahu Hanavi is forced to sometimes “split” in order to attend multiple Berit Milah.

Eliyahu Hanavi represents Hashem in the treaty of the Berit Milah. There is another treaty in the Torah and that is the Shabbat. The Pasuk says about Shabbat; "וְיָמֵינוּ וְיָמֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת" "it is a sign of the covenant between me and you". If the Shabbat is a covenant between us and Hashem, and as mentioned a covenant needs two parties, who is Hashem's representative by the treaty of Shabbat?! It is the נִשְׁמָה יְתֵרָה-the “extra Neshama” that we are blessed with at the onset of Shabbat. It is this Neshama that represents Hashem in this covenant between us and him every Shabbat!

**"וירא אליו ה' באלני ממרא"**

**“And Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamreh”**

Rashi explains "הוא שנתן עצה על המילה"- it was Mamreh that gave Avraham Avinu advice regarding the Milah. Therefore Hashem appeared to him in the area of Mamreh.

Avraham Avinu had three close friends ענר, אשכול, ממרא. He had asked all three what they thought of Hashem's command of the Berit Milah. ענר answered “don't do it”, it will cause you a lot of pain and it is forbidden to cause oneself pain, ענר's name stands for עֲנִי נֶפֶשׁ רָע (afflicting oneself is evil). אשכול also responded “don't do it”. His logic was that Avraham Avinu had many enemies and if he were to perform the Berit Milah, this would weaken him and make him vulnerable to attack from his enemies. אשכול's name stands for אָחִים שׁוֹנְאִים כְּבָרִים לְךָ (my brother, you have mighty enemies). ממרא advised Avraham Avinu to perform the Milah, ממרא stands for מֵל מְהֵרָ בְּפֶאֶךְ אֶל-ל (circumcise quickly, Hashem will heal).

What exactly was Avraham Avinu asking them? He had been instructed directly by Hashem to do this Misvah, what was there to talk about?! Avraham obviously could

not have been asking if he should do it or not! What then was his question?? There are many explanations given from the commentaries as to what he was asking. We will discuss one of them.

There are 10 Sefirot (lit; levels or filters) in spirituality. The highest of the ten is כתר and the lowest of them is מלכות. When a baby is born he is on the spiritual level of מלכות. Each day that goes by the baby ascends one Sefirah (meaning he attains the spiritual capacity to accept the holiness of that Sefirah). By the time the eighth day comes he is on the level of בינה (the third highest Sefirah). It was in regards to these spiritual ascensions that Avraham Avinu was asking Mamreh. Avraham Avinu was commanded to do the Berit Milah; his question was, should he wait eight days from the day of the commandment, or do the Berit immediately? Perhaps he needed eight days to elevate himself the eight Sefirot to בינה before he did the Berit Milah?! Mamreh pointed out to Avraham Avinu that he had already reached all the high spiritual levels of all the Sefirot and was therefore no need to wait before he did the Berit Milah. This is hinted in the words of Rashi. Rashi says "שנתן עצה על המילה" - he gave the עצה-(advice) regarding the Berit Milah. The word עצה is synonymous with בינה (understanding). [Some of the Sefirot are synonymous with other words or ideas (example; מלכות is synonymous with א-דני, this is why we begin the Amidah with the words א-דני שפתי תפתח, we open the Amidah from מלכות and we work our way up)]. Rashi was hinting to the advice of ממרא regarding the Sefirah of בינה.

It is based on this concept that it is brought down from the בני יששכר and the מהר"ש that one should make a Seudah on the third day after the Berit Milah. This feast should be **even greater** than the Seudah of the Berit Milah itself! They explain, that the origin to make a Seudah on the day of the Berit Milah is from the Pasuk that says Avraham Avinu made a feast "ביום הגמל את יצחק" - the word הגמל is broken up to read הג-מל =8 and מל means Milah. Showing us that Avraham Avinu made a feast on the 8<sup>th</sup> day - the day he circumcised his son. This is only *hinted* to in the Pasuk, however the third day after the Milah was the day that Avraham Avinu (according to this opinion) served the 3 angels and made them a feast! We see clearly that Avraham made a feast on this day.

The reason for this Seudah is that on the third day after the Berit Milah, the child obtains the spiritual capabilities to connect with the Sefirah of כתר - the highest of all the Sefirot! This is indeed a cause for great celebration!

The ten Sefirot are connected to:

- The ten tests of Avraham Avinu
- The ten plagues
- The ten Commandments
- The ten utterances that the world was created with

The tenth plague was מכת בכורות and the tenth test of Avraham Avinu was to sacrifice his *first born*. The tenth utterance was ויאמר יהוה אלהים לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו which was for Adam to marry (in order to have children). This was the test of Avraham Avinu, to take *his* child and sacrifice him to Hashem. The tenth commandment is לא תחמד (“do not be jealous”), this is what the Satan tried to test Yishak Avinu with when he was about to be slaughtered. He told Yishak: “Your mother prepared so much jewelry for your bride!” “Now Yishmael will get everything!” Yishak of course, was unfazed.

We see the connection between the tenth of various different holy things. Our Parasha begins with the story of Avraham Avinu with the angels which took place on the third day after the Berit Mila day which is the day of כתר- the tenth day, and it ends with the tenth test of Avraham- the Akeidat Yishak.

The torah- in the form of the second Luchos- was brought down by Moshe Rabeinu on the tenth day of תשרי, the day of Yom Kippur! That was the day the Jews received the כתר תורה (crown of Torah). כתר corresponding to the tenth Sefirah of כתר!

We learn from all this how special and holy the Misvah of Berit Milah is! It is the covenant that connects us to Hashem, a seal of Hashem in our bodies, and the bond that keeps us forever close to him. It is done on the eighth day of life, the day of בינה, the day symbolizing things that are “above nature”. It is part of the process to the babies’ spiritual ascension to the ability to reach the highest Sefirot! It is incumbent upon us to guard this holy covenant. May we merit to guard our Berit Kodesh, and to keep it pure in order to enjoy all the benefits of being connected to our creator!