



The Dispute between Shabbas and Milah as to Who Is Greater

Shabbas Was Given on the Seventh Day to Improve Nature Milah Was Given on the Eighth Day to Rise Above Nature

This week's parsha is parshas Sazria. It is fitting that we focus on the opening pesukim of the parsha (Vayikra 12, 1): **”וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, דבר אל בני ישראל לאמר אשה כי תזריע וילדה זכר וטמאה שבעת ימים כימי גדת דוותה תטמא, וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו.”** Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: **Speak to Bnei Yisrael, saying: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be impure for a seven-day period, as during the days of her menstrual infirmity shall she be impure. On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.** We will endeavor to explain the reason HKB”H chose to juxtapose these three items: (1) The birth of a male child, (2) the seven-day tumah period for a woman after childbirth, and (3) performing the mitzvah of milah on the eighth day.

Additionally, it is worth noting the question posed by the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh: Why does the Torah insert the mitzvah of milah—**“on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised”**—in the middle of the laws pertaining to childbirth. After all, HKB”H already gave the mitzvah of milah to Avraham Avinu in parshas Lech Lecha. Albeit a new halachah pertaining to milah is learned from the passuk here (Shabbas 132a): **”וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו, ביום אפילו בשבת”**—that the mitzvah of milah preempts Shabbas. Even so, why was this chiddush taught here rather than in parshas Lech Lecha?

The Ohr HaChaim hakadosh suggests that had the Torah informed us of this in parshas Lech Lecha, we might have thought that this only applied to Avraham and his descendants who lived prior to Matan

Torah—before Yisrael were commanded to observe the Shabbas. But after Matan Torah, Yisrael were admonished (Shemos 31, 14): **”ושמרתם את השבת כי קודש הוא לכם מחלליה מות יומת”**—**you shall observe the Shabbas, for it is holy to you; those who profane it shall be put to death.** Thus, we might have concluded that milah does not override Shabbas. Therefore, the Torah informs us here that the mitzvah of milah does indeed override Shabbas.

Nevertheless, this still does not really answer the question. After all, the Torah was given to Yisrael many parshas earlier, in parshas Yisro. So, why did the Torah wait specifically until parshas Sazria, when dealing with the laws of childbirth, to teach us that the mitzvah of milah overrides Shabbas.

Which Is Greater: Milah or Shabbas?

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing an exposition in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Sazria 547): **“On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.” This is the implication of the passuk (Koheles 11, 2): “Distribute portions to seven or even to eight” . . . “Distribute portions to seven,” this refers to the seven days of Shabbas (the days of the week); “or even to eight,” this refers to the eight days of milah.** This profound statement by the wisest of all men is enigmatic. What portions should be distributed to the seven days of the week, and what portions should be distributed to the eight days of milah?

To unravel this enigma, let us introduce another fascinating Midrash (ibid. Yirmiyah 321):

”אתה מוצא השבת והמילה מדיינים זה עם זה, השבת אומר אני גדולה ממך, שבו שבת ממלאכת עולמו, שנאמר וישבות ביום השביעי. אמרה המילה אני גדולה ממך, שאלמלא אני לא נברא העולם, שנאמר אם לא בריתי יומם ולילה חוקות שמים וארץ לא שמת.”

אמר רבי יהודה בר שלום, משל לשתי מטרונות שהיו עומדות, ולא היה אדם יודע ליתן לב להפריש איזו גדולה מחברתה, כיון שהעביר אחת מלפני חברתה, ידעו הכל שאותה שעברה מלפני חברתה היא הקטנה, כך ממה שאנו יודעים שהמילה דוחה שבת, אנו יודעים שהמילה גדולה מן השבת.”

Shabbas and milah were arguing with each other. Each claimed that it was greater. Shabbas argued that it is greater, since HKB”H abstained from the work of creation on the seventh day (Bereishis 2, 2). Milah contended that it is greater, since the world would not have been created if not for it, as it states (Yirmiyah 33, 25): **“If not for My covenant of day and night, I would not have established the statutes of heaven and earth.”**

Rabbi Yehudah bar Shalom said: This is analogous to two matrons, and people could not discern which of the two was greater. When one of them went forward before the other, everyone understood that the other was the less important of the two. Similarly, from the fact that milah overrides Shabbas, we know that milah is greater than Shabbas.

Let us clarify the puzzling words of our sages. What lesson are we to learn from this dispute between Shabbas and milah? Furthermore, Shabbas was surely aware that the mitzvah of milah takes precedence. So, how could she have persisted that she is greater than milah by arguing that HKB”H ceased His work of creation on Shabbas?

To explain the matter, we will now introduce another Midrash with an apparent contradiction as to which is greater—milah or Shabbas. The Midrash (V.R. 27, 10) expounds on the passuk (Vayikra 22, 27): **”שור או כשב או עז כי יולד והיה שבעת ימים תחת אמו ומיום השמיני והלאה ירצה לקרבן—when an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain under its mother for seven days; and from the eighth day on, it will be acceptable for a fire-offering to Hashem.**

This can be compared to a king who entered a province and issued a decree, saying, “All the guests that are here shall not see my face until they first see the face of the matron!” Similarly, HKB”H said: You shall not bring an animal before Me as a korban until one Shabbas passes over it. For, there is no seven-day period without a Shabbas. Similarly, there is no milah without one Shabbas (passing over the child). Thus, it is written (in our passuk): “And from the eighth day on, it is acceptable (for a fire-offering to Hashem).” Rabbi Yitzchak said: The law pertaining to a man and the law pertaining to an animal are equivalent. The law pertaining to a man—“on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised”—and the law pertaining to an animal—“and from the eighth day on, it is acceptable.”

Thus, we learn from this Midrash that the reason HKB”H commanded us not to perform the mitzvah of milah until the eighth day, is so that a day of Shabbas—compared to a matron—passes over the newborn child before he enters into the covenant. From this perspective, it would appear that the mitzvah of Shabbas is greater than the mitzvah of milah, since it is impossible to perform the mitzvah of milah until the newborn has experienced the kedushah of Shabbas. This seemingly contradicts the passage of the Midrash in the Yalkut Shimoni, which concluded that milah is greater than Shabbas.

In the Merit of the Mitzvah of Milah on the Eighth Day We Are Granted Supernatural Miracles

I thought of a fantastic way to resolve this apparent contradiction based on a vital principle that is taught over and over again in the works of the Maharal. He explains why HKB”H gave Yisrael the mitzvah of milah specifically on the eighth day after a child is born. The number seven is associated with the natural order of creation, which HKB”H established during the seven days of creation. In contrast, the number eight, which is greater than the number seven, is associated with divine supervision and management that is supernatural—that defies the laws of nature. Therefore, HKB”H gave us the mitzvah of milah on the eighth day. The foreskin was created naturally;

removing it is supernatural; it alters the child's natural anatomy. Correspondingly, "midah k'neged midah," for performing this mitzvah, we are granted an existence that defies the laws of nature.

With this understanding, the Maharal, in Gevuros Hashem (Chapter 47), interprets the statement in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Beshalach, 241) explaining why Shiras HaYam begins with the word "אז" (Shemos 15, 1): "אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל"—**the letter "aleph" equals one; the letter "zayin" equals seven; thus, they equal eight. Moshe said that in the merit of the mitzvah of "milah" which was given to be performed on the eighth day, the sea split. We express praise with the word א.ז.** The Maharal explains that the miracle of Krias Yam Suf was a supernatural event. Therefore, it required the merit of a supernatural mitzvah, namely, the mitzvah of "milah," which is performed on the eighth day. In other words, in the merit of the mitzvah of milah, supernatural events occur on our behalf.

This also explains magnificently why it is impossible to attain the wisdom of the Torah without the merit of the mitzvah of milah. As the Midrash explains (S.R. 30, 12) regarding the passuk (Shemos 21, 1):

"And these are the ordinances." This is to be understood in light of what is written (Tehillim 147, 19): "He relates His words to Yaakov." Once Aquilas said to the emperor Hadrian, "I wish to convert and to become a Jew." He (Hadrian) said to him, "You seek a relationship with this nation?! How much have I degraded it! How many of its people have I killed! To this lowliest of nations, you wish to be part of?! What did you see in them that makes you want to convert?"

He (Aquilas) replied to him, **"Even the simplest of them knows how HKB"H created the world; what was created on the first day; and what was created on the second day; and how many years have elapsed since the world was created; and what sustains the world; and that their Torah is the truth!"** He (Hadrian) said to him, **"Why don't you learn their Torah but do not get circumcised."** Aquilas said to him, **"Even the wisest person in your kingdom, and even if he is a venerable man of one hundred years, he is unable to study their**

Torah if he is not circumcised. For it is written, 'He relates His words to Yaakov, His statutes and His judgments to Yisrael. He did not do so for any other nation.' And to whom (did He relate the Torah)? Only to the children of Yisrael."

This intriguing conversation can be explained based on what the Maharal writes in Ner Mitzvah on Chanukah. As explained, the mitzvah of milah is performed on the eighth day, because it is supernatural. The Torah is also supernatural. Therefore, after the exodus from Mitzrayim, HKB"H did not give Yisrael the Torah immediately. Instead, they were commanded to count seven weeks (Devarim 16, 9): "שבעה שבועות תספור לך"—corresponding to natural world that was created in seven days. Only after seven weeks, on the fiftieth day, akin to the number eight that follows the number seven, were they given the Torah, which is above and beyond the realm of nature.

Although it is obvious, we can explain why the Torah transcends nature based on a passage in the Midrash (B.R. 1,1) related to the passuk (Bereishis 1, 1): "בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ". **HKB"H would look in the Torah and create the world. Therefore, the Torah states, "Bereishis' G-d created (the heavens and the earth)." The word "Reishis" refers to nothing other than the Torah.** In other words, with the Torah, which is called "Reishis," G-d created the universe.

A similar teaching is found in the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 161b): "קודשא בריך הוא אסתכל באורייתא וברא עלמא"—**HKB"H looked in the Torah and created the world.** Now, seeing as the entire natural world was created with the Torah as its blueprint, it is obvious that the Torah itself is above and beyond nature. This explains very nicely why Aquilas the proselyte told the emperor Hadrian that it is impossible to attain the wisdom of the Torah, which transcends the realm of nature, without first performing the mitzvah of milah, which also transcends the realm of nature.

I Created the Torah as an Antidote to the Yetzer HaRa

Based on our current discussion, we can shed some new light on HKB"H's pronouncement to Yisrael

(Kiddushin 30b): **”בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין, ואם אתם—עוסקים בתורה אין אתם נמסרים בידו—My son, I created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand.** Now, we are taught in the Gemara (Succah 52a): **”שבעה שמות יש לו ליצר הרע”—the yetzer hara has seven names.** The Maharsha and the Rama (Toras HaOlah, part 2, chapter 26) explain that these seven appellations represent seven evil forces corresponding to the seven days of creation.

This coincides magnificently with the statement in the Gemara (ibid.): **”יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום, שנאמר רק—a man’s yetzer overwhelms him every day, as it states (Bereishis 6, 5): “Was only for evil all day long.”** They specifically said, **”every day,”** to teach us that the yetzer hara uses a specific one of its seven forces of tumah for each day of the week. As we learn from the Gemara, they can only be overcome through the study of Torah that transcends the seven days of creation.

Understood in this light, HKB”H told Yisrael: **”I have created the yetzer hara,”** who has seven distinct names corresponding to the seven days of creation. Their powers exist solely within the realm of nature, which was created during the seven days of creation. However: **”I have created the Torah as its antidote,”** because the Torah was given to Yisrael after the seven weeks of Sefiras HaOmer, on the fiftieth day, which is like the supernatural number eight. Therefore, the kedushah of the Torah, which is supernatural, has the power to negate and eliminate the yetzer hara, whose seven forces can only function within the natural order of the seven days of creation.

Shabbas Modifies the World of Nature Associated with the Seven Days of Creation

Nevertheless, despite this incredible insight from the Maharal, we must address an important issue. The number seven represents the world of nature created during the seven days of creation; the number eight represents the divine management that transcends the world of nature. So, why did HKB”H establish the day of Shabbas, a semblance of Olam HaBa, on the

seventh day, within the realm of nature, and not on the eighth day, above the realm of nature?

In light of this question, I believe that we can propose a fantastic chiddush! HKB”H gave us the Shabbas as a gift, a day of rest on which work is prohibited. Its purpose is to enable us to correct and modify the natural functions of the six weekdays. Hence, Shabbas must be the seventh day to illustrate that it is an inseparable part of the seven days of creation. Thus, on Shabbas, we are obliged to make amends for our actions of the past six days.

This can be substantiated by that which is written in relation to the conclusion of creation (ibid. 2, 2): **”ויכל אלקים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה”—G-d completed on the seventh day His work that He had done.** Seemingly, this is not accurate, since the work and creation of the heavens and earth were actually completed on the sixth day (with the creation of man). So, how can the Torah say that HKB”H finished His work on the seventh day? Therefore, Rashi addresses this difficulty: **What was the world lacking at that point? Rest. Shabbas came, rest came.** Rest was necessary to complete the work of creation; thus, the work of creation was actually completed on Shabbas. It provides the tikun for all of creation.

This explains magnificently the reason HKB”H gave us the Torah on Shabbas. As we learn in the Gemara (Shabbas 87b), everyone agrees that the Torah was given to Yisrael on Shabbas. As mentioned above, the Torah was given after the seven weeks of the Omer, on the fiftieth day, which resembles the number eight, which is above the world of nature. Therefore, the Torah was given specifically on Shabbas, the seventh day, to fix the shortcomings of the world of nature created in seven days. This enabled Yisrael to transcend the world of nature by receiving the Torah.

This also provides us with a better understanding of a passage in the Midrash brought down by the Tur (O.C. 290): **”אמרה תורה לפני הקב”ה, רבוננו של עולם כשיכנסו ישראל לארץ, זה רץ לכרמו וזה רץ לשדהו ואני מה תהא עלי, אמר לה, יש לי זוג שאני מזווג לך ושבת שמו, שהם בטלים ממלאכתם ויכולין לעסוק בך.”** Here the Torah voices her concerns before HKB”H that when

Yisrael enter the land and are occupied with their fields and vineyards, she will be neglected. HKB”H replies that Shabbas will be her mate. For, on Shabbas, Yisrael abandon their work and are free to engage in Torah study. He makes it quite clear that it is our obligation to illuminate the Shabbas with the light of Torah; it is a day designated for Torah study. Thus, we can conclude that in the merit of the tikun Shabbas provides for the seven days of the natural realm, we are able to attain the wisdom of the Torah that transcends the natural realm.

The Mitzvah of Milah on the Eighth Day Transcends Nature because It Comes after the Tikun of Nature on Shabbas

Following this sublime path, we can now proceed to unravel the puzzling words of Chazal concerning the dispute between Shabbas Kodesh and the mitzvah of milah as to which is greater. At first glance, it appears that the answer is obvious. As explained, HKB”H established Shabbas as the seventh day of creation to complete and fix the world of nature. Whereas HKB”H established the day of the milah to be the eighth day, transcending the world of nature created in seven days. Seen from this perspective, it seems clear that the mitzvah of milah, which elevates us above nature, is superior.

Yet, this fact did not deter Shabbas. She continued to protest: **“I am greater than you; for He rested from His work on me.”** She argued based on the fact that it is impossible to climb a ladder without going up one rung at a time. Similarly, it is impossible to ascend to the supernatural world represented by the number eight without first amending the natural world created in seven days. Thus, it turns out that our ability to transcend the world of nature via the mitzvah of milah on the eighth day is totally thanks to the mitzvah of Shabbas.

This explains very nicely the teaching in the aforementioned Midrash. HKB”H gave us the mitzvah of milah on the eighth day, so that the newborn baby boy would be exposed to the kedushah of Shabbas prior to undergoing the mitzvah of milah. For, as explained, the day of Shabbas is a tikun for the natural

world. So, only after being subjected to its kedushah, is it possible for the newborn to fulfill the mitzvah of milah on the eighth day and transcend nature.

After considering both sides of this dispute between mitzvas Shabbas and mitzvas milah, it seems reasonable to apply the well-known principle of (Eiruvim 13b): **אלו “ואלו דברי אלקים חיים הן”—both are the words of the living G-d**, i.e., both represent divine truth. On the one hand, the mitzvah of milah overrides the mitzvah of Shabbas, and is associated with supernatural transcendence. On the other hand, the milah is performed on the eighth day, so that the kedushah of Shabbas and its tikun of nature will prepare the newborn for this transcendence. Thus, they both have legitimate claims to the title of superiority.

We can now comprehend the profound statement of Shlomo HaMelech in sefer Koheles elucidated by the Yalkut Shimoni above: **תן חלק לשבעה, אלו שבעת ימי “שבת”—it is essential to first wait seven days to ensure that the kedushah of Shabbas will provide a tikun for the natural order of the world that was established during the seven days of creation; וגם לשמונה, אלו שמונת ימי המילה—because that will enable a Jew to transcend nature in the merit of the mitzvah of milah.**

The Mother Is Tamei for Seven Days corresponding to the Seven Names of the Yetzer HaRa

We are now approaching our rewarding destination. Our parsha opens: **“When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be impure for a seven-day period . . . On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.”** In the Gemara Sanhedrin 91b), we learn of an argument that ensued between Antoninus and Rabeinu HaKadosh as to when the yetzer hara invades a person. Is it when the fetus is first formed in its mother’s womb or is it only after the child is born? Rebbe says that it is at the time of conception/formation; Antoninu says that it is at the time of birth. In the end, Rebbe concedes to Antoninus that the yetzer hara only enters a person after it emerges into the world and explains that Antoninus’ viewpoint is supported by the passuk (ibid. 4, 7): **“At the entrance, sin crouches.”** The passuk is referring to the entrance into the world from

the birth canal; there the yetzer hara lies in wait to infect a person.

We have succeeded in shedding light on the fascinating relationship between the three issues mentioned in the opening pesukim of parshas Sazria. Firstly: "אשה כי תזריע וילדה זכר וטמאה שבעת ימים"—alludes to the fact that when a male child is born, it is invaded by the yetzer hara. The yetzer hara has seven names aligning with the seven days of the week, with the potential to corrupt a human being with their tumah. Therefore, on account of this danger posed by the yetzer hara: "וטמאה שבעת ימים"—the baby's parents must be extremely vigilant to protect him from the negative influence of the yetzer hara.

Notwithstanding, we are familiar with the teaching (Kiddushin 30b): "שלשה שותפין באדם, הקב"ה ואביו ואמו"—**there are three partners in the creation of a human being—HKB"H, his father and his mother.**

Therefore, HKB"H contributed His part, as it were, to save the child from the yetzer hara by giving us the mitzvah of milah to be performed shortly after birth: "וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו". As we have learned, the eighth day represents divine supervision above and beyond the realm of nature. So, on the eighth day, the natural foreskin that a male child is born with is removed. In the merit of the supernatural mitzvah of milah, a Jew possesses the ability to attain the gift and wisdom of the Torah, which is also emblematic of the number eight, since it was given on the fiftieth day after the seven weeks of the Sefirah. With the power of the Torah, a Jew is able to withstand the yetzer hara whose power exists only within the confines of nature. This is the fulfillment of HKB"H's promise: **"My son, I created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand."**



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