



“Walk before Me and be perfect”

By Fulfilling the Mitzvah of Milah and Removing His Foreskin Avraham Avinu Removed the Foreskin of All of Creation

This week's parsha is parshas Lech Lecha. We wish to focus on the mitzvah of milah. It is unique in that it is the only one of the taryag mitzvos that Hashem commanded Avraham Avinu to perform. We find the following elucidation in the Gemara (Shevuos 13a) related to the passuk (Bamidbar 15, 31): **“ואת” —מצוותו הפר [הכרת תכרת הנפש ההיא], זה המפר ברית בבשר”** **and he has violated His mitzvah,” this refers to one who violates the “Bris” (covenant) in his flesh** (i.e., circumcision). Rashi (as interpreted by the Ritva) comments that since the passuk mentions a mitzvah, in the singular, it is referring to the single mitzvah that was imposed on Avraham Avinu, a”h.

This raises an interesting question brought up by the commentaries. We are taught in the Gemara (Yoma 28b): **“קיים אברהם אבינו כל התורה כולה, שנאמר עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקולי”**—**Avraham Avinu fulfilled the entire Torah, as it states** (Bereishis 26, 5): **“Because Avraham obeyed My voice.”** So, why didn't he take the initiative and perform the mitzvah of milah prior to being commanded to do so? The Shela hakadosh (Lech Lecha, Torah Ohr) answers that Avraham Avinu perceived via his “ruach hakodesh” that HKB”H was going to give him the mitzvah of milah explicitly. And since (Kiddushin 31a): **“גדול” —מצווה ועושה מאינו מצווה ועושה—one who has been commanded and does is greater than one who has not been commanded and does**—Avraham opted to wait to perform this mitzvah until he was actually commanded to do so.

The commentaries add another explanation. A person is able to perform the other mitzvos of the Torah several times. Hence, Avraham Avinu performed them even before he was commanded to do so knowing that if HKB”H subsequently

commanded him to do them, he would have the opportunity to do them again as one who had now been commanded to do them. The mitzvah of milah, however, can only be performed once; once the foreskin—the “orlah”—has been removed, the mitzvah cannot be performed again. Therefore, Avraham waited for HKB”H to command him to perform this mitzvah, so that he would be categorized as “one who has been commanded and does.”

The Connection between the Mitzvah of Milah and Inheriting the Land and the Letter “Hei” that HKB”H Added to Form the Name Avraham

Thus, it behooves us to consider why HKB”H only gave Avraham Avinu this mitzvah for him and his future generations to perform and none of the other taryag mitzvos. We will also address several other matters related to the mitzvah of milah. Here are the pertinent pesukim in this week's parsha (ibid. 17, 1):

“ויהי אברם בן תשעים שנה ותשע שנים, וירא ה' אל אברם ויאמר אליו אני אל שדי התהלך לפניי והיה תמים, ואתנה בריתי ביניי ובייך וארבה אותך במאד מאד... ולא יקרא עוד את שמך אברם והיה שמך אברהם כי אב המון גוים נתתיך... והקימותי את בריתי ביניי ובייך ובין זרעך אחריו לדורותם לברית עולם להיות לך לאלקים ולזרעך אחריו, ונתתי לך ולזרעך אחריו את ארץ מגוריו את כל ארץ כנען לאחוזת עולם והייתי להם לאלקים.”

When Avram was ninety-nine years old, Hashem appeared to Avram and said to him, “I am Kel Shakkai; walk before Me and be ‘tamim’ (complete, perfect, wholehearted). I will set My covenant between Me and you, and I will increase you most exceedingly . . . Your name

shall no longer be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations . . . I will uphold My covenant between Me and you and your offspring after you, throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant, to be a G-d to you and to your offspring after you; and I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojourns—all of the land of Cana'an—as an everlasting possession; and I shall be a G-d to them."

We will endeavor to explain the connection between the mitzvah of milah and the letter "hei" that HKB"H added to the name Avram specifically in conjunction with the mitzvah of milah. Rashi explains that as a result of the mitzvah of milah, Avraham's entire body became perfect and complete—"tamim." Previously, he was deficient in five major body parts—his two eyes, two ears, and the male organ; they were exposed to external stimuli that could be controlled by the yetzer and make him susceptible to sin. With the letter "hei"—whose numerical value is five—these five body parts were perfected and sanctified. Nevertheless, since it is the nature of Torah to be explained from seventy different aspects, we will explore other explanations.

Additionally, we will endeavor to explain the connection between the mitzvah of milah and HKB"H's promise to give Eretz Yisrael to Avraham and his offspring. This is emphasized in the following Midrash (B.R. 46, 9): **אם מקיימין בניך את המילה: הן נכנסים לארץ—if your children fulfill the (mitzvah of) milah, they will enter the land; if not, they will not enter the land.**

Eretz Yisrael Represents the Holy Bris of the Earth—the Klipah of the Orlah Must Be Removed from Her

We will shed some light on these matters by introducing sacred sources that illuminate this fascinating subject. We will begin with the explanation of the Shela hakadosh (ibid. 1) regarding the amazing connection between the mitzvah of milah and Eretz Yisrael.

He focuses on the juxtaposition of the covenant of the milah with the covenant of the land in the pesukim cited above: **"And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojourns—all of the land of Cana'an—as an**

everlasting possession; and I shall be a G-d to them." And our Rabbis of blessed memory taught that HKB"H told Avraham that if his children would fulfill the milah, they would enter the land; but if not, they would not. Thus we see that Eretz Yisrael is related to the milah.

He goes on to say that we are the prize possession of the Blessed One; **He chose us from among all the nations; He is our G-d, and we are His people. The seventy nations are divided by their languages and their lands, and they are under the supervision of the seventy ministering angels. On the other hand, our language is "lashon hakodesh," and He gave us the Holy Land (Devarim 11, 12): "A land that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out (supervises)"—not by means of a heavenly intermediary. Furthermore, the land below is aligned with the Eretz Yisrael above. We can only possess Eretz Yisrael by removing the "orlah," which is the klipah.**

This explains very nicely what is written when Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael to conquer it (Yehoshua 5, 2): **בעת ההיא אמר ה' אל יהושע עשה לך חרבות צורים ושוב מל את בני ישראל שנית... כי מולים היו כל העם היוצאים וכל העם הילדים במדבר בדרך בצאתם ממצרים לא מלו.** At that time, Hashem said to Yehoshua, **"Make sharp knives for yourself and circumcise Bnei Yisrael a second time . . . All the people that exited were circumcised, but all the people that were born in the midbar on the way, after they exited Mitzrayim, were not circumcised."** Besides the simple obvious reason of performing the mitzvah of milah, Yehoshua was commanded to circumcise the people as a preparation (prerequisite) for conquering the land, which has the status of a holy covenant ("Bris").

Mitzrayim Is the "Orlah" of Eretz Yisrael It Had to Be Removed before They Entered the Land

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to spice up his sacred comments. We have a fundamental concept that Eretz Mitzrayim is the "orlah" of Eretz Yisrael, which has the status of a "Bris kodesh." Hence, when Yosef HaTzaddik accuses his brothers of being spies, he refers to Mitzrayim as the nakedness of the land (Bereishis 42, 9): **"לראות את ערות הארץ באתם"**—you have come to see the nakedness of the land!

This fascinating concept is taught by our illustrious master, the Arizal, in Sha'ar HaMitzvos (Lech Lecha). He explains that Yosef is the paradigm of the attribute of "yesod tzaddik." When the brothers sold him to end up in Mitzrayim—the "nakedness of the land," the "orlah"—they enabled the "orlah" to be nurtured by the kedushah of Yosef "yesod tzaddik"—the foundation of righteousness and morality.

We can embellish this thought based on the following Midrash (V.R. 32, 5): **Yosef went down to Mitzrayim and guarded himself against sexual immorality; in his merit, Yisrael were able to guard themselves. Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said: The guarding against immorality alone was sufficient cause for Yisrael to be redeemed.** We learn from here that with his exemplary kedushah, Yosef paved the way for all of Yisrael to safeguard themselves from immorality during their stay in Mitzrayim.

Thus, we can suggest that it was for this reason that HKB"H arranged for Yosef HaTzaddik, "tzaddik yesod olam," to go down to Mitzrayim, "the nakedness of the land," a form of "orlah." He made it possible for the people of Yisrael to sanctify themselves with regards to matters of immorality. As a result, when they exited from their galus in Mitzrayim, physically and spiritually, from the depths of 49 levels of tumah to the heights of 49 levels of kedushah, they took out with them all the sparks of kedushah that had been trapped in Mitzrayim. After removing the "orlah"—the klipah of Mitzrayim—they were privileged to enter Eretz Yisrael—the "Bris kodesh" of the land.

Both Eretz Yisrael and Eretz Mitzrayim Measure 400 by 400 Parsah

We find support for this notion from the assertion of the Megaleh Amukos on Vaeschanan (193) that Eretz Yisrael from the aspect of kedushah contrasts directly with Eretz Mitzrayim from the aspect of tumah. Hence, we find sources stating that the areas of both were 400 by 400 parsah. The Gemara teaches (Megillah 3a, B.K. 82b): "נודעזעה ארץ ישראל—ארבע מאות פרסה על ארבע מאות פרסה—Eretz Yisrael trembled, an area of 400 parsah by 400 parsah. Correspondingly, on the side of tumah, Eretz Mitzrayim also measures 400 parsah by 400 parsah, as the Gemara explains (Ta'anis 10a): "תנו רבנן—ארץ מצרים היא ארבע מאות פרסה על ארבע מאות פרסה—the Rabbis

taught in a Baraisa: Eretz Mitzrayim is 400 parsah by 400 parsah in area.

Based on this, the Megaleh Amukos (Korach) goes on to explain what HKB"H said to Avraham (ibid. 15, 13): "כי גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם ועבדום וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה—your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. The purpose of Yisrael's galus in Mitzrayim was to purify them during those 400 years of the 400 forces of tumah of Mitzrayim, whose area measured 400 x 400 parsah. This would prepare them to enter Eretz Yisrael, whose area measured 400 x 400 parsah from the aspect of its kedushah.

This concurs very nicely with what we have discussed. Mitzrayim is like the klipah of "orlah" possessing 400 forces of tumah. In contrast, Eretz Yisrael is like the kedushah of the "Bris" possessing 400 forces of kedushah. Therefore, HKB"H orchestrated Yisrael's galus in Mitzrayim, so that they would leave there with all the sparks of kedushah located there. Thus, they cut off the "orlah" of the klipah of Mitzrayim enabling them to enter Eretz Yisrael, the "Bris kodesh" of the earth.

This explains the remark HKB"H makes to Moshe Rabeinu at the phenomenon of the burning bush (Shemos 3, 7): "ויאמר ה' ראה ראיתי את עמי אשר במצרים ואת צעקתם שמעתי מפני נוגשיו כי ידעתי את מכאוביו, וארד להצילו מיד מצרים ולהעלותו מן הארץ ההוא אל ארץ טובה ורחבה אל ארץ זבת חלב ודבש אל מקום הכנעני והחתי והאמרי והפרוזי והחוי. Hashem said, "I have indeed seen the affliction of My people that is in Mitzrayim, and I have heard its outcry caused by its taskmasters, for I know its pains. I shall descend to rescue it from the hand of Mitzrayim and to bring it up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey—to the place of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite." For, the exodus from the tumah of Mitzrayim, the "nakedness of the land," representing the klipah of the "orlah," prepared them and enabled them to enter Eretz Yisrael representing the kedushah of the "Bris."

The Galus in Mitzrayim Encompassed All Four Galuyos

It is worthwhile to add a precious point. The Mishnah teaches (Nedarim 31b): "קונם שאני נהנה לערלים, מותר בערלי ישראל; קונם שאני עובדי כוכבים, ואסור במולי עובדי כוכבים... שאין הערלה קרויה אלא לשם עובדי כוכבים,

שנאמר כי כל הגוים ערלים." If one vows, **"Benefit that I derive from the uncircumcised is 'konam,' he is permitted to derive benefit even from uncircumcised Jews, and he is forbidden to derive benefit even from circumcised non-Jews . . . For the term "orlah" is not used except as a reference to the non-Jewish nations of the world, as it is stated (Yirmiyah 9, 25): "For all the nations are uncircumcised ('areilim')."** In other words, all non-Jews are considered associated with the klipah of "orlah."

This can be better understood based on the teaching of the Arizal in Likutei Torah (Ki Seitzei). He analyzes the division of Yisrael's exiles by Chazal into four distinct galuyos—**Bavel, Madai, Yavan** (Greece), and **Edom** (Rome). This is taught in the Midrash (B.R. 2, 4) in relation to the second passuk of the Torah (Bereishis 1, 2): **"והארץ היתה תוהו ובוהו וחושך על פני תהום..."** It expounds the following: **"Tohu"** is associated with galus Bavel, **"vohu"** with galus Madai, **"choshech"** with galus Yavan, and **"tehom"** with the evil regime of galus Edom, which is like a bottomless pit. We find a similar exposition in the Midrash (ibid. 44, 17) related to the Bris bein HaBesarim (Bereishis 15, 12): **"והנה אימה חשיכה גדולה נופלת עליו, אימה זו בבל, חשיכה זו מדוי, והנה אימה חשיכה גדולה נופלת עליו זו אדום."** Here, too, the Midrash associates the four elements mentioned in the passuk—**"eimah," "chasheichah," "gedolah,"** and **"nofeles alav"**—with the four individual exiles.

This prompts the Arizal to inquire why Chazal neglected to include galus Mitzrayim among these exiles seeing as it was the most difficult of all the galuyos. He explains that the four exiles—**Bavel, Madai, Yavan, and Edom**—were individual exiles; each one of them opposed one of the four letters of the blessed name **Havaya**. **Galus Bavel corresponds to the letter "yud," galus Madai corresponds to the first "hei," galus Yavan corresponds to the letter "vav," and galus Edom corresponds to the second "hei."** In contrast, galus Mitzrayim was a general, all-encompassing galus. It included all of the other exiles wrapped up in one. For, it corresponds to the tip of the letter "yud"—**"kotzo shel yud."** "Kotzo shel yud" incorporates all four letters of the name **Havaya**. As such, it opposes all the above forces of tumah. For this reason, Chazal only mention the four individual galuyos and omit galus Mitzrayim—which is not a novelty in and of itself but rather encompasses all of the galuyos.

Accordingly, since Eretz Mitzrayim represents the "orlah" of Eretz Yisrael, and it incorporates all of the exiles, it extends the klipah of the "orlah" to all the nations of the world. This then is meaning of the passuk: **"All the nations are 'areilim."** Hence, HKB"H brought Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael—the "Bris kodesh" of the physical world.

By Performing the Mitzvah of Milah Avraham Avinu Removed the "Orlah" from the Entire World

Continuing along this sublime path, we will proceed to explain why HKB"H added the letter **"hei"** to the name Avram specifically in conjunction with the command to perform the mitzvah of milah. It is written (ibid. 2, 4): **אלה תולדות השמים והארץ—these are the products of the heavens and the earth when they were created—בהבראם."** The Rabbis expounded two things in the Midrash in relation to this word. Firstly (B.R. 12, 9), **בהבראם** is an anagram for **באברהם**—implying that the world was created for the sake of Avraham. Secondly (ibid. 12, 10), the term **בהבראם** teaches us that **בה' בראם**—that HKB"H created the heavens and the earth with the letter **"hei."** The Zohar adds that the letter **"hei,"** with a gematria of five, represents the five books of the Torah—indicating that the world was created with the five books of the Torah.

We can propose that these two elucidations go hand-in-hand beautifully. The world was created in the merit of Avraham who recognized that Hashem created the world and publicized emunah in Hashem throughout the world. The following passuk attests to this (ibid. 21, 33): **ויטע אשל בבאר—שבע ויקרא שם בשם ה' אל עולם—he planted an "eshel" in Be'er Sheva and there he proclaimed the name of Hashem, G-d of the Universe.** The main tikun he accomplished, however, was when he fulfilled the mitzvah of milah and separated the "orlah" from the "Bris kodesh." At that time, HKB"H added the letter **"hei"** to his name, the letter with which this world was created. In other words, the world was created for the sake of Avraham and his contributions.

With immense pleasure, we can elaborate on the wonderful relationship between these two elucidations. In the impeccable teachings of our teacher, the Arizal, in Likutei Torah (Ki Sisa), he sheds light on the passuk (ibid. 1, 26): **ויאמר—אלקים נעשה אדם—G-d said, "Let us make man."** Chazal note

that this passuk employs the term **"נעשה"—let us make**—in the plural, rather than **"אעשה"—I will make**—in the singular. The latter would have been more accurate, since HKB"H is the one and only Creator.

The Arizal explains that HKB"H announced His intention to create man to all of the worlds and to all of the malachim. As such, the pronouncement **"נעשה אדם"** teaches us that HKB"H wanted them to all participate in the creation of man by contributing a part of themselves to be included in man's makeup. Thus, man is truly a microcosm containing all the elements of creation. Hence, when he studies Torah and performs good deeds, he not only improves and rectifies himself, but he improves and rectifies all of creation. Conversely, chas v'shalom, if he goes astray and messes up, he damages all of creation along with himself.

This provides us with a very nice interpretation of the Mishnah (Avos 6, 11): **"כל מה שברא הקב"ה בעולמו לא בראו אלא לכבודו, שנאמר כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו יצרתיו אף עשיתיו."** **Everything HKB"H created in His world, He created solely for His glory. As it is stated (Yeshayah 43, 7): "All that is called by My name, and for My glory, I created it, I formed it, also I made it."** Now, man is the only creature who possesses the capacity to discern and choose between good and bad. If that is so, how can the other parts of creation reveal the glory of Hashem? Yet, since the makeup of man incorporates all elements of creation, he serves as their agent to reveal the "kavod" of Hashem through his sacred work of Torah and mitzvos.

I would now like to propose my own interpretation of what is written after the creation of man on the sixth day (Bereishis 1, 31): **"וירא אלקים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד"—and G-d saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good.** They expounded on this in the Midrash (ibid. 8, 5): **מא"ד** refers to Adam. Thus it is written: **"And G-d saw all that he had made and behold it was very good."** This can be read as **"behold man (מא"ד) was good."** The Midrash points out that **מא"ד** is an anagram of **אד"ם**. What is curious, is that the text does not say **"G-d saw it was good"** specifically regarding the creation of man, the crowning jewel of creation, whereas it does say so regarding the entirety of creation.

This can be explained very nicely in light of what we just learned. Since man was a microcosm incorporating all

elements of creation, his actions could assure that everything Hashem created was very good. This then is the message conveyed by the passuk above: **וירא אלקים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד**. Only **מא"ד**—an anagram of **אד"ם**—possesses the ability to rectify all of creation through his actions, so that it qualifies as **"טוב"**.

The Continued Existence of the World Hinged on Avraham's Milah

We can now explain why the addition of the letter **"hei"** to form the name Avraham coincided with the mitzvah of milah. We have learned in the Mishnah (Nedarim 31b): **גדולה מילה שאלמלא היא לא ברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את עולמו, שנאמר כה אמר ה' אם לא בריתי יומם ולילה חוקות שמים וארץ לא שמתיו."** **Great is milah, for if not for it, HKB"H would not have created His world, as it is stated (Yirmiyah 33, 25): "Thus said Hashem, 'If not for My Bris (covenant) day and night, the laws of heaven and earth, I would not have established."**

The Midrash Tanchuma (Lech Lecha 19) explains why HKB"H employed the name **"אל שדי"** when He commanded Avraham to perform the mitzvah of milah, as it is written: **אני אל שדי התהלך לפני והיה תמים—I am Kel Shakkai; walk before Me and be "tamim"** (complete, perfect, wholehearted). He was informing Avraham that if he chose not to accept upon himself the mitzvah of milah, He would return His world to chaos and nothingness. He had waited twenty generations for Avraham to come along and perform the mitzvah of milah. He told Avraham that if he chose not to do it, He would say, **"Enough" ("dai")!**—there is no reason for the world to continue to exist.

We find a similar teaching in the Midrash Rabbah (ibid. 46, 3): **HKB"H said to Avraham, "It suffices ('dai') for you that I and You are in the world. But if you will not accept upon yourself to be circumcised, then the existence of My world until now suffices ('dai'); and the dominion of the 'orlah' until now suffices ('dai'); and it suffices ('dai') that milah has been miserable until now (due to the lack of its observance)."**

Let us explain. The purpose of creation was for people to look at it and recognize the wondrous feats and handiwork of the Creator. This is expressed in the passuk (Yeshayah 40, 26): **"שאו מרום עיניכם וראו מי ברא אלה"**—**raise your eyes heavenward**

and see Who created these. The problem, however, is that the klipah of the “orlah” covers and conceals the kedushah; this prevents us from seeing and recognizing the light of Hashem that permeates creation.

Therefore, HKB”H commanded Avraham Avinu, the first Jew in the world, who housed all the future neshamos of Yisrael, to accept upon himself and his progeny the mitzvah of milah—the removal of the “orlah.” Since he contained all of the neshamos, he also contained the parts of creation containing

the klipah of the “orlah”—the force that prevents people from recognizing the presence of HKB”H. By circumcising himself, he succeeded in removing the “orlah” from all the parts of creation that possess the klipah of the “orlah.” Furthermore, by fulfilling the mitzvah of milah, all of Yisrael succeed in removing the “orlah” from the elements of creation within them. This will enable us to enter Eretz Yisrael—the “Bris kodesh” of the world—at the time of the future geulah—swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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