



## “He was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day” Avraham Avinu Rescues All Those Who Are Circumcised from the Fire of Gehinnom with the Sacred Name “אתה”

This week's parsha is parshas Vayeira. The parsha begins by chronicling the momentous revelation of HKB"H to Avraham Avinu (Bereishis 18, 1): "וירא אליו ה' "Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day. Rashi comments: "Hashem appeared to him"--To visit the sick person. R' Chama the son of Chanina said: It was the third day since his circumcision, and HKB"H came and inquired about his (Avraham's) welfare.

In the Midrash (B.R. 48, 4), with their "ruach hakodesh" and extraordinary perception, Chazal assert that that which is written here in connection with Avraham Avinu alludes to le'asid la'vo: "And he was sitting at the entrance of the tent": Rabbi Levi said: Le'asid la'vo, Avraham will sit at the entrance to Gehinnom and will not allow a circumcised Jew to descend into it . . . "In the heat of the day": This alludes to when the day will come of which it is written: "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven."

### The Fire of Gehinnom Has No Effect on Talmidei Chachamim

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by explaining the deeper connection between the mitzvah of "milah" and the incredible power of Avraham Avinu to rescue those who have been circumcised from the fire of Gehinnom. We will refer to a teaching in the

Gemara (Chagigah 27a): "תלמידי חכמים אין אור של גיהנם שולטת בהן, קל וחומר מסלמנדרא, ומה שלמנדרא שתולדת אש היא, חסך מִדְמָה אין אור שולטת בו, תלמידי חכמים שכל גופן אש, דכתיב הלא כה דברי כאש נאום ה', על The fire of Gehinnom does not have power over "talmidei-chachamim." This is known through a "kal vachomer" from the "salamandra" (a beast created from fire with magic): If in the case of "salamandra," which is only the offspring of fire, fire does not have power over one who smears himself with its blood, then in the case of talmidei-chachamim, whose entire bodies are imbued with fire, as it is written (Yirmiyah 23, 29): "Behold, My word is like fire, says Hashem," how much more so.

It appears that we can explain Chazal's enigmatic statement that the bodies of "talmidei-chachamim" are imbued with fire based on what we learn elsewhere in the Gemara (Gittin 60b): "אמר רבי יוחנן, לא כרת הקב"ה ברית עם ישראל אלא בשביל דברים שבעל פה, שנאמר כי על פי הדברים האלה כרתתי אתך ברית ואת ישראל." Rabbi Yochanan said: HKB"H only entered into a covenant with Yisrael on account of the Oral Law, as it states (Shemos 34, 27): "For on account of these words have I entered a covenant with you and with Yisrael."

Yet, one might ask, this seems to contradict what HKB"H said explicitly to Avraham Avinu (Bereishis 17, 7): "והקמתי את בריתי ביני וביניך ובין זרעך אחריו לדורותם לברית עולם להיות: and I will uphold My covenant ("Bris") 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. Here HKB"H informs Avraham Avinu that the covenant between Him and Avraham and his offspring is based on the "Bris milah." So, how does this gibe with Rabbi Yochanan's statement that Yisrael's covenant with HKB"H is based on Torah she'b'al peh?

I believe that we can reconcile this apparent contradiction based on a passage in the Midrash (S.R. 30, 12). It recounts the amazing story of Onkelos the convert and his circumcision:

פעם אחת אמר לו עקילס לאדריינוס המלך, רוצה אני להתגייר ולהעשות ישראל, אמר לו לאומה זו אתה מבקש, כמה בזיתי אותה, כמה הרגתי אותה, לירודה שבאומות אתה מבקש להתערב, מה ראית בהם שאתה רוצה להתגייר. אמר לו הקטן שבהם יודע היאך ברא הקב"ה את העולם, מה נברא ביום ראשון ומה נברא ביום שני, כמה יש משנברא העולם ועל מה העולם עומד ותורתן אמת. אמר לו ולמד תורתן ואל תמוול, אמר לו עקילס, אפילו חכם שבמלכותך וזקן בן מאה שנה, אינו יכול ללמוד תורתן אם אינו מל, שכן כתוב מגיד דבריו ליעקב חוקיו ומשפטיו לישראל, לא עשה כן לכל גוי, ולמי לבני ישראל."

Once Aquilas (Onkelos) 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 (Tehillim 147, 19): '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."

## The Body of a Person Who Studies Torah Becomes a Parchment for Torah She'b'al Peh

We will endeavor to explain why only someone who has fulfilled the mitzvah of "milah" is capable of attaining the wisdom of the Torah. In Tiferes Yisrael (Chapter 68), the Maharal of Prague explains—as understood by the brilliant author of the Ketzot HaChoshen, ztz"l, in Shev Shematita (Introduction)—that just like Torah she'b'chsav must be written on a parchment; so, too, Torah she'b'al peh must be written on some sort of parchment—namely, the mouth of the scholar who engages in the study of Torah she'b'al peh.

Now, from a sefer-Torah inscribed on a parchment prepared from an animal's hide, the covenant and unique bond that exists between Yisrael and their Heavenly Father is not so apparent. From Torah she'b'al peh, however, that was given to Yisrael to be studied and transmitted orally, this relationship is ever so apparent. When a Jew's mouth becomes so pure and refined that it serves as a parchment for Torah she'b'al peh, the reason for Rabbi Yochanan's statement becomes clear: "HKB"H only entered into a covenant with Yisrael on account of the Oral Law."

It appears that we can add a vital point. Indeed, Torah is studied primarily orally, with one's mouth. In reality, however, all of a person's limbs are involved. As the Gemara explains (Eiruvim 53b): "ברוריה אשכחיה לההוא תלמידא דהוה קא גריס בלחישיה, בטשא ביה אמרה ליה, לא כך כתוב ערוכה בכל ושמורה, אם ערוכה ברמ"ח איברים שלך משתמרת, ואם לאו אינה משתמרת." Beruriah (the wife of Rabbi Meir) came upon a certain student who was reviewing his studies quietly. She kicked him and said to him, "Is it not written (Shmuel II 23, 5): 'Arranged in all and secure'? If it (your learning) is arranged in all your 248 limbs, then it is secure (and will not be forgotten); but if it is not, it will not be secure." The Maharsha provided the following clarification: **Speaking out loud elicits feeling and movement of all the limbs.** This means that when a Jew studies Torah she'b'al peh, it is not only his mouth that becomes a parchment upon which the words of the Torah are imprinted, but his entire body (all 248 limbs) is involved in the learning process and becomes a parchment upon which the letters of Torah she'b'al peh are etched.

This then is the way to understand the Gemara: **“Talmidei-chachamim, whose entire bodies are imbued with fire, as it is written (Yirmiyah 23, 29): ‘Behold, My word is like fire, says Hashem,’ how much more so.”** After an animal’s hide has been worked and made into a parchment—a “klaf”—and the Torah she’b’chsav is written on it, it attains the kedushah of a sefer-Torah, of which it is said (Mishlei 6, 23): **“כי נר מצויה ותורה אור”—for a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light.** In similar fashion, the body of a “talmid-chacham”—who studies Torah she’b’al peh and whose body serves as a “klaf”—is elevated and sanctified with the kedushah of the fire of Torah she’b’al peh. In this merit, they are spared from the fire of Gehinnom; it cannot dominate them, since their entire bodies are akin to a holy fire.

### A Man’s Body Can Only Become a “Klaf” after Removal of the Foreskin

With immense pleasure, we can now explain the reason the mitzvah of “milah” enables a man to attain Torah. As we have learned, HKB”H only entered into a covenant with Yisrael on account of Torah she’b’al peh. Furthermore, we learned from the Maharal that this is because the body of a Torah-scholar becomes a virtual “klaf” upon which the letters of Torah she’b’al peh are etched. Therefore, until a man has performed the mitzvah of “milah,” removing the “orlah” (foreskin), which is the foulness of the nachash, his body is unfit to be a “klaf” for Torah she’b’al peh. Hence, he is incapable of attaining Torah she’b’al peh.

This enlightens us with regards to the profound words of Rabbi Yochanan: **“HKB”H only entered into a covenant with Yisrael on account of the Oral Law.”** Indeed, HKB”H entered into a covenant with Avraham Avinu and his descendants in the merit of the “Bris milah,” as per the passuk: **“והקמית את בריתי ביני ובינך ובין זרעך אחריו לדורותם לברית עולם”** That covenant, however, was merely a preparation and prerequisite for the covenant HKB”H entered into with Yisrael on account of Torah she’b’al peh. For, only through the mitzvah of “milah”—removing the “orlah” from the man’s body, which is the foulness of the nachash—does the body become sanctified and fit to become a “klaf” upon which the

letters of Torah she’b’al peh can be etched. Thus, the two covenants—the “Bris milah” and the covenant of Torah she’b’al peh—go hand in hand magnificently.

In this manner, we can explain the teaching in Sefer Yetzirah (1, 3) that the “Bris” of the tongue is aligned with the “Bris milah.” Additionally, it teaches (6, 7) that HKB”H actually entered into both of these covenants with Avraham Avinu—the “Bris milah” and the “Bris” of the tongue:

**And when Avraham Avinu, a”h, looked, saw, investigated, and understood . . . then, the Master of everything, blessed is He, was revealed to him. He placed him in his bosom, kissed him on his head, and He called him, “Avraham my beloved.” He established a covenant with him and with his offspring between the ten toes of his feet—namely, the “Bris milah”—and the ten fingers of his hands—namely, the “Bris” of the tongue—and He bound the twenty-two letters (of the Torah) to his tongue and revealed their foundation to him.**

Let us explain this in keeping with our current discussion. In the merit of the **“Bris milah”**—removing the filth and perversion of the nachash from one’s body—we also merit the **“Bris of the tongue”**—the capacity to use our tongues to speak Torah she’b’al peh. This process transforms the body into a “klaf” upon which the letters of Torah she’b’al peh are etched. This is the meaning of the conclusion of the Mishnah in Sefer Yetzirah. After HKB”H established these two covenants with Avraham Avinu, **He bound the twenty-two letters (of the Torah) to his tongue and revealed their foundation to him.** In other words, He revealed to Avraham their origins in Torah she’b’al peh. This is alluded to beautifully by the fact that the gematria of **מילה** (85) equals **פה** (85)—i.e., in the merit of the mitzvah of **“milah,”** we are able to learn and attain the wisdom and knowledge of Torah she’b’al peh.

This being the case, we can appreciate the teaching in the Midrash: **Le’asid la’vo, Avraham will sit at the entrance to Gehinnom and will not allow a circumcised Jew to descend into it.** For, in the merit of fulfilling the mitzvah of “milah,” a man is able

to sanctify his body, so that it is fit to become a “klaf” for the letters of Torah she’b’al peh. Thus, his body becomes sanctified with the holy fire of the Torah. In the words of the Gemara: **Talmidei-chachamim, whose entire bodies are imbued with fire** are immune to the fire of Gehinnom.

### **A Revelation from Rabbi Shimshon of Ostropoli Regarding the Word “אתה”**

Following this glorious path, we will now proceed to explain in greater depth the amazing power of Avraham Avinu to rescue Jews who performed the mitzvah of “milah” from the fire of Gehinnom. We will refer to what the divine kabbalist Rabbi Shimshon of Ostropoli, ztz”l, hy”d, in Likutei Shoshanim (22). Here is a translated synopsis of his sacred words:

**There are 850 rooms in Gehinnom, the numerical equivalent of תכל”ת. Even a total tzaddik must pass through these rooms in order to reform and elevate the neshamos of reshaim. The tzaddik is able to pass through 580 rooms without fear of harm, because those rooms do not possess the full force of “din.” The remaining ר”ע (270) rooms, however, are evil, as indicated by their name. Were the tzaddikim to pass through them without protection, they would be liable to be harmed . . . Hence, a malach goes and writes the name את”ה on his (the tzaddik’s) forehead. Thus, even if they pass through these ר”ע (270) rooms, they will not be prosecuted, and no harm will befall them.**

In my opinion, this secret was revealed to us by David HaMelech, a”h, (Tehillim 23, 4): **“Though I walk through גי”א צלמו”ת (the valley overshadowed by death), I will not fear evil.”** Now, the gematria of גי”א צלמו”ת is 580. He is saying that even after walking through the 580 of the 850 rooms of Gehinnom that do not possess the full force of “din,” nevertheless, I will not fear that evil will befall me in the remaining ר”ע (270) rooms that I must pass through. Why? **“כי את”ה עמדי”**—because the name of את”ה is with me; it is inscribed on the forehead of the tzaddik.

### **“And You give them all life” via the 22 Letters of the Torah**

I had a wonderful idea! I would like to explain the practical significance of the name את”ה that is inscribed on the forehead of a tzaddik to protect him on his journey through Gehinnom to release the neshamos of reshaim. I would like to introduce what the author of the Tanya wrote in Sha’ar HaYichud V’HaEmunah (Chapter 2) to interpret the passuk (Nechemiah 9, 6): **“וְאַתָּה מַחֲיֵה אֶת כּוֹלָם”**—and You sustain them all—do not read מחיה (sustain; give life) but rather מהוה, (You create them ex nihilo) **something out of nothing; the word את”ה represents the letters from aleph to tav plus the five origins (articulators) of speech in the mouth, the source of all the letters—the lips, the teeth, the palate, the tongue and the throat—represented by the letter “hei.”**

In other words, the passuk **“וְאַתָּה מַחֲיֵה אֶת כּוֹלָם”** alludes to the fact that HKB”H sustains creation, at all times, every moment, without interruption, by means of the spoken letters that come out of His mouth, so to speak. The letters **“aleph”** and **“tav”** of the word את”ה allude to the 22 letters from “aleph” to “tav,” while the **“hei”** alludes to the **five** origins of speech in the mouth that articulate the letters that sustain all of creation.

We will expand on his sacred insight based on the opening passuk of the holy Torah (Bereishis 1, 1): **“בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ”**—in the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth. They expounded in the Midrash (B.R. 1, 1): **So, too, did HKB”H peer into the Torah and create the universe. The Torah said, “בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹקִים” — “with ‘Reishis’ G-d created.” There is no “Reishis” other than the Torah, as it says (Mishlei 8, 22): “Hashem made me at the beginning of His way.”** This teaches us that HKB”H created the world with the 22 letters of the Torah. Based on this concept, Sefer Yetzirah details how everything was created with these 22 letters, which are essentially 22 conduits through which HKB”H delivers His bounty to the world.

In this manner, the author of the Tanya interprets the phrase: **“וְאַתָּה מַחֲיֵה אֶת כּוֹלָם”**. Just as HKB”H created

the universe by peering in the Torah and utilizing its letters to create everything, as alluded to by the word **את"ה**; so, too, HKB"ח sustains the world with life every moment via the letters of the Torah.

### The Chiddush of the Maggid of Mezritch: HKB"ח Is Called כביכול

In truth, this explanation of the author of the Tanya is founded in the sacred teachings of his Rav, the great Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezritch, zy"א. It is also brought down in the Maggid's name by his disciple Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, zy"א, in the Noam Elimelech (Vayeira). They explain that HKB"ח is described as **"כביכול"**, because it is an anagram for **כ"ב יכול**. In other words, via the **כ"ב (22)** letters of the Torah, **יכול—HKB"ח is able** to provide bounty in Olam HaZeh. Here are his sacred words:

**"דהנה כשעלה ברצונו יתברך לברוא את העולם להטיב לברואיו, צמצם הקב"ה את עצמו, ולהיכן צמצם את עצמו, שמעתי מפי מורי ז"ל שצמצם עצמו בתוך האותיות התורה שבהם ברא העולם, ואמר שזה הפירוש שאמרו חז"ל (עירובין כב.) כביכול"ל ברוך הוא, רצונו לומר על ידי כ"ב אתון יכול הקב"ה להיות בזה העולם, והצדיק העוסק בתורה לשמה בקדושה, הוא ממשיך את הבורא ברוך הוא ויתעלה בתוך האותיות של התורה כמו בשעת הבריאה."**

He says that when HKB"ח decided to create the world and benefit His creatures, He diminished and compacted Himself into the letters of the Torah. This then is the meaning of the term **כביכול**: HKB"ח is able to be present in this world via the 22 letters of the Torah. Furthermore, a tzaddik who engages in the study of Torah l'shma with kedushah extends the influence and presence of the Creator, blessed is He, within the letters of the Torah like at the time of the creation.

Thus, the author of the Tanya emphasizes that the phrase **"זאתה מחיה את כולם"** states that HKB"ח gives life and sustains all life in the present—every single moment. He does so through the 22 letters of the Torah that come out of the five origins of speech in a person's mouth. This is the implication of **כ"ב יכול**.

### The Revelation of the Arizal Concerning the 22 Letters Etched on a Man's Forehead

Continuing our sacred journey, we will now elaborate on the name **את"ה** which is etched on the tzaddik's

forehead when he traverses Gehinnom to elevate neshamos of reshaim and rescue them from the fire and harmful forces there. We will introduce a precious teaching from the impeccable teachings of the Arizal as they were presented by his loyal disciple Rabeinu Chaim Vital, ztz"l, in Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh (Sha'ar 7). He discusses the science and wisdom of facial recognition. Here is a concise translation:

**Know that the 22 letters of the aleph-Beis are etched on a person. They are only visible on a person's forehead. These 22 letters relate to "tikun hanefesh" and its shortcomings. If there are shortcomings, the related letters will not appear on the forehead; only the letters that have been rectified will be apparent, and they will shine. They function similar to the letters of the Choshen and the Urim V'Tumim. When a question was asked, only certain letters would stand out on the stones of the Choshen. The same is true on a person's forehead. For example, if the letters "חיים" flash, it indicates that life has been decreed for him.**

Further on, Rabeinu Chaim Vital recounts an incident involving himself personally with his mentor, the Arizal: **The Arizal saw three letters on his forehead—an "aleph," a "beit," and a "gimel" facing backwards. He told him that he must do an act of "chesed" for his father. Hence, the letter "gimel" (which stands for "gemilus chasadim") faced backwards toward the two letters אב (alluding to his father).**

**"Keep My covenant—you and your offspring after you"**

I would now like to propose a novel idea. The 22 letters etched on a Jew's forehead are actually the 22 letters of Torah she'b'al peh that are etched on the body of a Jew who studies Torah she'b'al peh. As we learned from the Maharal, by engaging in the study of Torah she'b'al peh, a Jew's body is transformed into a "klaf" for Torah she'b'al peh. In keeping with this discussion, we can suggest that these are the very same 22 letters that are etched on the forehead of one who studies Torah she'b'al peh.

This enlightens us and gives us cause to rejoice. We have achieved a better understanding of the significance of the name **את"ה** that is etched on the forehead of a tzaddik who passes through Gehinnom to rescue the neshamos of reshaim. We have learned that this name represents the 22 letters of the Torah from **"aleph"** to **"tav,"** and the five (**"hei"**) areas of the mouth that articulate those letters. Since the brilliant illumination of these letters shines on his forehead due to the fire of Torah she'b'al peh that he studied, his entire body is transformed into a fire that is impervious to the fire of Gehinnom.

So, I sought a source to substantiate this explanation—that thanks to the mitzvah of "milah," a Jew is able to sanctify his body through the study of Torah she'b'al peh. This causes the name **את"ה** to shine on his forehead enabling Avraham Avinu to save him from the fire of Gehinnom. I was gratified to find what my heart yearned for. In the parsha related to the mitzvah of "milah," HKB"H says to Avraham Avinu (Bereishis 17, 9): **"ואתה את בריתי תשמור אתה וזרעך אחרריך"** **"and as for you, you must preserve My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations."**

In his commentary on parshas Lech Lecha, the Kli Yakar addresses the repetition of the word **"אתה"** by HKB"H in this remark. Seemingly, it would have sufficed to say: **"ואתה את בריתי תשמור וזרעך אחרריך לדורותם"**—

without repeating the word **"אתה"**. However, in light of what we have learned, we can suggest that HKB"H was informing Avraham that in the merit of the mitzvah of "milah," his descendants would deserve to be spared from the sentence of Gehinnom. Thus, HKB"H told Avraham: **"ואתה את בריתי תשמור אתה וזרעך אחרריך"**—that in the merit of performing the mitzvah of "milah," he and his descendants would be rewarded with the sacred name **את"ה**, which would save them from the sentence of Gehinnom.

With immense pleasure, we will conclude this essay with the fitting tefilah of David HaMelech (Tehillim 102, 14): **"אתה תקום תרחם ציון כי עת לחננה כי בא מועד"**—**and one day You (את"ה) will arise and have compassion on Tziyon, for the time to favor her (again), for the appointed time will have come.** Here is an interpretation of the passuk from the Bnei Yissaschar (Tamuz-Av 2, 13): **He (David HaMelech) is referring to the name את"ה; it "will arise and have compassion on Tziyon." He explains why it will be this name specifically: "For the time to favor her (again), for the appointed time will have come." Now, we know that (Sotah 49b): "In the period which will precede the coming of Mashiach, insolence ("chutzpah") will increase (be prevalent and rampant)." Therefore, it will be appropriate (necessary) for the name את"ה to arise, so that the insolent will flee and be eliminated, and the glory of Hashem will fill the entire land!**

Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of **אחינו בני ישראל**

Family Madeb - לעילוי נשמת  
their dear mother  
Lea bat Virgini ע"ה

Arthur & Randi Luxenberg לזכות  
of their wonderfull parents, children and grandchildren  
לעילוי נשמת His Father ר' יצחק יהודה בן ר' אברהם ע"ה

To receive the mamarim by email: [mamarim@shvileipinchas.com](mailto:mamarim@shvileipinchas.com)