

"As for Me, behold My Covenant is with you, and You shall be the father of a multitude of nations." (17:4)

Rashi explains that as Avraham became the father of the world, he would attain "spiritual paternity" over all nations. Avraham feared that the isolation which resulted from his circumcision would create a barrier separating him from the uncircumcised world. This obstacle might serve to confine his spirit from radiating out to the pagans, preventing him from bringing them closer to Hashem. He was threatened with the failure of his whole life's work. Converted pagans would not acquiesce to the imperative of circumcision. Thus, Hashem solemnly assured Avraham that he would become the spiritual father of a multitude of nations.

The term "ct" often refers to spiritual paternity. This notion is confirmed through the letter v (*hay*) which Hashem added to Avram's name as He made this promise. The sound of the letter v is just a barely audible breath, not an articulated sound. Thus, the letter v is among the most inconsequential letters, symbolizing a material void. Integrated into the name of the Patriarch, the v indicates that Avraham's paternity over the world is not to be a substantive one, but rather a spiritual one.

As *Rashi* notes, this paternity extends over "*a multitude of nations*", including both Jewish and non-Jewish peoples. The unique but universal character of this nation was first proclaimed at the threshold of the formation of the Jewish people. It is apropos that this declaration was presented simultaneously with the commandment of *Bris Milah*. *Bris Milah* creates a physical barrier which segregates *Am Yisroel* from other peoples, underscoring the distinctiveness of Jews more than any other *mitzvah*. This separation also allows the Jewish people to shelter its national prowess from the external influences which threaten it. In order for the Jewish people to accomplish its personal mission, it must focus solely on the persuasive force which emanates from absolute truth. This orientation necessarily precludes missionary work and inhumane methods such as those practiced by the fanatics of other religions.

Horav Eliyahu Munk, z.l., suggests, therefore, that it is incumbent upon the Jewish leaders to limit the people's interaction with the external world. Such exposure could tarnish the unique character of the Jewish people. In order for the Jewish ideal to persevere, *Bnei Yisroel* must remain aloof and true to its heritage, principles, and values. Consequently, the Jewish nation will be better equipped to carry out its mission. The significant power of Judaism's truths is that it can enable Jewry to realize its potential without sacrificing any aspect of its existence. In this sense the separatist imperative of circumcision serves as an effective means of preservation.