

On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. (12:3)

While every *mitzvah* in the Torah is an obligation to observe, *mitzvas Milah*, the commandment concerning circumcision, seems to be a mainstay – a *mitzvah* for which Jews throughout the millennia have sacrificed themselves. What is it about this *mitzvah* that impacts our lives to such an extent? The first time that this *mitzvah* is mentioned in the Torah is when Hashem commanded Avraham *Avinu* to circumcise himself. In his commentary to *Parashas Emor*, the *Ramban* teaches that with the execution of *Bris Milah* on his body, Avraham was transformed from a *ben Noach*, Noachide, to a *ben Yisrael*, Jew. Despite Avraham's belief in the Creator and his observance of His commandments, Avraham did not achieve this milestone until he was circumcised. Once Avraham committed his body and soul to Hashem, the Almighty changed his name to Avraham, and Judaism was born. In a way, Hashem was recreating Avraham, since, until then, he had been a *ben Noach*. There was Adam *HaRishon*, Primordial/first man, and now there was the first Jew – Avraham *Avinu*. This occurred as a result of *Bris Milah*.

Thousands of times this transformation has taken place: an individual far-removed from Jewish observance is willing to do anything to have a *Bris Milah* performed on his infant son. When a Jew rejects *Milah*, as some of the most alienated Jews have done, they are fighting their spiritual DNA, since *Milah* and Judaism are inextricably bound up together. I guess there is a difference between being assimilated, an individual who simply does not know, and being alienated, an individual who refuses to know, who outright rejects the Jewish label, who views his heritage as a primitive aberration. We can only pray that all of his machinations will one day give way to an illumination through which he will see his utter foolishness. One does not fight Hashem, and, if he does, he certainly does not win.

Eliyahu *HaNavi* attends every *Bris Milah*. Actually, Eliyahu attends two Jewish services – *Bris Milah* and the *Pesach Seder*. These are both transformational experiences: one, in which a young infant enters into the covenant of Judaism; and the other, which celebrates and relives our entrance into nationhood by way of our being liberated from the Egyptian bondage. Indeed, these two practices are almost universally maintained by Jews of all stripes. Eliyahu *HaNavi* is the harbinger of peace. His presence at these two celebrations indicates the harmony engendered between man and G-d, and between man and his fellow man. Both of these events represent sacrifice. Eliyahu/Pinchas was prepared to sacrifice his life to preserve Hashem's honor. This is why he is the harbinger of true peace. Peace founded on religious compromise is not peace; it is an incursion against Hashem.

Certainly, no dearth of stories exists which underscore the inexorable bond the Jewish People have with *Bris Milah*. The following vignette even includes Eliyahu *HaNavi*. An assimilated Jewess (I guess her husband was beyond assimilation) called a *mohel*, ritual circumciser, and asked him to come to her house to perform a circumcision on her son. When he appeared at the house, he

seemed obviously surprised that nothing “Jewish” was to be found in the house. Noticing his incredulity, the woman said, “Please ignore the lack of Jewish symbolism in our home. Neither my husband nor I have any relationship whatsoever with Judaism. We decided to give our son a *Bris* because we do not want him to feel different when he grows up.” The woman added that she was in a big rush, and, since the *Bris* is a minor procedure, she was leaving him in the care of her nanny – who would arrive in approximately one half hour. The two-month old baby was in the midst of his morning nap, so the *mohel* would have to wait a little. Meanwhile, the mother left. The nanny had yet to arrive.

A *Bris Milah* in a solitary house is a bit strange. This was a large city – not a small town with a few Jewish families. Yet, the *Bris* was performed in the company of the *mohel* and the baby; no one else showed up. Whoever heard of such a “celebration”? An empty home; parents who apparently did not care, but what can one do? The mother informed the *mohel* before she left that her infant son’s name was Yuval, which the *mohel* affirmed following the *Bris*. The *mohel* served as *sandek*, holding the infant, and as *mohel*; he also held the baby when he gave him his name. It should have been a happy occasion, but it was not. The *mohel* had never experienced such a sad *Bris*.

The nanny had thus far not come. The infant was hungry and he began to cry. The *mohel* went into the kitchen and could not find anything edible for an infant. He attempted to soothe the child, to stop him from crying. The baby was very tense. He was hungry; he was in pain; perhaps he sensed that no one seemed to care about him. The *mohel* was so heartbroken over the course of events that he joined in with the baby. So, the baby cried, and the *mohel* cried. Imagine the scene following the *bris*: the baby crying out of pain and hunger; the *mohel* crying because he was sad – for the baby, and sad for the parents, who were clueless about their religion.

“You make a mistake,” the *Mekubal* said. “It was not just you and Yuval who were alone in the house that day. Eliyahu *HaNavi* attends every *Bris*. When you and Yuval wept, it impressed Eliyahu so much that he, too, joined in the weeping. The tears of Eliyahu *HaNavi* supplementing yours and those of the infant, Yuval, made such an impression in Heaven that it was decreed that Yuval would one day become a great Torah scholar!”

In the meantime, the nanny showed up to confront a crying baby and a crying man. She apologized, claiming that she had been stuck in traffic due to an accident on the highway. The *mohel* thanked her for finally showing up. She fed the child. The *mohel* bid her good day and left.

Thirteen years later, the *mohel* had become a preeminent, much sought-after *mohel*. One day, the phone rang and a woman introduced herself and asked if her name jogged his memory. At first, he did not remember. Then it came back to him. She was the mother who had left him to perform a *bris* on her two-month old son. The *mohel* said that, yes, he did remember. After all, how could he forget what would go down as his most memorable *bris*? He immediately asked, “Did something happen to Yuval?” “No,” she answered, “he is fine.” She would like to consult with him concerning a pressing situation. Could he come to the house? The *mohel* agreed to come.

The *mohel* arrived and was greeted by the mother and her tall, handsome son. After exchanging greetings, the mother could no longer contain herself. "He wants to throw it all away. He wants to become observant!" she cried. "How could a boy whose parents are devoid of religion have a child that insists on becoming *frum*, observant?" she asked. "He insists on keeping kosher, observing *Shabbos*, and attend a *yeshivah*! Have you ever heard of something so outrageous?" she asked (in all innocence).

"We have taken him to the top psychologists and psychiatrists. They all agree that he is fine. How could he be fine, if this is what he wants to do?" she screamed. Indeed, she said that the doctors had warned them that if they do not give in, he will otherwise snap (emotionally). "Rabbi, you are the only observant Jew that we know. What should we do?"

The *mohel* thought for a few moments and then asked, "By the way, why did you select me as your son's *mohel*? There were so many others, more experienced than I." "Well, in the phone book under *mohel*, you were the first one, since your name begins with *aleph*, A," she replied.

The *mohel* agreed to take Yuval under his wing, and, with his help in getting him started in *yeshivah*, over a short span of time, he quickly grew into a huge *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar. The *mohel* was ambivalent in his joy. On the one hand, Yuval must be an exceptional boy with an extraordinary mind, motivated by a unique thirst and drive for learning. So many others, however, just do not make it, despite caring parents and outstanding *rebbeim*. What was the secret behind Yuval's success? It certainly was not his parents. The *mohel* went to a distinguished *Mekubal*, holy scholar knowledgeable in mysticism, to ask his question. Perhaps he would receive the correct answer to this pressing question.

The *Mekubal* asked him to describe what had taken place the day of the *Bris Milah*. The *mohel* related the entire story, and concluded, "I wept so much that day. I wept and the infant Yuval wept. The two of us alone wept incessantly."

We never know the far-reaching effect achieved by our sincere prayer accompanied by tears.