

Walk before Me and be perfect. (17:1)

Rashi says that Avraham's perfection, his capacity to be *tamim*, was attained by his observance of the *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah*. As long as he had the *arlah*, foreskin, he had a physical imperfection. With its removal, he now became perfect. We may wonder why Avraham needed the *mitzvah* of *Milah* to become a *tamim*; Noach was called a *tamim* without the *mitzvah* of *Milah*. **Horav Dov Eliezrav, Shlita**, distinguishes between Noach's virtue and that of Avraham. We find that Noach's righteousness is the topic of a dispute among *Chazal*. Was he a *tzaddik* only because he lived in a generation of wicked people? Had he lived during Avraham's time, he might not be viewed as being such a saint. The flip side is, if Noach had maintained his virtue living among such evil people, surely had he lived in Avraham's period he would have been an outstanding *tzaddik*. Regardless of which side we accept, one thing is certain: Noach's righteousness is disputed, while Avraham's is not. Why? What distinguishes Avraham's type of righteousness from that of Noach? Secondly, if Avraham's virtue is that significant, why was it necessary for him to have a *Bris Milah* in order to achieve perfection, while Noach, whose righteousness remains under a cloud of ambiguity, is considered a *tamim*?

The answer, claims *Horav Eliezrav*, lies in the origin of their righteousness. Noach was born a *tzaddik*, having inherited this virtue from his grandfather, Mesushelach. Avraham's pedigree was far from distinguished. His father, Terach, was infamous for his idol-worship. Avraham achieved his level of *emunah* on his own. He worked at it. He questioned; he sought answers; he saw the fallacy of the pagans. No, Avraham did not inherit his righteousness. He was a self-made *tzaddik*. It was essential that this form of commitment become an inherent characteristic in the Jewish psyche. It was necessary that those Jews whose fathers were not *tzaddikim*, those Jews who could not inherit observance and commitment from their parents, should also have the same element of devotion to mitzvos as their counterparts who did have a strong observant family background.

The *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah* signifies *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice. The shedding of blood symbolizes our readiness to relinquish our lives to serve the Almighty. Hashem gave this *mitzvah* to Avraham whose devotion to Him was self-induced. He would bequeath to his children the idea that one can achieve spiritual distinction, one can climb the ladder which reaches up to Heaven, even though his parents did not possess this conviction.

Noach was called a *tamim* without the *mitzvah* of *Milah*, because he had inherited his virtue. Avraham's *temimus*, perfection, was of a higher plane. It was established only after he demonstrated his willingness to be *moser nefesh* through the vehicle of *Milah*.

This is the reason that we end the *Bircas Ha'avos*, blessing of the Patriarchs, which is recited at the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrai*, with *Magen Avraham*. Why is Avraham more distinguished than the other *Avos*? Hashem promises to be a *magen*, shield, even to those whose commitment is self-made, as was Avraham's. He stands as the paragon of virtue who recognized the Almighty

through his own contemplation. He exhibited *mesiras nefesh* for his beliefs, a conviction that has been transmitted to his descendants. Avraham Avinu is credited with being the symbol of one who was willing to sacrifice himself for *Torah* ideals--even though he did not inherit this trait from his parents. This is the legacy of the father of our nation.