

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

The custom among Jews is to wish the father of the newly-circumcised infant, *K'sheim she'nichnas l'bris, kein yikanes l'Torah, u'lechuppah, u'lmaasim tovim*, "As the infant enters into the covenant of *Bris Milah*, so, too, should he enter into Torah, *chuppah*/marriage and the performance of good deeds." Many commentators have offered interpretations of this statement by *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 137b) – each one intimating an important lesson. I will share but a few.

*Tochachas Chaim* explains the concept behind *k'sheim she'nichnas*, "As the (infant) enters into the *Bris*": When a father brings his newborn son into the covenant of Avraham *Avinu*, it is a momentous occasion – one for which he spares no expense. He seeks the finest, most experienced *mohel*, ritual circumcisor, and prepares a decent to lavish *seudah*, festive meal, following the *bris*. Even one who is not swimming in money does what he can to celebrate this auspicious event. When the child begins to grow up and it is time to arrange for his education, however, the father's deep pockets are suddenly empty. He is prepared to get by with a mediocre *rebbe*/tutor whose going rate is less than the sought after, experienced *rebbe*. When it is time to marry off his son, he is suddenly on an austerity program, in which every penny counts. The father must remember that, while *Bris Milah* is important and life-altering, so, too, is Torah study and marriage. They go hand-in-hand.

Alternatively, when an infant enters the covenant, he has no vested interests, no ego, no anxiety concerning what he personally benefits from this experience. Likewise, his approach to studying Torah and the performance of good deeds should not be oriented towards personal gain, recognition, an opportunity to aggrandize himself and his activities. He should study Torah *lishmah*, for its sake, and carry out acts of lovingkindness simply because it is Hashem's command.

The *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah* transforms the infant forever. It is an indelible sign on his body that remains with him from cradle to grave. Likewise, one should never divest himself of his marriage obligations and his commitment to Torah study. Sadly, we find excuses to rationalize our lack of interest/commitment. We somehow find time for everything but... As *Bris Milah* is a game-changer in one's commitment, marriage and regular Torah study should likewise be an intrinsic part of our lives.

Why do we wish this blessing exclusively for the *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah*? Why do we not extend this blessing to every *mitzvah*? When one puts on *Tefillin*, eats *matzah*, sits in the *Succah*, makes *kiddush*, we do not say, "As you performed this *mitzvah*, so, too, shall you merit to perform other *mitzvos*." What is unique about *Bris Milah*? The *milah* experience transforms the child into a Jew. It transforms his entire body. As such, he (via the *mitzvah*) becomes a *cheftza d'mitzvah*, article of the *mitzvah*, much like *Tefillin*, *matzah*, *Succah*. Concerning other *mitzvos*, however, there is a *gavra*, man/person, who performs the *mitzvah* and a *cheftza*, the article/subject upon which the *mitzvah* is performed. We bless the child that, just as you became a *cheftza d'mitzvah* through

*milah*, so, too, shall your relationship with Torah, marriage and good deeds not be an extraneous, externalized experience. It must become a part of him. This can only happen when he becomes a part of it.

I have always wondered why the word *chuppah*, which refers to the marriage canopy, is used to connote marriage. Why not simply say “marriage”? Perhaps the word *chuppah* is designed to give us a window into understanding the proper approach to Torah and *maasim tovim*. *Chazal* (*Gittin* 57a) relate that there used to be a tradition in Yerushalayim that, at the birth of a girl, the parents planted a cypress tree. At the birth of a boy, they planted a cedar tree. When the children grew up and were ready to marry, they cut the branches down and used them as the four poles of their *chuppah*. [Probably each parent held one pole.] Why was the wood used to fashion poles? Would it not have made more sense to use the wood to build a house for the young couple? I think the lesson to be derived herein is that parents raise their children and escort them to the *chuppah*. They prepare them for life. The actual building of their home is up to the young couple – who (if they had a good upbringing) incorporate the lessons (which their parents) infused in them into setting the standard for the moral, ethical and spiritual compass of their jointly-built home.

Having said this, the lesson of *chuppah* is: Children live their own lives based upon their education, both formal education and the modeling that they received from their parents. We pray for the *rach ha'nimol*, young circumcised child, that, just as his parents brought him to his *Bris Milah*, he should be worthy of having parents whose life lessons concerning marriage, Torah study and performance of good deeds will be worth incorporating and building upon.

Last, *Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl*, was writing a *mazel tov* note to one of his *talmidim*, students, whose wife had recently given birth to a boy. The *Rosh Yeshivah* wrote, “I would like to share an entire litany of blessings with you. However, what can I add to *Chazal* who coined the perfect blessing that you should merit to raise him *l'Torah, u'Ichuppah, u'l'maasim tovim*? Clearly, every blessing that I could give is included in these three blessings.”