

I will ratify My covenant between Me and you. (17:7)

Avraham Avinu observed the Torah and its *mitzvos*. It is, therefore, surprising that the *mitzvah* of *milah*, circumcision, was the one *mitzvah* that he did not perform until Hashem instructed him to do so. The question is well-known, and the accepted answer is: *Gadol ha'metzuveh v'oseh mimi she'eino metzuveh v'oseh*; "A person who does something after being commanded is superior to one who does it without being commanded." The *mitzvah* of *milah* was so important to Avraham that he waited for Hashem to command him, so that his performance would have greater impact and generate greater reward.

Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl (*Seridei Eish*), asks a compelling question: *Milah* is much more than a *mitzvah*. It is also a sign of the *bris*, covenant, between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*. The *Bris Milah* is an *ose kodesh*, holy sign, on one's body, which represents our relationship with the Almighty. As such, how could Avraham have undertaken the *bris milah*, which involves two parties, on his own? Furthermore, posits the *Rosh Yeshivah*, Avraham did not fulfill those *mitzvos* that represent an *ose*, sign, relating to a specific occasion or milestone experience, such as *matzah* and *maror*. The Torah presented these *mitzvos* to celebrate a specific experience which had not yet occurred in Avraham's time. Thus, when *Chazal* teach that Avraham fulfilled the entire Torah, this is reference to those which were germane in his time.

Thus, we must say that Avraham delayed carrying out the *mitzvah* of *milah*, because, once he performed the procedure, he could no longer redo it as part of the covenant. Furthermore, for the Patriarchs to perform the *bris milah* in two parts (first, making the circumcision; and then *ha'tofas dam bris*, releasing some blood, as part of the covenant) would not suffice. As the first person to perform *bris milah*, everything that he did required perfection. To split the first *mitzvah* in two would flaw the message for the future. Avraham had to do it right – the first time.

We see from here that the *mitzvah* of *milah* includes the accompanying *kavanah*, intention – not just the action. The *kavanah* transforms a simple surgical procedure into a *mitzvah* and a symbol of the *bris kodesh* with Hashem. Avraham wanted this particular *mitzvah* to be perfect from the very onset.