

And you will no longer be named Avram, your name will be Avraham. (17:5)

In *Berachos 13a* the *Talmud* states that whoever calls Avraham "Avram" transgresses either a positive commandment or a prohibition. One may refer, with equanimity however, to Yaakov by his other name, Yisrael. *Rabbi Eli Munk z.t.l.* explains that Avraham's situation is different. With the act of circumcision he was transformed into a totally new being. The *bris mila* is accompanied by a complete metamorphosis. This transformation signals a distinct severance with the past, socially as well as morally and physically. No room for regression is allowed. The "Avram" of old is gone forever. The new Avraham belongs to an entirely new world. His sphere of activity and focus of perspective is relegated to a different, more refined, realm.

Yaakov's name change was not integral. Indeed, both names are equally applicable in different situations. *Klal Yisrael*, his descendants, remain a people with a dual identity. "Yisrael" signifies strength and resoluteness in response to its mission of "fighter for Hashem." "Yaakov" denotes the nation, when it is weak indecisive and vulnerable to sin.

What is the reason for *bris mila*'s unique "ability" to transform the Jew into a new being? Perhaps we may suggest the following rationale. The *Zohar Ha'kadosh* places great emphasis on the symbols of sacrifice indicated by the circumcision ceremony. As the blood of a *korban* effects atonement for the one who offers it, so, too, the blood of *bris mila* brings penance for the father whose son is circumcised. Indeed, the sacrifice of *bris mila* is greater since it is physical in nature, not simply material. A Jew enters into the covenant through the vehicle of sacrifice. It represents only the first of many such sacrifices he is mandated to make in order to fulfill his mission on this earth.

For the Jew, sacrifice does not merely describe the lengths to which one must go in order to fulfill his obligations. It is an inherent part of his doctrine as a Jew. Sacrifice, in its various forms, is the only vehicle for harmonious union between the physical and spiritual spheres. Circumcision is our symbol of admission, our license of acceptance into the Jewish doctrine of subservience, abnegation, and obedience. With the commitment to *bris mila*,