

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

No nation has suffered that which the Jewish people have experienced from its very infancy. Hashem has used adversity as the crucible for tempering our spiritual growth – and it has succeeded. The Jewish people have manifested incredible religious commitment, continuing to grow by leaps and bounds in their spiritual devotion, Torah study, and *mitzvah* performance. Nonetheless, a major portion of our people do not even know what it means to be Jewish. They are biologically Jewish, but, unfortunately, they are unaware of the uniquely Jewish spiritual persona that defines us. Many of them, although they do not practice religiously, maintain a Jewish identity of which they are proud.

It is, however, a deeply emotional and tragic reality that many alienated Jews still choose to forgo a *bris milah*, thereby robbing their sons of that which has been the cornerstone of Jewish identity throughout the millennia. This *mitzvah* represents a Jew's profound spiritual connection to Hashem, rooted in his physical identity. What parent has the right to deny his child his inherent identity?

The decision to eschew performing this *mitzvah* reflects a broader estrangement from Jewish heritage and tradition. At times, this is due to a lack of education. One who has been exposed to the beauty of Jewish culture and values could not turn his back on such a *mitzvah*. This is all the more reason to reach out to the alienated Jewish population, to rekindle the flame of connection which has sustained our people until the present. We have, unfortunately, seen throughout history that, when the Jew distances himself from his identity, the gentile nations have a way of “reminding” us who we really are.

A *Rav* in Yerushalayim gave his car in for a service. As a result, he had to use the services of a *monit*, taxi, to get around. One morning, he was ferried around by a driver who was observant – and had a story to share with him. Apparently, he was excited by the story, and he wanted to relate it to someone else who would take an interest in what he had to say. (I may add that listening to people – even when we personally do not share their interests or sentiments – is in and of itself a tremendous act of kindness. It makes people feel relevant, a feeling which, sadly, is at a premium.)

The driver related the following story. “A while ago, I was driving a *monit* in the north (Galil). One day, I received a call to pick up a passenger in a nearby *kibbutz* and take him to the airport. I picked up the fare, who was a friendly man, but who had absolutely no attachment to Judaism as a religion. It was a totally secular *kibbutz*, and, apparently, he fit in very well. Nonetheless, since it was close to *Pesach*, I asked him if he was going to America for the festival.” He replied, “Absolutely not!! I will not miss out on *Pesach*. It is a festive time, when family gets together to socialize. The *kibbutz* gives us *matzos*: we go to an Arab village and purchase “pita” from them, and those are our *matzos*.”

All was quiet for a few moments until the man piped up again, "You know that I will soon be a father. I made up my mind that, if it is a boy, I will not subject him to a *bris milah*. You must understand that people from all over visit the *kibbutz*. Some remain to live there. These people are not necessarily Jewish. I would hate for my son to decide that he wants to marry a gentile girl from Sweden or England, but his 'Jewish identity' (reference to the *bris milah*) might impede him from marrying her."

The driver was stunned by the man's "casual" disregard of one of the core principles of our faith. It is not merely a personal misstep – but an anathema to one of the most sacred cornerstones of our faith. Our survival throughout history has hinged upon an unwavering commitment to preserving our *kedushas am Yisrael*, our sanctity. Inter-marriage severs one's connection to the unbroken chain of tradition that has safeguarded our people through centuries of exile and persecution.

This fellow was absolutely clueless concerning what he was doing. Indeed, many of our alienated Jews are not malicious, defiant or uncaring – they are simply oblivious. After years of secularism, during which they have been inculcated with the notion that Judaism is an archaic, lost religion, they have lost complete touch with the meaning and beauty of our religion.

The driver thought for a moment, then countered, "With Hashem's blessing, you will have a son, whom I am certain you will want to see enter the army. What will you do if he meets a Jewish girl, who herself may not be observant, but surely would only marry a Jewish boy? When she discovers that your son has no Jewish identity, do you think that she will marry him? Her parents would never allow such an outrage." The *kibbutznik* said, "I never thought about this. You have enlightened me." (Imagine that the probability of his son marrying a Jewish girl was an enlightenment!) He was so excited that, when they arrived at the airport, he embraced the driver warmly and thanked him again and again for all his help.

Indeed, from that day on, whenever he needed the services of a taxi, the *kibbutznik* called for this driver. Words that emerge from a warm heart can penetrate a heart clogged with misrepresentation and deception. A lack of Jewish pride, brought on by self-loathing secularism, has destroyed many unknowing Jews. The *nekudah ha' Yehudis*, *Pintele Yid*, always succeeds when it is awakened from the deepest recesses of the Jewish heart.