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Lech Lecha

A PARASHA THOUGHT



For We are Your Nation

In this week's *parasha*, Avraham is given the *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah*, circumcision. "I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and between your descendants after you throughout their generations as an eternal covenant, to be a G-d to you, and to your descendants after you." (*Bereishis* 17:7) Apparently, *Bris Milah* is not an ordinary *mitzvah;* rather, it represents the special bond between the Jewish People and Hashem for all generations. It follows that circumcision is a crucial component of our religious identity and our relationship with Hashem. In fact, Rabbeinu Bachya points out that the *gematria* of the words "*echad*" and "*milah*" in *Mispar Katan* are both 13.

Clearly, *Milah* is an embodiment of Hashems' oneness, a mark of our status as the Chosen People. The Rambam takes this idea a step further and says that *Milah* is also a sign of belonging and membership to *Am Yisrael* amongst ourselves. *Milah* represents a oneness not only of Hashem but also *Am Yisrael*.

Bris Milah represents our dedication as a nation that follows the rules and dictates of Hashem and that also represents Hashem's will in the world. "*Ki shem Hashem nikra alecha* – the name of Hashem is called upon you [Israel]." Interestingly, this idea works in reverse as well.

A few weeks ago, we recited *Hoshanos*. We asked Hashem to save us from many tragedies and bad decrees. As we put down our Lulav and Esrog we screamed out, "*Ani v'ho shia na*," which loosely translates as, "Hashem, please save us." Tosfos (*Sukkah* 45a) points to the peculiar wording, "*Ani v'ho*," and explains that the way to understand this phrase is actually, "*Ani v'Hu hoshia na*." Hashem should save us (*ani*) and Himself (*v'Hu*). Evidently, when the Jewish people are in need of salvation, Hashem also needs salvation. At first glance this idea is difficult. How can the all-powerful Hashem be in need of salvation?

In light of the above, we understand that we are Hashem's ambassadors in this world. When tragedy falls upon the Jewish people, it falls on Hashem, *k'vyachol*, because we are His people who represent His oneness. When the Jewish people are in peril, the natural result is that Hashem's image in the world is in danger as well. "*Imo*

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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL

WITH
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

The Midrash explains that when Hashem punished Pharoh because he took Sarah, it became obvious to him that she must have been married to Avraham and that he was being kept away from her. In a less miraculous way, the laws against *yichud* (seclusion) are designed to keep people away from situations that might lead to sin.

Although the Gemara in *Kiddushin* (80b) finds only a hint to the idea of *yichud* from the Torah, the Gemara elsewhere (*Avoda Zara* 36a) understands this to mean that *yichud* with one of the *arayos* is a Torah prohibition, and that is the consensus of most of the Poskim. Similarly, the Rambam refers to these laws as *Divrei Kabalah,* and there is an argument among the commentators if in this context he means to classify them as being from the Torah or not. The Gemara in *Avoda Zara* also adds that *yichud* with other women is also prohibited from the Rabbis. The court of King David first prohibited seclusion with an unmarried woman and later, in the times of Hillel and Shamai, the prohibition was extended to include a non-Jewish woman. In

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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL

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practice, however, in modern times, most single Jewish women would be included among those with whom *yichud* with a man would be a Torah prohibition.

Even if the prohibition of *yichud* is from the Torah, the definition of seclusion for this prohibition would be one man with one woman. One man being alone with two women is only Rabbinically prohibited. These distinctions make a difference, for example, when we consider applying a more lenient opinion in a particular instance. When dealing with a Torah prohibition we need to act strictly. If we are concerned with only a Rabbinic restriction, there may be grounds to be lenient. Of course, one must seek competent Rabbinic guidance in such cases.



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RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUCK

Mitzvah #3

Throughout the ages the struggle of Yaakov and Eisav, as related in the Torah, has been the blueprint for the struggle of the Jewish people in exile. In *parshas Vayishlach,* the Torah relates the battle between the angel of Eisav and Yaakov. Although Yaakov comes out victorious, the angel does manage to injure his leg. For this reason, the Torah says, it is forbidden to eat the *gid hanasheh* (sciatic nerve) of even kosher animals. Our years of exile up to our very time have been fraught with great challenges. Hashem promised us that the collective Jewish people will survive and that G-d will ultimately bring the redemption. This idea, writes the *Chinuch*, is hinted to us by the prohibition of eating the *gid hanasheh*. The *mitzvah* would have been part of the Torah irrespective of the conflict with Eisav's angel, but the Torah put it specifically here to teach us this lesson – that despite being wounded in our long exile we will ultimately prevail.

In his work *Derash Moshe*, Rav Moshe Feinstein, *ZT"L*, questions why we celebrate the victory of Yaakov with a prohibition and not with our general practice of celebration, as the famous adage goes "We fought, we won, let's eat." Perhaps, writes Rav Moshe, we are conveying that although Yaakov won the battle with Eisav, we would have been much happier to have avoided the whole conflict. As Jews we desire to be a nation committed to Hashem and his service, not to be involved in war and battle – unless we must.

A PARASHA THOUGHT

CONTINUED

Anochi b'tzara," Hashem is pained when Am Yisrael is hurting.

We proudly carry the banner of the Jewish nation in both good and hard times. We recognize the mission of representing Hashem in this world. During this difficult period, we can tap into the power of *Bris Milah*, the power of our real and unique relationship with Hashem. We ask Hashem, "*Ani v'Hu shia na*." Hashem please save us; please save Yourself. We are Your nation and You are our G-d.

TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI MORDECHAI BERINSTEIN

Last week we mentioned that in most of Israel *Birchas Kohanim* takes place daily. This is the *minhag* in Yerushalayim, as well as most other places in Israel. However, in the Galil the custom is for *Birchas Kohanim* to be recited only at *Mussaf* of Shabbos and Yom Tov, with some also saying it on Rosh Chodesh and Chol haMoed. The commonly given reason for this is that when European Jews originally immigrated to Israel and settled in Tzfat and Teveria, the custom they found there was like the rest of Israel, in that *Birchas Kohanim* was recited daily. However, the newly immigrated Jews were accustomed to the *minhag* they followed in Europe, of *Birchas Kohanim* being said only on Yom Tov. As something of a compromise, they began reciting *Birchas Kohanim* more often than they had in the past, but still didn't say it daily, and this became the accepted custom. An exception to this is at the *kever* of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, where the custom is for *Birchas Kohanim* to be said daily despite Meron being in the north of Israel. Haifa primarily follows the *minhag* of the Galil, although some there follow the custom of Yerushalayim. (See *Piskei Teshuvos* 128:90,91 which deals with all of this.)

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