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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Vayeira ✍️ Rabbi Yehoshua Goldstein

The Perfect *Milah*

The Torah tells us that Avraham Avinu circumcised his son Yitzchok when he was eight days old, “as Hashem commanded him.” This phrase requires explanation. Is it not obvious that Avraham did as Hashem commanded? Why does the Torah have to inform us that this *bris milah* was as Hashem commanded him?

The *Ksav Sofer* suggests the following. Chazal tell us that Avraham Avinu fulfilled all the *mitzvos* of the Torah even though he was not commanded to perform them. However, as far as the *mitzvah* of *milah* is concerned, Avraham Avinu waited until he was commanded by Hashem. These perplexing statements raise two questions. First, why did Avraham Avinu wait for Hashem’s command pertaining to *milah* alone, as opposed to all the other *mitzvos*? Second, how could Chazal state that Avraham Avinu observed the **whole** Torah if in the case of *milah* he waited? The *Mizrachi* explains that we know that it is a greater *madreigah* (level) to do *mitzvos* when commanded (*mitzuva v’oseh*) than to do them voluntarily. When a person is commanded to do a *mitzvah*, his Yetzer Horah makes every effort to prevent him from doing the *mitzvah*. When the *mitzvah* is voluntary, however, the Yetzer Horah battles less fiercely. Avraham Avinu knew that he would eventually be commanded to do *milah*, and therefore waited in order to be a “*metzuvah v’oseh*,” one who performs a *mitzvah* under command. Nevertheless, emphasizes the *Ksav Sofer*, a voluntary *mitzvah* is special too because it demonstrates the degree to which the individual desires to serve Hashem. Avraham wanted to fulfill that aspect as well.

The *mitzvah* of *milah* comprises two parts: the *milah*, the cutting of the foreskin, and the *priah*, the pulling back of the outer membrane. Both are required in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *milah*. Avraham Avinu was only commanded to do *milah* and not *priah*. However, Tosafos in Yevamos says that Avraham Avinu did the *priah* as well, as he did all the *mitzvos*. Avraham Avinu fulfilled both aspects of the *mitzvah* of *milah*. He accomplished the obligatory aspect by doing the *milah* and the voluntary aspect by doing

the *priah*. It is considered as if Avraham Avinu actually observed the entire Torah, including *milah*, voluntarily because the *milah* is not kosher without the *priah* (after Klal Yisroel was commanded in *priah*).

Now we can understand the implication of the phrase “as Hashem commanded him” in connection with Avraham Avinu’s circumcision of his son Yitzchok. For his own *bris milah*, he went beyond the obligation and did *priah*. For Yitzchok, however, he deliberately did not do the *priah* so as to allow Yitzchok the opportunity to do *priah* on himself and thus enable him to perform the voluntary *mitzvah*. Therefore, the Torah stresses that he did “as Hashem commanded,” i.e. the *milah*, not the *priah*.

Perhaps another reason why an obligatory *mitzvah* is on a higher level than a voluntary one is because the highest *madreigah* a person can achieve is to be an *Eved Hashem*, a servant of Hashem. We see that Moshe Rabbeinu is called *Eved Hashem*. A servant has no self-interest, because his role is to fulfill his master’s will. When a person does a voluntary *mitzvah*, on the other hand, he does so because he desires and chooses to perform the *mitzvah*. While this is meritorious, it is not the highest level of *avodas Hashem*.

May we be *zocheh* to overcome our Yetzer Horah and become true *Avdei Hashem*.

Rabbi Goldstein is the rosh chaburah at the kollel.

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Seudas Bris

Rabbi Dovid Greenberg

In this week's *Parsha* the Torah states "Vaya'as Avraham Mishteh Gadol B'Yom HiGamel Es Yitzchok" "Avraham made a great feast on the day that Yitzchok was weaned." The *sefer Pirkei D' Rabbi Eliezer* (ch.29) states that we learn from this *posuk* that one is obligated to serve a festive meal on the day one gives his son a *bris milah*. The *Tosafos* in *Maseches Shabbos* (130a) explains that the words "B'Yom HiGamel" can be interpreted as "B'Yom Hei-Gimmel Mal," "On the eighth day (5 + 3) that he circumcised," he made the feast. Although some *Poskim* say that the *mitzvah* of making a *Seudas Bris* is a Torah obligation, most *Poskim* opine that it is a Rabbinic injunction or merely a custom (see *Sha'arei Teshuvah* O.C. 551:33). *Rabbeinu Bechaya* (P' *Lech Lecha* 17:13) compares the *Bris Milah* ceremony to the order of bringing a *korban*, therefore, just as there is a *mitzvah* for the *korban* to be eaten, which brings atonement to the owners, so too, we make a *seuda* on the day of a *bris*. The *Rema* (Y.D. 265:12) writes that a *Seudas Bris* has the status of a *Seudas Mitzvah* (where there is a *mitzvah* to eat) and the custom is to assemble at least ten men for the meal.

Mentioning vs. Inviting

The *Gemara* in *Maseches Pesachim* (113b) lists eight people who are "excommunicated" by Heaven. Among these eight is one who declines to eat at a gathering for a *mitzvah*. *Tosafos* (ibid. 114a) states that this gathering refers to a *Seudas Bris*. The *Midrash* states that one who partakes of this meal will be saved from *Gehinnom*. By declining this tremendous opportunity, one shows indifference to the severity of sin (*Gehinnom*) and is thereby deserving of the Heavenly ban. Hence, one should not invite people to a *Seudas Bris*, so as not to cause anyone to be excommunicated if he does not attend. Rather, one should only announce the time and place (*Pischei Teshuvah* 265:18). Even if one is personally invited, he is exempt from the ban if: a) his attendance would cause him to miss *davening* with a *Minyan*, b) he needs to go to work, c) he learns Torah full-time (*Bris Avos* 13:11), or d) there will be unscrupulous people in attendance with whom he does not wish to associate (*Tosafos*, ibid.). One can fulfill the *mitzvah* of attending the *seuda* by tasting even a small amount of food. Some *Poskim* suggest that the ban only applies to a person who attended the *Bris* but left without participating in the *seuda* (*sefer Koreis Bris* s.k.67).

The Menu

The *Magen Avraham* quotes the opinion of the *MaHaRash* of *Lublin* that one does not fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Seudas Bris* unless

one eats meat and drinks wine as one does at any other *Seudas Mitzvah*. (249:6 see also *Machatzis HaShekel*). This is based on the *Gemara* in *Pesachim* (109a- according to the *Maharshal's* interpretation in *Beitza* 2:5) that joy is only felt through meat and wine. However, many *Poskim* write that fowl and fish may be substituted as they also cause joy (see M.A. 533:8 and 552:2 and *Sefer Even Yisrael*). The *Levush* and the *Bais Yosef* (O.C. s.529) maintain that the *Gemara* in *Pesachim* only refers to the meat of *korbonos*, but nowadays one can fulfill his *mitzvah* of joy with wine. One should definitely try to honor the *mitzvah* as much as one is able.

Seasonal Laws

On *Erev Pesach*, the *minhag* is that all firstborn males (or their fathers, if they are not yet *Bar Mitzvah*) fast. The *Mishnah Berurah* (470:10) states that many have the custom that the firstborn can break his fast by eating at a *Seudas Mitzvah* such as a *Seudas Bris* or a *siyum*.

During the *Nine Days*, the *minhag* is to not eat meat or drink wine. However, at a *Seudas Mitzvah* such as a *Seudas Bris*, one should eat meat. Even if the *bris* is not performed on the eighth day or the *seuda* was postponed for any reason, the meal is still considered a *Seudas Mitzvah*. One should make an effort to have the *seuda* as close to the time of the actual *bris* as possible (*Pischei Teshuvah* 265:16, *Sha'arei Teshuvah* 551:33). Up until the week during which *Tisha B'Av* falls, anyone who would normally attend the *seuda*, is permitted to eat meat at the meal. During the week of *Tisha B'Av*, only the *Ba'alei Simcha* (father, *mohel*, *sandek*) and the close relatives, plus ten additional friends, are allowed to eat meat. All other participants should have fish or dairy (M.B. 551:75-77).

If the meal is held on the night after *Tisha B'Av*, when some restrictions of the *Nine Days* still apply, even people who would not normally come to the *seuda* may participate and eat meat (M.B. 558:2).

Many have the custom to fast on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*. If there is a *bris* on that day, those people who would normally attend have a *mitzvah* to eat; individuals who would not normally attend are permitted to eat.

There is a custom to sing the song entitled "Yom LaYabosha," which discusses *Krias Yam Suf*, at the *Seudas Bris*. This is based on the *Mechilta* which states that in the merit of *Bris Milah* the *Yam Suf* split and allowed the Jews to cross.

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