

Tazria: Bris - Seven and Eight

- Rabbi Michael Kossowsky, zt"l.

Brit on the eighth day. Baal Haturim, number of words in the command corresponds to number of words in VAYECHULU. In Kohelet Rabbah, TEN HELEK LESHIVA VEGAM LISHEMONA. This refers to the connections between Brit and Shabbat. Hinuch starting at birth, but must continue by example, such as the way you observe Shabbat....

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(Based on a sermon in Sefer Toafot Hari"m, by Rabbi Michael Kossowsky, zt"l)

"And on the eighth day he shall be circumcised". The Baal HaTurim points out that the number of words in this passage corresponds to the number of words in the passage of Vayechulu. Our sages emphasized the same connection in Kohelet Rabbah, citing the passage Ten helek leshiva vegam lishemona (Kohelet 11), "Give tribute to the seventh and the eighth as well", referring to the connection between the seventh day of Shabbat and the eighth day of circumcision. What is the connection between circumcision and Shabbat?

Throughout history the Jewish people sacrificed much to observe both of these commandments, circumcision and Shabbat. But there must be a deeper connection.

I suggest we look for it in the beracha the father recites during the brit, which concludes with the words, "To enter him into the covenant of Abraham our Father". Obviously, Abraham symbolizes the mitzvah of Hinuch, Torah education, in the spirit of the Torah's testimony, "For I know that he will command his children and household after him to guard the way of God and walk according to His commandments" (Bereshit 15:19).

To inspire a generation that will walk in God's way has always been our highest aspiration. No other nation raised the commandment of education to the level that we did. "When a child begins to talk, his father begins to teach him Torah" (Succah 42). The first system of universal education was our invention. The motto was haamidu talmidim harbeh (Avot I), "Teach many students".

The commandment to teach children begins at the time of birth. And circumcision is the first step towards raising the child. That is why we express the wish to the father at the ceremony, and to both parents at that occasion, that "Just as you entered him into the covenant, so may you enter him into a life of Torah, marriage and good deeds". Circumcision is then the beginning of the child's preparation for Jewishness.

How does one continue to teach a child? Not only by words and thoughts. Example is equally important. Without example there is no inspiration. It is only by observing Jewish conduct in the parents' house that one can be relatively sure the lessons will "take". Veshinantam lebanecha; How? Vedibarta bam, you yourself shall do it - Beshivtecha bebetecha by your conduct at home.... The most potent example of Jewish conduct that creates a truly Jewish atmosphere is the

Shabbat. The spirit of holiness that it creates has the greatest effect on children and their Jewish development. That is what our sages meant when they wrote, "Give tribute to the seven". If you give honor to the Sabbath, the seventh day, then "vegam shemona", this will influence the child to continue in the fashion begun at the eighth day, the day of entering the great covenant of Brit. And that was what the Baal HaTurim meant when he emphasized that the number of words in the passage commanding Mila corresponds to the number of words in the vayechulu passage describing Shabbat.

(The Author: Rabbi Dr. Michael Kossowsky, zt"l, was Rav of the Beth Midrash Hagadol in Johannesburg until his death in 1965. His book, Toafos Harim, was published after his death (in Hebrew) by his widow, Rebbetzin Chiena Kossowsky, aleha hashalom.)