

תזריע

IT'S ALL IN THE NUMBER

The *bris milah* ritual is performed on the eighth day of a boy's life (*Bereishis* 17:12). It also has many other associations with the number eight. The first addition to the 7 *mitzvos Bnei Noach*, it was the eighth *mitzvah* incumbent upon Avraham Avinu (ibid. 17:10); it was the eighth of the *Asarah Nisyonos* — the Ten Tests — with which Avraham was tested (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 29); the eighth *berachah* of the *Shemoneh Esrei* was established as the healing prayer of *bris milah* (*Megillah* 17:); and the eighth generation of *Klal Yisrael* (Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Levi, Kehas, Amram, Moshe and Yehoshua) merited redemption from bondage in Mitzraim due to the performance of the *mitzvah* of *Milah*.

Hashem stipulated to Avraham that *B'nai Yisroel's* ultimate inheritance of *Eretz Yisrael* was contingent upon the performance of *bris milah* (*Bereishis* 17:8). The merit of *bris milah* is so great that it shields its adherents from the travails of *Geihinom* (*Tana D'vei Eliyahu Zuta* 25:3). *Bris milah* is singled out as a *mitzvah* which *Klal Yisrael* accepted with joy, and is therefore still practiced with joy (*Shabbos* 130.). It is the equivalent of all the *mitzvos* of the Torah (*Nedarim* 32.). Of all the *mitzvos* which Avraham performed, only *milah* elevated him to a level of perfection (*Nedarim* 31:).

It is significant that the concept of perfection in *Tanach* is bound to the number eight. Avraham was commanded regarding *milah*:

התהלך לפני והיה תמים

“Walk before Me and be perfect” (*Bereishis* 17:1).

The *mitzvah* of *milah* is replete with references to the number eight, and its performance is considered as an offering of incense upon the *mizbei'ach* (Ramah, *Yoreh Dei'ah* 265:11). Regarding an animal sacrifice we are told:

תמים יקריבנו לפני ה'

Perfect shall he bring it before Hashem (*Vayikra* 3:1).

The minimum age of a Temple sacrifice is eight days old (*Vayikra* 22:27). The greatest perfection one can achieve is the adherence to Torah. The Maharal (*Neir Mitzvah*) states that Torah is signified by the number eight, for the Torah was given to *Klal Yisrael* only after a seven week period of preparation and self-elevation.

תורת ה' תמימה משיבת נפש

The Torah of Hashem is perfect, it restores the soul (*Tehillim* 19:8).

The Maharal (*Chidushei Aggados Sotah* 11:) explains that the number eight represents the spiritual, the supernatural, while the number seven signifies the natural order of creation. Since

creation was accomplished in seven days, all activity pertaining to nature revolves around the number seven. *Bris milah* is therefore performed on the eighth day to indicate that it is above nature; it is in the realm of the spiritual.

The calendar is composed of seven day cycles which comprise the week. Every seventh year begins a new *Shemita* cycle, and there are seven *Shemitos* in a *Yovel* cycle. *Sheva Brachos* is celebrated with seven Blessings on each of the seven days following a wedding. The *Shiva* period of mourning is observed for seven days. Hashem commanded all humanity to observe the seven *mitzvos* of *B'nei Noach* (*Sanhedrin* 56:) and there are the original seventy nations of the world (Maharal, *Tiferes Yisrael* 2). There are seven major behavioral characteristics in man (*Pirkei Avos* 5:10). There are seven types of punishment unleashed in this world (ibid. 11). There are seven days of counting impurity for the *zav*, *zavah* and *metzora* (*Vayikra* 15:13 15:28) as is the case for the *parah adumah* (*Bamidbar* 19:12). Seven major miracles were performed for this world (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 52). There are seven entrances to *Geihinom* (ibid. 53). There are seven pillars of wisdom (*Mishlei* 9:1). The harp played in the *Beis Hamikdash* had seven strings, while the harp of *Mashiach* will consist of eight strings (*Arachin* 13:).

There is also a mystical power relative to the number seven. It is a major factor in the calculation of time and also in the worship of Hashem through animal sacrifice offerings; it also alludes to the seven “Lower Emanations” (Ibn Ezra, *Balak* 23:1). After the *molad* of the moon — the point at which the new moon begins to appear — for a period of seven days the moon grows a little each day and becomes more complete (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 426:4). Seven indicates completion of matters: “And the boy sneezed seven times and revived” (*Melachim II* 4:35). “He immersed himself seven times in the Jordan and his skin became like the skin of a young boy” (ibid. 5:14). There were seven branches of the *menorah* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, and there were seven sprinklings on the *Yom Kippur Beis Hamikdash* service.

Rashi (*Bereishis* 4:1) states that Kayin was born together with one female twin while his brother, Hevel, was born with two female twins. Kayin murdered Hevel in order to acquire Hevel's extra twin (Rashi *Sotah* 9:; *Bereishis Rabbah* 22:7). The Maharal (*Gur Aryeh, Bereishis* 4:1) explains that the seven days of creation were identified by the first seven human beings. Adam corresponded to Sunday, Chava to Monday, Kayin to Tuesday, Kayin's female twin to Wednesday, Hevel to Thursday, Hevel's first female twin to Friday, and Hevel's second female twin to *Shabbos*. Kayin wanted control of the complete natural cycle; he therefore conspired to murder Hevel and thereby acquire the *Shabbos* female twin.

The Ramban (*Vayikra* 23:36) states that each even day of the week formed a pair with its predecessor. *Shabbos*, the seventh day, protested to Hashem that it had no partner. Therefore, Hashem created the eighth entity, *Klal Yisrael*, to become the partner of *Shabbos*, the seventh entity. This liaison between the seventh and eighth entities introduces a special level of holiness into the world. Similarly, the Ramban continues, *Shemini Atzeres*, the eighth day after *Sukkos* begins, is on a higher plane of holiness than the preceding days of *Yom Tov* (*Shemini Atzeres* also includes the festival of *Simchas Torah*). Correspondingly, the Ramban continues, (the actual giving of the Torah) maintains a *Shemini Atzeres*-like holiness because it occurs on the eighth week after *Pesach* (see Maharal, *Tiferes Yisrael* 25).

Rabbeinu Bechaya, in his commentary on Torah (*Vayikra* 9:1; *Bamidbar* 4:47), suggests that many of the elements involved with the *Mishkan* (and ultimately the *Beis Hamikdash*), the holiest

spot in this mundane world, are intimately involved with the number eight. There were eight days in the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. The *Kohein Hagadol's* uniform consisted of eight articles of clothing. There were eight varieties of spices in both the *shemen hamishchah* — the oil of anointing and in the *ketores* — the incense. There were eight poles with which to carry the vessels in the *Mikdash*. The minimum age of an animal offered as a *karban* was eight days old. The *Levi'im's* orchestra consisted of eight musical instruments.

David *Hamelech*, in *Tehillim*, established the 119th Psalm in an eight-fold alphabetical arrangement describing the ceaseless striving to faithfully live a true Torah-life regardless of time, place, or social pressures. Correspondingly, the 19th Psalm, which deals with Hashem's revealing Himself to mankind through both nature and the Torah (see Malbim *ibid.*), also enjoys a unique structure. The first seven verses deal with the creation of the world (which took seven days). The eighth verse deals with the perfection of Torah (which is above nature — supernatural). Similarly, the festival of *Chanukah*, the celebration of the triumph of Torah over the Greek philosophy of secularization is manifested in the number eight (Maharal, *Ner Mitzvah*).

Eight is the number associated with holiness, and *bris milah* is the act which enables man to achieve it. Hashem ordained *milah* as a covenant with *Klal Yisrael* to serve as a physical manifestation of separation from the other nations. The *orlah* — foreskin — is a physical impediment to holiness. Its removal signifies the desire to come close to Hashem. The removal of the *orlah* is symbolic of the control over the other three human *orlos*: the ear, the lips and the heart (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 29). *Bris milah* is the first step in raising our physical beings to a greater spiritual level.

The Torah teaches:

ביום השמיני עצרת תהיה לכם

On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly (*Bamidbar* 29:35).

For seven days *Klal Yisrael* is charged to assemble all its natural energies, directed toward a holy goal. The eighth day is an *Atzeres*, a gathering day, the transcendental opportunity for *Klal Yisrael* to identify with its Torah heritage.

The Torah states:

וייצר ה' אלקים את האדם

Then Hashem formed the man (*Bereishis* 2:7).

Rashi (*ibid.*) comments that implicit in the original act of creation are actually two acts of creation. This is evidenced by the double usage of the letter 'Yud' in the word "formed" (וייצר). The first creation is for *Olam Hazeh*, and the second creation is for *techias hameisim* — the resurrection of the dead. The *bris milah* on the eighth day begins man's preparation for the second and ultimate purpose of creation, *techias hameisim*. Life in this world is routine and natural; *techias hameisim* is existence in its climactic form, a transcendent, permanent reality.

The *Midrash Shochar Tov* on *Tehillim* (9) identifies several individuals mentioned in the Torah who were *nolad mahul* — born already circumcised. They are identified by the fact that their names are repeated in quick succession. The first time their name is mentioned is for their creation in *Olam Hazeh*, and the second mention is for *techias hameisim*. The fact that they are born in an already circumcised state is a divine statement that they are born primed for the next

world. Their agenda in this world already deals with the next. The fact that they were not required to wait the routine eight days to undergo the ritual of *bris milah*, but were already born into a state of holiness indicates that they are not bound by the limitations and restrictions of *Olam Haze*. They are endowed with supernatural holiness which designates them for *Olam Haboh*, for they “approach G-dliness without mortality” (Maharal, *Chidushei Aggados, Sotah 12.*).

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