



BADERECH

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L'chaim!

Rav Yitzchak Zilber, *zt'l*, legendary champion of Russian Jewry, was a humble *talmid chacham* and teacher whose incredible self sacrifice and dedication inspired and strengthened generations of Jews. Having been imprisoned in gulags of the former Soviet Union, he escaped to Tashkent and later arrived in Eretz Yisrael, where he continued his efforts in teaching Torah around the clock. Thousands of Russian *olim* to the Holy Land sought his counsel and Torah instruction.

In the early 1970's, most Jews from the USSR arrived without a *bris milah*. While the country scrambled to accommodate the waves of Aliyah, neither the Ministry of Absorption nor the Chief Rabbinate were prepared for the challenge of providing to the masses an opportunity to do this mitzvah. The bureaucratic mechanics created a waiting period of weeks. As it is extremely important not to delay the essential mitzvah of *milah*, Rav Zilber worked feverishly to help the *olim* accomplish it as soon as possible. In

Yerushalayim, he reconnected with Dr. Yaa-kov Tzatzkis, a urologist who had performed clandestine circumcisions in Moscow. Together, they made countless *brisim* in their own homes, and across Eretz Yisrael, for Russian Jews of all ages.

Dr. Tzatzkis recalled:

After a *bris*, it's customary to drink *l'chaim*. We would bring a bottle of wine, maybe a little vodka to help ease the pain and some cookies or cake. Sometimes the *baalei simcha* themselves would bring something.

One cold and rainy day we had the unexpected opportunity to perform a *bris* at Bikur Cholim hospital in Yerushalayim. Rav Yitzchak suddenly came running to meet me at the hospital, and arrived with a bottle of wine and some cookies. I saw that he wasn't wearing a coat.

The next day, again, I met him outside without a coat. "Rav Yitzchak, this is not like winter in Moscow, but it is raining and cold! Why aren't you wearing a coat?" He mumbled something unintelligible. When I pressed him further, Rav Yitzchak relented: "OK, so I pawned it..."

I looked at him inquisitively.

"When you called me to join you for the *bris* yesterday," he explained, "I ran out of the house right away. My wife didn't have any warning to prepare something for the *simcha*. I didn't have any money in my pockets. What was I supposed to do? We needed some *mezonos* and wine to celebrate the *bris*. So I walked into the store on Rechov Strauss down the block from the hospital, gave them my

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coat, and they gave me what I needed. How could a Yid enter the covenant of Avraham Avinu without a *l'chaim* to celebrate?

וַיְהִי אַבְרָם בֶּן־תְּשָׁעִים שָׁנָה וַתְּשַׁע שָׁנִים וַיְרֹא ה' אֶל־אַבְרָם

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי־אֵל שַׁדַּי הִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי וַיְהִי תָמִים

When Avram was ninety-nine years old, Hashem appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am *E-l Sha-dai*. Walk in My ways and be *tamim*, wholehearted.

וְאֵתָנָה בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וְאֶרְבָּה אוֹתָךְ בְּמֵאדָּ מְאֹד...

I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous (you will multiply you very greatly).

זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ בֵּינִי וּבֵינְכֶם וּבֵין זֶרְעְךָ אַחֲרָיִךְ הַמּוּל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר

This is My covenant, which you shall observe between Me and between you and between your offspring after you, that every male among you be circumcised. (17:1-2, 10)

This was the first time in history that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* invited us all into an exclusive, sacred covenant and partnership. *Milah* thus connects us to everyone who came before us, as well as everyone who will come after us. It opens for us a blessing for national growth, development and expansion בְּמֵאדָּ מְאֹד.

The practice of *milah* is rooted in the recognition that Hashem created the world in an ‘imperfect’ state, and that Hashem’s *mitzvos* are obligations and opportunities to work toward improving Creation and perfecting the world. The mitzvah of *milah* has and will always remain a defining symbol and sign of our commitment to *Yidishkeit* and to Hashem.

During the Second Temple period, Greco-Roman culture centered around adulation of the ‘perfect’ human body, and

specifically the male physique. Meanwhile, generations of Jews faced *gezeiros*, severe decrees banning *milah*, and doing the mitzvah required great self-sacrifice. *Midrash Tanchumah*, (Tazria 5) relates a debate between the great sage and martyr, the *heilgeh* Rabbi Akiva, and the evil Roman governor of Judea, Turnus Rufus:

The wicked Turnus Rufus challenged Rabbi Akiva: “Which is better and more beautiful, the works of the Almighty, or those of flesh and blood? Rabbi Akiva replied, “The works of flesh and blood are more beautiful.”

Turnus Rufus then asked, “Why are Jews circumcised?” Rabbi Akiva replied, “I knew you would ask this and that is why I pre-empted you and answered that the works of man are superior.”

Rabbi Akiva then brought sheaves of grain and loaves of bread. “These sheaves are the works of the Hakadosh Baruch Hu, while these loaves are the works of flesh and blood.

“Are not the loaves superior?”

The Midrash concludes with a lesson that the commandments that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* gives us are *לְצַרְרָה אוֹתָם בָּהֶם*, to purify and further refine us.

An interpretation of God’s name *Sha-dai* is *She’amar l’olamo dai*, “The One who said to His world, ‘Enough.’” This refers to Hashem



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halting the expansion and development of the world before it would become complete or ‘perfect’. In doing so, Hashem left space for us to apply our creative efforts to improve His world. By holding back from completing Creation, Hashem enables us to participate in a continuous expansion that is qualitative as well as quantitative.

All of Creation had been ‘yearning’ to be more, to be greater, to be fulfilled and self-actualized. Had *Sha-dai* not told Creation to stop, there would have been no sheaves of wheat for Rebbi Akiva to bring before Turnus Rufus — for they would have already evolved on their own into baked loaves of bread.

It is the name *Sha-dai* — this attribute which leaves the male body ‘incomplete’ — which obliges us to bring a Jewish child into the covenant. This is what allows us to participate in ‘completing the creation’ of the child’s

body.

אִם-לֹא אֶפְתָּח לָכֶם אֶת אַרְבּוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִרֵקְתִּי לָכֶם
בְּרָכָה עַד-בְּלִיַּדִּי

“I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you until there will not be sufficient room for them!” (Malachi, 3:10)

Gemara (*Taanis*, 22b) explains this verse: “Hashem will bless us *ad bli dai*, with an excess of blessings, beyond that which we require, with an abundance so great that עד שיכלו שפתותיכם מלומר די “our lips will be worn out (*yivlu*) from saying *Dai*, ‘It is enough!’”

From bread to *Bris Milah*, may we live with the awareness and appreciation that everything is בֵּינֵינוּ וּבֵין הַשָּׁמַיִם, “between us and Hashem”; may we celebrate our role and privilege as co-creators, with overflowing blessings. *L’chaim!*

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