

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

TAZRI'A-MITZORA

On the eighth day, the child's foreskin shall be circumcised (12:3)

The Maharal writes that the mitzva of Brit Mila has special characteristics of its own. It centres around number eight, which is an addition to the seven days of the Creation. He develops the idea that the Creation itself revolves around the number seven, including the seven days of the week and the seven years of the agricultural cycle. By commanding the circumcision of male children on Day 8 of their lives, G-d expects Am Yisrael's spiritual ascent in life to transcend the natural order of things. There are times he should go against the flow. This is a message transmitted and reminded privately between G-d and each male Jewish person.

Am Yisrael had to go against the tide of what they had been conditioned to in Egypt in accepting the Torah. This was transcending the Creation, the natural order of things, by accepting and implementing drastic change. Keeping circumcision was necessary to frame this attitude of mind before receiving the Torah. And keeping circumcision is a key reminder to the Jew to this present day of the need

to transcend the natural order of things in situations that confront him, even at the cost of financial loss and personal ridicule. This is particularly exemplified by Shabbat, Kashrut, and Taharat HaMishpacha, where, outside Israel, our Torah-ordained practices set us apart from the practices of the general population.

This idea can be extended in that Brit Mila is not only there to keep us separate from practices of the general population, but from immoral social norms of the general population. For we learn of Brit Mila in Sefer B'reishit where G-d established that practice in the form of a covenant with Avraham Avinu and his descendants. As my late teacher R' Jonathan Sacks ztl points out, Sefer B'reishit brings six instances where those at the top of the social pyramid abused their power in sexual ethics. Sara was abducted twice, once by Pharaoh and once by Avimelech. The men of S'dom attempted the homosexual version with Lot's two guests. Two generations on, Shechem forced himself on Dina, and later, Potifar's wife strove by foul means to seduce Yosef. Indeed, various legal codes of that time support such practices, allowing the rich and privileged to pay compensation to the family, exemplified by the way Pharaoh 'treated Avraham well for her sake' through which 'he acquired... donkeys... servants... and camels' (B'reishit 12:16).

As Rabbi Sacks explains, our norms are not like that. Among the cornerstones of our sacred traditions are the sanctity of marriage, the exclusivity of the relationship between husband and wife, and equality before the law. Not one law for the rich and another for the less privileged peoples and classes. Being rich does not allow us to indulge passions at will. All have to exercise self-control. Brit Mila is both inward sign and a unifying of Klal Yisrael in accepting that might does not conquer what right, whether in this or any area. All of us are equal before Torah law. 🌿📖