

Dam Milah. Bris Milah of Aliza and Sasha Pesach 2020

Abraham and Sarah start their journey childless. Theirs is a journey of transformation: their names are changed, and their bodies are transformed - Abraham is circumcised and Sarah becomes fertile.

Life is not about acceptance of fate, but rather transforming and refining the natural reality.

Only once they internalize this idea are they blessed with a child. Abraham and all his men must circumcise themselves, causing themselves *harm* and allowing blood of *pain* to flow from their reproductive organs...

and meanwhile, Sarah's womb will be *healed* and blood of *creation* will flow from her reproductive organs.

Upon reading this, I was put in mind of a quote from Ezekiel 16:6 which we say when we read the Passover Haggadah:

וַאֲעֵבֶר עָלֶיךָ וְאָרָאָהּ, מִתְבוֹסֶסֶת
בְּדַמֶּיךָ; וְאָמַר לָךְ בְּדַמֶּיךָ חַיִּי, וְאָמַר לָךְ
בְּדַמֶּיךָ חַיִּי. 6 And when I passed by thee, and saw thee wallowing in
thy blood, I said unto thee: In thy blood, live; yea, I said
unto thee: In thy blood, live;

There are several different interpretations of this verse- some talk about the blood of circumcision and others of childbirth.

"And I passed over you and I saw you and behold it was time for you to be loved (Yechezkel 16:8)" -- Hashem meant by this, "The time has come to keep the promise I made to Avraham, to redeem his children!" But the Jews had no Mitzvot through which they could merit His redemption, as it says (ibid. 16:7), "And you were naked and exposed." Hashem therefore gave them two Mitzvot: the blood of the Pesach offering and the blood of circumcision (the blood of the mass circumcision on the evening that they left Egypt) as the verse says, "You were soiled with your bloods (ibid. 16:6)" -- with two bloods. And another verse says, "You too, with the blood of your covenant, have I sent forth your prisoners (Zechariah 9:11)."

(Rashi to Shemot 12:6)

Indeed, the entire stay of the Jews in Egypt was bloodstained. As the Midrash tells us, Pharaoh used to bathe himself in the blood of Jewish babies to cure his leprosy (Rashi to Shemot 2:23).

The Pesach Seder is full of reminders of the Jewish blood that was spilled in Egypt.

Tosafot comments on the Charoset into which we dip our Marror:¹

The Yerushalmi tells us that some people [mix in wine] in order to remember the blood [of our fathers that was spilled in Egypt].... It is customary nowadays to initially prepare it very thick and then to thin it with wine and vinegar.

(Tosafot to Pesachim 116a)

Sarah's menses had stopped, it's stated explicitly in Genesis 18:11-

יא ואברהם ושרה זקנים, באים
בַּיָּמִים; חָדַל לְהִיּוֹת לְשָׂרָה, אַרְחַ
כַּנְּשִׂים. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, and well stricken
in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of
women.--)

I want to suggest that on some level (and this is not *peshat*),

Abraham must circumcise himself (one type of bleeding) **IN ORDER** for Sarah's menses to resume (a different type of bleeding).

There is some kind of spiritual causation or manifestation here, a kind of transference or balancing act.

To some degree, it is the personal sacrifice of the male and his willingness to undergo pain that allows for the fertility of the female he cares for to come into effect.

(To be clear, I am not suggesting that Abraham knew this would be the outcome of his choosing to observe the commandment- only that this is something we as the reader observe.)

This may explain why it is precisely circumcision that is used by Simeon and Levi against Shechem and his family.

Shechem and his people circumcise themselves, arguably to become like the Hebrews and to be able to intermarry with them.

But they will never *truly* be able to be like the Hebrews.

Circumcision, seen in the light I have just explained it, is a way of the male saying that he is willing to cause pain to himself and allow his life blood to spill *in order* to allow his partner to experience the gift of creation and create life.

¹ The halachic authorities (see Mishneh Berurah 472:38) also link the halachic preference for the use of red wine for the Four Cups at the Seder to its similarity to the color of the blood Pharaoh spilled slaughtering the Jews.

In contrast, for Shechem, who violates and rapes Dina, to perform circumcision is a complete perversion of the act. He is not capable of doing something so selfless for his female partner- he has demonstrated that by abducting and raping her! Thus, it is fitting that the very act of circumcision causes his downfall...

This type of balancing act- where there is a price to be paid, harm for the sake of healing, or pain for the sake of creation- is seen in other places throughout Tanakh.

For example, at *Mei Marah*, Moses is instructed to throw a bitter branch into non-potable waters in order to turn them sweet. The prophet Elisha also performs a miracle like this- he puts salt into non-potable waters in order to turn them sweet (II Kings 2:19-22).

The Midrash stretches the metaphor further:

והיו לוקחים דם מילה ודם פסח, והיו נותנין על משקוף בתיהן, וכשעבר הקב"ה לנגוף את מצרים (יא) וראה דם הברית ודם הפסח, נתמלא רחמים על ישראל שנאמר ואעבור עליך ואראך מתבוססת בדמיך ואומר לך בדמיך חיי

And they [the Israelites] took the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Paschal lamb, and they put it on the lintel of their homes.

And when the Holy Blessed One passed over to plague the Egyptians and saw the covenant blood and the Paschal blood, They were filled with mercy for the Israelites,

as it is said, "And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, and I said to you, in your bloods [plural] live" (Ezekiel 16:7)

[Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 29:11](#)

So the question remains as to the relationship between the two bloods: *Dam Milah and Dam Korban Pesach*....

היה אומר הקדוש ברוך הוא: אם אין אתם נימולין, אין אתם אוכלין [קרבת פסח], שנאמר: ויאמר יי אל ונתערב דם הפסח בדם המילה, משה ואל אהרן זאת חקת הפסח וגו', מיד נתנו עצמן ומלו

והקדוש ברוך הוא עובר **ונוטל כל אחד ואחד ונושקו ומברכו**, שנאמר (יחזקאל טז, ו): ואעבור עליך ואראך מתבוססת בדמיך וגו', חיי בדם פסח, חיי בדם מילה

[שמות רבה י"ט:ה'](#)

The Holy One Blessed Be He said: If you are not circumcised, you cannot eat [the Passover sacrifice], as it says,

"And God said to Moshe and to Aaron 'This is the law of the Passover sacrifice...' "

They immediately circumcised themselves, and the blood of the Passover sacrifice mingled with the blood from the circumcision,

and The Holy One Blessed Be He passed over and **held each one and kissed it and blessed it**, as it says, "And when I passed by thee, and saw thee wallowing in thy blood, I said unto thee: In thy blood, live; yea, I said unto thee: In thy blood, live;" (Isaiah 16:6)

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[Shemot Rabbah 19:5](#)

Connecting the blood with the fertility of the women is cited in the following later midrash

דם, מפני מה בא עליהם? שהיו רואים את ישראל שהיו טובלין מטומאותיהם ואת בנות ישראל... (ג)
שהיו טובלות מנדתן ואחזו עליהם את המים כדי שלא יטבלו לפיכך הפך הקב"ה את כל מימיהם לדם.

[ילקוט שמעוני על התורה קפ"ב:ג'](#)

Why did the [plague of] blood come upon them? Because they saw that the Israelites would immerse [to cleanse themselves] from their impurities, and that the daughters of Israel would immerse [to cleanse themselves] from their menstrual [impurity], and they took the water from them that they should not immerse. Therefore, God turned all their water to blood.

[Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 182:3](#)

סימן ואות שאני אדון ואתם עבדי... ודם נדות שהנשים משמרות. **והיה לאות ברית ביני וביניכם** (יא)
ומגידות פתחיהן לבעליהן הוא להם דם ברית

[בכור שור, בראשית י"ז:א"א'](#)

"You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin,] and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you." A sign and symbol that I am your Lord and you are my servants....

The menstrual blood that women must monitor, and the way in which they inform their husbands of their sexual availability, functions for them as covenantal blood [that is parallel to the male mitzvah of circumcision”

[Bekhor Shor, Genesis 17:11:1](#)