

"I will set My covenant between Me and you"

Torah She'b'al Peh Is Acquired in the Merit of Bris Milah: 36 Times בריית טו"ב masechtos--tractates Equals ת

In this week's parsha, parshas Lech Lecha, we encounter a mitzvah that is one of the foundations of the Torah and Judaism—the mitzvah of "Bris-milah." HKB"H gave Avraham Avinu and his descendants this essential mitzvah with the explicit intent of establishing a covenant with them for the duration of time. Let us examine a sampling of the pesukim related to this mitzvah (Bereishis 17, 1):

"ויהי אברם בן תשעים שנה ותשע שנים, וירא ה' אל אברם ויאמר אליו אני אל שדי התהלך לפני והיה תמים, ואתנה בריתי ביני ובינך וארכה אותך במאד מאד. ויפול אברם על פניו וידבר אתו אלקים לאמר, אני הנה בריתי אתך והיית לאב המון גוים, ולא יקרא עוד את שמך אברם והיה שמך אברהם כי אב המון גוים נתתיך, והפתי אותך במאד מאד ונתתיך לגוים ומלכים ממך יצאו, והקמותי את בריתי ביני ובינך ובין זרעך אחריך לדורותם לברית עולם להיות לך לאלקים ולזרעך אחריך."

"When Avram was ninety-nine years old, Hashem appeared to Avram and said to him, "I am Kel Shakkai; walk before Me and be perfect. I will set My covenant between Me and you, and I will increase you most exceedingly." Avram fell upon his face, and G-d spoke with him saying, "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be a father of a multitude of nations; your name shall no longer be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations; I will make you most exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you; and kings shall descend from you. I will uphold My covenant between Me and you and your offspring after you, throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant, to be a G-d to you and to your offspring after you."

Reconciling the Contradiction Related to the Bris in the Merit of Torah She'b'al Peh

Examining the passage of the mitzvah of "milah," we find that HKB"H mentions the word "ברית"—covenant—thirteen times. Regarding this phenomenon, our blessed sages teach us in the Gemara (Nedarim 31b): "גדולה מילה שנכרתו עליה שלוש עשרה בריתות"—**"milah" is so significant that it is associated with thirteen covenants.** The Ran and Tosafos explain that the Gemara is referring to the thirteen times the word "ברית" is mentioned in the passage of "milah." Thus, we can conclude that the purpose of the mitzvah of "milah" is to include the young, circumcised child in the

covenant HKB"H established with Avraham Avinu. Accordingly, Chazal formulated the following special berachah to be recited in conjunction with this mitzvah: **אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו להכניסו—בריתו של אברהם אבינו—Who sanctified us with His mitzvos and commanded us to enter him into Avraham's covenant.** It is not surprising, therefore, that all of Yisrael refer to this mitzvah as: **"ברית מילה"—the covenant of "milah."**

Thus, we can suggest that this is why this mitzvah differs significantly from all of the other mitzvos in the Torah. As we know, a person is only obligated to perform all of the other mitzvos upon reaching the age of twelve or thirteen. At that age, a person is considered to possess the "da'at"—knowledge—necessary to choose to perform mitzvos. Yet, HKB"H imposed this mitzvah on an eight day old infant lacking "da'at." This is meant to teach us that the "Bris" established with Yisrael—in the merit of the mitzvah of "milah" given to Avraham Avinu and his offspring—is beyond "da'at" and is not at all dependent on a person's choice.

I have been inspired to focus, in this essay, on an apparent contradiction that has troubled us throughout the ages. On the one hand, the Gemara states (Gittin 60b): **"אמר רבי יוחנן, לא כרת הקב"ה ברית עם ישראל אלא בשביל דברים שבעל פה, שנאמר (שמות לד-כז) כי על פי הדברים—HKB"H only established a "Bris" with Yisrael for the sake of the Oral Law—Torah she'b'al peh.** On the other hand, it states explicitly in this week's parsha that HKB"H established a "Bris" with Avraham and his descendants in the merit of the mitzvah of "milah": **והקמותי את בריתי ביני ובינך ובין זרעך—I will uphold My covenant between Me and you and your offspring after you, throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant, to be a G-d to you and to your offspring after you.**

In truth, we could simply posit that both statements are valid and accurate. HKB"H established a covenant with Yisrael both in the merit of "milah" and in the merit of Torah she'b'al peh. This, however, is at odds with Rav Yochanan's use of the word "אלא"—meaning "only"—in the Gemara cited above. His implication is that

the "Bris" was established with Yisrael solely for the sake of Torah she'b'al peh. This clearly contradicts the passuk in our parsha.

Why Did HKB"H Not Specify which Limb Is to Be Circumcised?

Next, let us consider another fascinating aspect concerning the mitzvah of "milah." Nowhere does HKB"H specify in Torah she'b'chsav which bodily limb is to be circumcised in the fulfillment of the mitzvah of "milah." In the Gemara (Shabbas 108a) and in greater detail in the Midrash, we find statements from which we can prove that HKB"H intended us to fulfill this mitzvah by removing the foreskin of the male sexual organ. In the words of the Midrash, this is referred to as "the **orlah** of the body." Let us present the Midrash (B.R. 46, 5):

"רבי ישמעאל אומר, אברהם כהן גדול היה, שנאמר (תהלים קי-ד) גשבע ה' ולא ינחם אתה כהן לעולם וגו', ונאמר להלן (בראשית יז-יא) ונמלתם את בשר ערלתכם, מזהיכן ימול, אם ימול מן האוזן, אינו כשר להקריב [כי הוא בעל מום], מן הפה אינו כשר להקריב, מן הלב אינו כשר להקריב, מזהיכן ימול ויהיה כשר להקריב, הוי אומר זו ערלת הגוף."

רבי יעקבא אומר ד' ערלות הן, נאמרה ערלה באוזן (ירמיה ו-י) הגה ערלה אזנם, ונאמרה ערלה בפה (שמות ו-ל) הן אני ערל שפתים, ונאמר ערלה בלב (ירמיה ט-כה) וכל בית ישראל ערלי לב, ונאמר ערלה בגוף (בראשית יז-יד) וערל זכר, ונאמר לו (שם שם-א) התהלך לפני ויהיה תמים, אם ימול מן האוזן אינו תמים, מן הפה אינו תמים, מן הלב אינו תמים, ומזהיכן ימול ויהיה תמים, הוי אומר זו ערלת הגוף."

Rabbi Yishmael teaches that Avraham was a Kohen Gadol; yet, it states that we must perform circumcision by removing the "orlah" from our flesh. What organ can be circumcised without disqualifying the kohen from performing ritual services? It must certainly be the male foreskin, for removal of any of the other "orlah"s would deem the kohen physically flawed—a "ba'al mum."

Rabbi Akiva teaches that there are four "orlah"s in the human body: in the ear, the mouth, the heart and the male organ. Avraham is told to walk before G-d and be perfect. If either the ear or the mouth or the heart were to be circumcised, he would no longer be perfect. Thus, he concludes that circumcision must involve the removal of the male foreskin—referred to as "the orlah of the body."

It is incumbent upon us to solve this mystery. Why would HKB"H command Avraham to perform the mitzvah of "milah"—in the merit of which HKB"H established a covenant with Avraham and his offspring for all time—provide the details of the mitzvah at length in fourteen pesukim in the Torah and, yet, fail to mention explicitly even once which body part is to be circumcised? After all, we only know which bodily limb is to be circumcised thanks to the erudition of the holy Tannaim above.

Torah Knowledge Can Only Be Attained by Means of the Mitzvah of Milah

Let us begin our investigation with the enlightening story in the Midrash (S.R. 30, 12) involving Onkelos. He converted and was circumcised so that he could acquire the knowledge and wisdom of the Torah. For, it is taught that one who is uncircumcised is incapable of attaining Torah knowledge:

"פעם אחת אמר לו עקילס [אונקלוס] לאדריינוס המלך, רוצה אני להתגייר ולהעשות ישראל, אמר לו לאומה זו אתה מבקש, כמה בזיתי אותה, כמה הרגתי אותה, לירודה שבאומות אתה מבקש להתערב, מה ראית בהם שאתה רוצה להתגייר. אמר לו הקטן שבהם יודע היאך ברא הקב"ה את העולם, מה נברא ביום ראשון ומה נברא ביום שני, כמה יש משנברא העולם ועל מה העולם עומד ותורתו אמת. אמר לו ולמד תורתן ואל תמול, אמר לו עקילס, אפילו חכם שבמלכותך וזקן בן מאה שנה, אינו יכול ללמוד תורתן אם אינו מול, שכן כתוב (תהלים קמז-כ) מגיד דבריו ליעקב חוקיו ומשפטיו לישראל, לא עשה כן לכל גוי, ולמי לבני ישראל."

Onkelos explains to the Emperor Hadrian that he wishes to convert to Judaism. Hadrian is surprised and professes that they are a lowly people; he has subjected them to countless abuses and has killed many of them. He wants to know why Onkelos is attracted to the Jews.

Onkelos replies that even the youngest among them and the least learned knows how the Almighty created the world; they know what was created on each day; they know what sustains the world; and their Torah represents the truth. In response, Hadrian suggests that Onkelos study their Torah without undergoing circumcision and conversion. To which Onkelos replies that even the wisest man in Hadrian's kingdom and even a one-hundred year old elder is incapable of learning and comprehending their Torah without undergoing circumcision first.

After much thought, I would like to propose an explanation for Onkelos' tremendous revelation—that only someone who has been circumcised is capable of divining the words and depths of Torah. And who better than Onkelos to attest to this fact, having personally experienced this phenomenon?! Furthermore, we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 63b): "מנין שאין דברי תורה מותקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה, שנאמר (במדבר יט-יד) זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל" —only someone who is willing to endure self-sacrifice on its behalf is able to acquire and retain Torah knowledge. The Midrash Tanchuma (Noach 3) explains that this Gemara is referring specifically to the toil and effort expended in the study of Torah she'b'al peh. Here is a short excerpt from the fiery and insightful words of the Midrash:

"שלא תמצא תורה שבעל פה אצל מי שיבקש עונג העולם, תאוה וכבוד וגדולה בעולם הזה, אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה, שנאמר זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל, וכך דרכה של תורה, פת במלח תאכל, ומים במשורה תשתה, ועל הארץ תישן, וחיי צער תחיה, ובתורה אתה עמל, לפי שלא כרת הקב"ה ברית עם ישראל אלא על התורה שבעל פה, שנאמר כי על פי הדברים האלה כרתי אתך ברית..."

וזו היא תורה שבעל פה שהיא קשה ללמוד, ויש בה צער גדול שהיא משולה לחשך, שנאמר (ישעיה ט-א) העם ההולכים בחשך ראו אור גדול, אלו בעלי התלמוד שראו אור גדול, שהקב"ה מאיר עיניהם באיסור והיתר, בטמא ובטהור, ולעתיד לבא (שופטים ה-לא) ואוהביו כצאת השמש בגבורתו."

"Torah she'b'al peh will not be found in someone seeking the pleasures of this world—such as earthly desire, honor and greatness. It is only to be found in someone who endures self-sacrifice on its behalf. Such is the way of Torah—sufficing with meager amounts of bread and water, sleeping on the ground, enduring discomfort and engaging in unrelenting Torah study. For, HKB"H only established a covenant with Yisrael for the sake of Torah she'b'al peh.

Torah she'b'al peh is difficult to learn and is associated with much anguish. It is compared to "darkness." The passuk states (Yeshayah 9, 1): "The people walking in the darkness saw a magnificent light." This refers to the Talmudic scholars who revealed a magnificent light with HKB"H's guidance. Regarding the Future to Come, the passuk promises (Shoftim 5, 31): "and let those who love Him be like the powerfully rising sun."

Bris Milah Instills in a Person a Natural Desire to Serve Hashem Diligently

Now, let us present a precious idea from the Ollelos Ephraim; he provides eight reasons for the mitzvah of "milah," corresponding to the eight days of the "milah." In the eighth reason, he writes that the purpose of the mitzvah of "milah" is to instill in a person the natural desire to serve Hashem diligently and with self-sacrifice:

"טעם ח'. שהמילה כולה צער לגוף, ובה יקנה קנין טוב, שבו תלוי כל הצלחת האדם, והוא שישאר רושם זה קיים בגופו, לשמוע כל המצוות שבתורה, ושלא ליהנות ניתנו. גם ירגיל עצמו למסור נפשו על קדושת שמו יתברך, ויתחיל תחילה באחד מאבריו ראש הגויה, ואחר כך יהיה נקל בעיניו למסור כל נפשו, כדרך שמצינו ביצחק שמתחילה מסר עצמו באחד מאבריו [שהיה הראשון שנימול לשמונה], וקיבל הטבע מכאן ולהבא [למסור נפשו], עד שהיה נקל בעיניו אחר כך [בעקידת יצחק] לקדש השם בכל גופו."

"Milah" involves physical suffering. A person's success depends on it. It leaves a lasting physical impression on his body—reminding him to observe the Torah's mitzvos and that the mitzvos were not given for our personal pleasure. A person should also grow accustomed to self-sacrifice for the sake of Hashem—starting with the tip of the male member. Subsequently, it will be easier for the person to perform acts involving self-sacrifice. A good example of this is Yitzchak. He was the first to be circumcised on the eighth day; this inculcated in him a natural tendency to perform acts of self-sacrifice. Ultimately, it was very easy for him to sacrifice his entire being at the time of the akeidah.

In this exalted manner, let us explain Onkelos' comment to his uncle, the Roman Emperor Hadrian. He claimed that it was necessary for him to convert and undergo ritual circumcision in order to attain Torah knowledge. Now, the Chazon Ish writes that Targum Onkelos, although it is a commentary on the Torah, nevertheless it does not have the status of a sefer Torah written in Aramaic. Rather, it is considered part of Torah she'b'al peh. As proof, he cites the fact that Onkelos does not translate the Torah word for word; rather, he adds explanations and interpretations that are not explicit in the text.

In fact, this view is stated unequivocally in the Chidushei HaRamban (Shabbas 115a): "תרגום דידן דהיינו אונקלוס ויונתן בן עוזיאל כשאר "our Targum, Onkelos and Yonasan ben Uziel, are like the rest of Torah she'b'al peh. Furthermore, we should note that we have learned in the Gemara (Megillah 3a): "תרגום של "תורה אונקלוס הגר אמרו מפי רבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע"—Onkelos' interpretation of the Torah was learned from his teachers, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua. Note that the Gemara specifically uses the word "מפי"—from the mouths of Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua—indicating that the Targum is indeed considered an integral part of Torah she'b'al peh—the Oral Law. Onkelos received the teachings from the mouths of his teachers; they received them from the mouths of their teachers; and so on until Moshe Rabeinu at Har Sinai.

Thus, we can better comprehend Onkelos' comment to his uncle. As we have established, Targum Onkelos is an integral part of Torah she'b'al peh. Concerning Torah she'b'al peh, it states: "זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל"—teaching us that words of Torah are not retained unless a person is willing to sacrifice himself on its behalf. Therefore, its treasures can only be obtained in the merit of the mitzvah of "milah"—which inculcates in a person the natural tendency to serve Hashem selflessly.

The Relationship between Bris Milah and the Bris of Torah She'b'al Peh

We can now appreciate with great joy the amazing connection that exists between the two covenants that HKB"H established with Yisrael. Regarding the first "Bris" established in the merit of the mitzvah of "milah," it states: **"I will uphold My covenant between Me and you and your offspring after you, throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant."** Regarding the second "Bris," in the merit of Torah she'b'al peh, Rabbi Yochanan states: **"HKB"H only established a covenant with Yisrael for the sake of the Oral Law."** In truth, the two covenants are intimately related to one another.

Without a doubt, Rabbi Yochanan's statement is accurate, as attested to by the passuk he cites as proof (Shemos 34, 27): **"כי על פי "הדברים האלה כרתי אתך ברית ואת ישראל"—for according to these words have I entered a covenant with you and with Yisrael."** Via the

Torah she'b'al peh, HKB"H revealed to Yisrael the true meaning and significance of all the obscure teachings in Torah she'b'chsav.

Yet, seeing as it is only possible to acquire Torah she'b'al peh in the merit of the mitzvah of "milah," the second covenant depends on the first. For, only in the merit of the mitzvah of "milah" is it possible to fulfill the covenant of Torah she'b'al peh. Thus, the mitzvah of "milah" is an essential part of the "Bris" established between HKB"H and Yisrael. It turns out, therefore, that the two covenants—"Bris milah" and the "Bris of Torah she'b'al peh"—go hand in hand brilliantly. At this point, it is worth adding a nice allusion. The numerical value of 85) מיל"ה is equivalent to the numerical value of 85) פ"ה—alluding to the fact that it is in the merit of the mitzvah of "milah" that a person ultimately merits Torah she'b'al peh.

Based on what we have learned, we can finally provide a satisfactory explanation regarding the puzzling fact that HKB"H chose not to specify in Torah she'b'chsav the limb to be circumcised in the performance of the mitzvah of "milah." HKB"H wished that the matter be transmitted orally from Avraham Avinu to all future generations. This conveys the message that the purpose of the mitzvah of "milah," is to ultimately merit the acquisition of Torah she'b'al peh—the Oral Law. Consequently, the details of the mitzvah of "milah" were only revealed in Torah she'b'al peh.

A Novel Interpretation of Rabbi Yochanan's Statement

Now, we can also reconcile a perplexing question concerning what we have learned in the Gemara (Nedarim 32a): גדולה מילה "milah" is so great that it is equivalent to all the mitzvos in the Torah, as it is written: "For according to these words . . ." The Ran explains: כי על פי הדברים האלה כרתי אתך ברית, כלומר ברית מילה ששקולה ככל הדברים "כי על פי הדברים האלה כרתי אתך ברית, כלומר ברית מילה ששקולה ככל הדברים"—the "Bris" mentioned in the passuk refers to "Bris milah; "these words" refers to the Torah. In other words, the passuk infers that "Bris milah" is equivalent to all of the other mitzvos.

Seemingly, this is problematic. After all, we learned from Rabbi Yochanan that this passuk is a reference to Torah she'b'al peh. From here he expounded that HKB"H only entered into a covenant with Yisrael for the sake of Torah she'b'al peh. So, how does the Gemara just cited interpret this passuk as a reference to "Bris milah"?

Based on what we have learned, however, we can provide a satisfactory answer. Certainly, the words of the passuk: כי על "כי על פי הדברים האלה" constitute a reference to Torah she'b'al peh. Yet, without the mitzvah of "milah," it is impossible to properly engage in the study of Torah she'b'al peh—which requires self-sacrifice and diligence. Therefore, when the passuk goes on to specify: כרתי אתך "כרתי אתך", it is referring to "Bris milah." This is the "Bris" that HKB"H

gave in advance to Avraham and his offspring, so as to enable them to attain and engage in the study of Torah she'b'al peh selflessly.

Thus, we can interpret Rabbi Yochanan's statement in a new light. "לא כרת הקב"ה ברית עם ישראל"—in other words, HKB"H only established the covenant of "Bris milah" with Yisrael; "אלא בשביל דברים שבעל פה"—so that they would succeed in their laborious efforts to attain Torah she'b'al peh; because the mitzvah of "milah" instills in a Jew the natural tendency enabling him to exert himself and toil in the study of Torah.

As proof, Rabbi Yochanan quotes the passuk: שנאמר כי על פי הדברים "האלה"—in order to allow you to attain the knowledge contained in Torah she'b'al peh—"כרתי אתך ברית ואת ישראל"—I entered into a covenant with you through the mitzvah of "milah." According to this interpretation, it turns out that even according to Rabbi Yochanan the words: כרתי אתך "כרתי אתך" refer to "Bris milah"—the "Bris" which enables a Jew to attain the knowledge and wisdom contained in Torah she'b'al peh.

Now, this explains very nicely the Gemara's elucidation: גדולה מילה ששקולה כנגד כל המצוות שבתורה שנאמר כי על פי הדברים האלה וגו' and the explanation supplied by the Ran and Tosafos that the continuation of the passuk—"כרתי אתך ברית"—is a reference to "Bris milah." Seeing as it is only possible to acquire Torah she'b'al peh in the merit of "Bris milah"—the covenant HKB"H entered into with Avraham and his descendants—it stands to reason that "milah" is equal to all of the other mitzvos. After all, it would be impossible to clarify the meaning and details of any of the mitzvos, as explained in Torah she'b'al peh, were it not for the merit of the mitzvah of "milah."

טו"ב 36 masechtos Times ברי"ת

Based on what we have learned, we can shed some light on the significance of the term "Bris"—"ברית". As the following pesukim indicate, HKB"H referred to the mitzvah of "milah" as "ברית": "ואתנה בריתי" "ברית": "ואתנה בריתי ביני ובינך ובין זרעך אחר כך לדורותם לברית עולם".

Let us introduce a marvelous explanation from the Shu"t Mahari Asahd addressing Rabbi Yochanan's statement: לא כרת הקב"ה ברית עם ישראל אלא בשביל דברים שבעל פה, שנאמר כי על פי הדברים האלה כרתי אתך ברית ואת ישראל. It is generally accepted that Talmud Bavli consists of thirty-six masechtos--tractates. According to the Derashos Chasam Sofer, it is for this reason that the Talmud Bavli concludes with the statement: תנא דבי אליהו כל השונה הלכות בכל יום "א Baraisa of the academy of Eliyahu teaches: Whoever learns halachos every day is assured that he is destined for the World to Come--for it is stated: "The ways of the world are his." The words לו"ל, which has a numerical equivalent of thirty-six, alludes to the fact that access to the World to Come comes in the merit of the thirty-six masechtos. This is the gist of his explanation.

With this in mind, the Mahari Asahd refers to the Gemara's statement (Berachos 5a): "אין טוב אלא תורה"—**there is no (good) other than Torah.** So, if there are thirty-six masechtos in Torah she'b'al peh, then Torah she'b'al peh contains 36 times (טו"ב), which equals 612, ברי"ת. Let us apply these numerical allusions to the passuk: "כי על פי הדברים האלה". The word אל"ה also equals thirty-six; thus when the passuk says: "**according to these (אל"ה) words,**" it is alluding to the thirty-six masechtos contained in Torah she'b'al peh. In their merit: "כרתי אתך ברית"—**I have entered into a "Bris" with you**—for thirty-six times טו"ב equals ברי"ת. This concludes his marvelous explanation.

We can now posit that this is why HKB"H referred to the mitzvah of "milah" as a ברי"ת. This name alludes to the fact that in the merit of the mitzvah of "milah," a man merits engaging in and attaining the knowledge of Torah she'b'al peh. For, Torah she'b'al peh contains thirty-six masechtos, and thirty-six times טו"ב equals ברי"ת. This prompts Rabbi Yochanan's statement: "**HKB"H only established a ברי"ת**"—referring to "milah"—"**with Yisrael for the sake of the Oral Law**"—so that they would merit the acquisition of Torah she'b'al peh. To prove his point, he quotes the passuk: "כי על פי הדברים האלה"—where the word אל"ה alludes to the thirty-six masechtos--"כרתי אתך ברית". In other words, for the sake of the thirty-six masechtos of Torah she'b'al peh, I entered into a covenant with you through the mitzvah of "milah," which is known as a ברי"ת--because the word ברי"ת equals thirty-six times טו"ב.

We can now begin to appreciate why HKB"H established thirteen "Brisos" regarding the mitzvah of "milah." In his commentary on the Torah (Bereishis 17, 13), the Rosh writes that the thirteen mentions of the word "ברית" in the passage of "milah" correspond to the "thirteen midos by which the Torah is elucidated" (the thirteen principles of exegesis). Thus, we can suggest that the word "ברית" is mentioned thirteen times in connection with the mitzvah of "milah," alluding to the fact that in the merit of this mitzvah, we merit Torah she'b'al peh—which is based on the thirteen principles the Torah scholars used to elucidate and clarify the details of the laws presented in Torah she'b'chsav.

HKB"H Added the Letter Hei to the Name Avraham Corresponding to Torah She'b'al Peh

Continuing along this path, let us explain why HKB"H chose to add the letter "hei" to Avraham's name specifically in the midst of the command to perform the mitzvah of "milah" as it is written: "ולא יקרא"

—**your name shall no longer be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.** We will refer to the Bnei Yissaschar (Nissan 4, 1; Kislev-Teves 14, 3) who writes that the letter "hei" symbolizes the final letter "hei" of the name Havaya—representing Torah she'b'al peh.

With this bit of information, we can suggest that this is why HKB"H added the letter "hei" to Avraham's name specifically after he had been commanded to perform the mitzvah of "milah." As we learned above, the mitzvah of "milah" was designed to instill in a person the natural tendency to engage in and toil in the study of Torah she'b'al peh. HKB"H was conveying to Avraham that he would now merit achieving incredible heights in the realm of Torah she'b'al peh, represented by the letter "hei." As if by way of explanation, HKB"H explains to Avraham: "והיה שמך אברהם כי אב המון גוים נתתיך"—**your name shall be Avraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.** Avraham qualifies as the father of nations, because he and his offspring merit the acquisition of Torah she'b'al peh. As a consequence, they are superior to the other nations, who are uncircumcised and, therefore, have no part or claim to Torah she'b'al peh.

Let us add another beautiful allusion based on the teachings of the Arizal in Shaar Hamitzvos (Vaetchanan) concerning the concept of "Torah l'shmah." The letter "hei" with its full array of miluis—expansions—adds up to a total of thirty-six, ל"ו. There are three miluis of the letter "hei"; it can be spelled ה"י, ה"א or ה"ה. The sum of these three spellings is thirty-one; if we add the simple numerical value of the letter "hei" itself, we arrive at thirty-six. As we have learned, the number thirty-six alludes to the thirty-six masechtos which comprise Torah she'b'al peh, which is represented by the final "hei" in the name Havaya.

Now, HKB"H gave Avraham the mitzvah of "milah," so that he would be able to labor and acquire Torah she'b'al peh. This is why HKB"H referred to this mitzvah as a ברי"ת. HKB"H wished to convey the fact that in the merit of performing the mitzvah of "milah," Avraham would merit the acquisition of Torah she'b'al peh, containing thirty-six masechtos. Since each maseches represents a טו"ב, we have, in essence, thirty-six times טו"ב, equaling ברי"ת. Therefore, HKB"H added the letter "hei" to the name Avram, forming the name Avraham. For, the full complement of the letter "hei" equals thirty-six--corresponding to the thirty-six masechtos which comprise Torah she'b'al peh, which Avraham ultimately acquired in the merit of the mitzvah of "milah."

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