

Parshat Tazria - From Seven to Eight

Is 'eight' a magic number in Sefer Vayikra? Or, is it only coincidental that:

- ◆ In Parshat Shmini - the 'eighth day' is chosen for the dedication of the Mishkan;
- ◆ In Parshat Tazria - the 'eighth day' is chosen for the "brit Milah" of a male child;
- ◆ In Parshat Metzora - the 'eighth day' is chosen for the day on which the cleansed Metzora, Zav, and Zavah bring their special korbanot;
- ◆ In Parshat Emor - the final holiday is "**Shmini** Atzeret" - the 'eighth day' of Succot?!

In [last week's shiur](#), we discussed the special relationship between the number **seven** and the "shalosh regalim," noting that is not by chance that the Torah commands us to:

- ◆ Celebrate specifically **seven** days of Chag HaMatzot in the spring; and then -
- ◆ To count **seven** weeks until the grain harvest holiday of Shavuot; and finally -
- ◆ To celebrate our fruit harvest during the **seven** days of Succot.

We suggested that by emphasizing **seven**, the Torah reminds us of the connection between these agricultural holidays and our belief that 'nature' is indeed God's creation. [In our shiur on Parshat Breishit we explain how the Torah's story of Creation in **seven** days emphasizes this very point - that nature is a willful act of the One God (as opposed to an act of a pantheon of many gods).]

In the following shiur, we return to Sefer Breishit in search of the biblical significance of the number 'eight.'

Introduction

From the above examples in Sefer Vayikra, eight appears to be significant simply because it follows seven:

- ◆ "Yom HaShmini" follows the **seven** days of the "miluim";
- ◆ The korbanot on the eighth day of the Metzora and Zav follow their minimum **seven** day "tahara" period;
- ◆ "Shmini Atzeret" follows the **seven** days of Succot.

Brit Milah, however, appears to be an exception. Although the mother happens to be "tamey" (unclean) for the first seven days after her son's birth ([12:2](#)), there does not appear to be any logical connection between these seven days

and the commandment to perform "milah" on the eighth day. In fact, the original commandment to Avraham Avinu to circumcise his offspring on the 'eighth day' ([see Breishit 17:7-14](#)) is not connected in any manner to the laws of "tumah" or "tahara." In that parsha, there doesn't seem to be any obvious reason why specifically the eighth day is chosen.

However, a study of the parsha of "brit milah" in the wider context of Sefer Breishit suggests a very interesting relationship between "milah" on the 'eighth day' and the 'seven days' of Creation. To uncover that relationship, we must first conduct a quick review of the first seventeen chapters of Sefer Breishit.

In What 'Name' Does God Speak to Man?

Recall from our study of Sefer Breishit that God's creation of the universe is presented in Chumash from two perspectives:

- 1) "B'shem **Elokim**" ([1:1-2:4](#)) - which focused on God's creation of **nature**, i.e. a structured universe, in **seven** days [what we call 'perek aleph']; and
- 2) "B'shem **Havaya**" ([2:5-4:26](#)) - which focused on God's special relationship with Man, i.e. the creation of Gan Eden, and man's banishment from that environment after he sinned [what we call 'perek bet'].

Without going into the complex details of this 'double presentation,' we will just posit that God's relationship with man develops along the lines of each of these two perspectives. In other words, we will find that at times God may talk to man b'shem Elokim, while other times He may speak to him b'shem Havaya - each Name reflecting a different perspective of that developing relationship.

For example, in perek aleph, God - b'shem Elokim - blesses man that he be fruitful and multiply, master the earth and rule over all other living creatures ([see 1:26-28](#)). In contrast to this perspective of man as ruler, in perek bet - b'shem Havaya - man is created in order to become God's servant, whose job is to tend and watch over His Garden ([see 2:15-17](#)).

This double perspective continues in the Torah's account of the Flood. Because of the sinful behavior of "dor haMabul" (the generation of the Flood), God decides to destroy His creation, saving only Noach and his family. The explanation for this punishment is presented according to both of these perspectives:

- 1) b'shem Elokim - see [6:9-6:22](#)
- 2) b'shem Havaya - see [6:5-8](#) and [7:1-5](#)

Likewise, in the aftermath of the mabul, God redefines His relationship with man, again from both perspectives:

- 1) b'shem Elokim - see [9:1-17](#)
- 2) b'shem Havaya - see [8:18-21](#)

After the flood, the children of Noach disperse into seventy nations ([10:1-32](#)). From that time onward, up until the story of "brit Milah" (i.e. [chapters 11-16](#)), the Torah describes any intervention by God exclusively from the perspective of "shem Havaya." For example, God's punishment of the builders of the Tower of Babel is described b'shem Havaya ([see 11:1-10](#)). Similarly, God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation is also described b'shem Havaya ([see 12:1-16:16](#)). In fact, God - b'shem Havaya - makes several promises to Avraham concerning the future of his offspring and the Promised Land ([see chapter 13](#)). This promise is formalized, again b'shem Havaya, at Brit Bein Ha'Btarim ([see 15:1-20](#)) - a covenant that not only foresees the conquest of the Land of Israel by Avraham's offspring, but also foresees the forging of this nation through bondage in a foreign Land.

Thus we find that from [chapter 11](#) until [chapter 16](#) in Sefer Breishit, God speaks to man exclusively b'shem Havaya. In [chapter 17](#), when God commands Avraham to perform Brit Milah, this pattern suddenly changes! In this narrative, God first introduces Himself as "Kel Sha-dai" and then, for the **first** time, He speaks to Avraham Avinu b'shem **Elokim**:

"When Avram was ninety-nine years, God [**Havaya**] appeared to Avram and said to him: '**Ani Kel Sha-dai**,' walk before Me and be blameless. And I will establish My **covenant** between Me and you... Avram fell on his face, and God [**Elokim**] spoke to him saying... This is my **covenant** with you..." ([17:1-4](#))

Note how in this covenant, given b'shem Elokim, God:

- a) Changes Avram's name to Avraham;
- b) Blesses him that he will multiply ("pru u'rvu");
- c) Promises that he will become a great nation;
- d) Promises him and his future generations Eretz Canaan;
- e) Promises to be his God ("I'hiyot l'cha l'**Elokim**");
- f) Commands him to circumcise his male children, etc.

To better appreciate the significance of this special covenant of "brit milah," we must compare it to the two earlier instances in Chumash where God spoke to man b'shem Elokim:

- (I) After the creation of man on the sixth day ([1:27-30](#));
- (II) After the Flood ([9:1-17](#)).

I) On the sixth day, when man is created b'tzelem **Elokim**, God (b'shem **Elokim**) blesses him that he should:

- a) Be fruitful and multiply ("pru u'rvu");
- b) Be master and ruler of the living kingdom;
- c) Eat from the plants and fruit of the trees.

II) Some ten generations later, after the Flood, God (b'shem **Elokim**) blesses Noach and his children in a very similar fashion ([9:1-7](#)), including:

- a) To be fruitful and multiply ("pru u'rvu");
- b) To be master of the living kingdom;
- c) Permission to eat living creatures (not only plants);

This divine blessing is followed by a special covenant, also given b'shem Elokim. This covenant, better known as "brit ha'keshet" (the rainbow covenant), reflects the establishment of a special relationship between God and mankind, i.e. God's promise that He will never again bring about the total destruction of His creation ([see 9:11-15](#)).

[[See Ramban on 6:18](#), especially his final explanation of the word "brit," based on the word "briya"!]

As we explained above, the next time that God speaks to man b'shem Elokim is only some ten generations later - at Brit Milah! Once again we find that God speaks to man in order to establish a special covenant. Note the striking textual similarities between this covenant - "brit Milah" and the earlier covenant - "brit ha'keshet":

- a) To be fruitful and multiply [9:1](#) / [17:2,6](#);
- b) "Va'ani hi'nei... briti itach(em)..." [9:9](#) / [17:4](#);
- c) "V'hakimoti et briti..." [9:11](#) / [17:7](#);
- d) "Ha'aterz" / "eretz canaan" [9:13,16,17](#) / [17:8](#);
- e) "Ot brit": "ha'milah" / "ha'keshet" [9:13,17](#) / [17:11](#);

([See Board #1.](#)) However, in addition to these similarities, in "brit Milah" we find an important promise - "I'hiyot lachem l'Elokim" [to be a God to you] - which reflects a much closer relationship. In fact, this key phrase is repeated twice, for it emphasizes and defines the purpose of Brit Milah (read [17:7-8](#) carefully!).

One Step 'Above' Nature

This background can help us understand the commandment that "brit milah" be performed specifically on the eighth day.

Note the progression of God's relationship with man from the perspective of 'shem Elokim':

- 1) The Creation of **nature** in **seven** days ([1:1-2:4](#));
- 2) The covenant with Noach after the Flood ([9:1-17](#));
- 3) The "Brit Milah" covenant with Avraham Avinu to be performed on the **eighth** day ([17:1-14](#)).

One could suggest that circumcision on the **eighth** day relates to this elevation of man's spiritual level, **one** step above the level of his original creation in **seven** days.

Let's explain this statement, based on these three stages of this progression b'shem Elokim:

(1) During the first seven days, God brought the universe to a stage of development where it appears to 'take care of itself.' Be it vegetation, animal or man, all species of life secure their existence by their ability to reproduce; they become fruitful and multiply (e.g. "zo'ray'ah zera," "zachar u'nekeyvah," "pru u'rvu," etc.). Man's mastery of this creation, his desire to conquer and his ability to harness it, are all part of this phenomenon that we call **nature**. The first chapter of Breishit teaches us that, what we call nature, is not simply an act of chance, but rather a willful act of God. [By resting on Shabbat, once every seven days, we remind ourselves of this point.]

(2) After the "mabul," God (b'shem Elokim) 'starts over' by re-establishing His relationship with mankind in a covenant with Noach, known as "brit ha'keshet." This covenant reflects a relationship very similar to that in God's original creation in seven days, with some 'minor' changes: Man remains master of His universe ([9:2](#)), with a 'small change' in his diet ([9:3-5](#)), and a commandment that it is forbidden to murder a fellow human ([9:6-7](#)). However, the basic laws of nature remain the same ([see 9:8](#)).

(3) Up until Brit Milah, man's relationship with God b'shem Elokim remained distant. Although Man was the pinnacle of God's creation with certain minimal expectations of moral behavior, he was basically just part of nature. Man was given power; he acted **like** God (b'tzelem Elokim), but was not **close** to Him. At Brit Milah, Avraham is raised to a higher level. He and his offspring are chosen to represent God as His special nation, and towards that purpose, they are awarded a special relationship - "li'hiyot lachem l'Elokim." As an "ot," a sign of this relationship, they are commanded to circumcise their children on the 'eighth day.'

Thus, the **eighth** day represents yet one more level of progression in the creation process, which first took place in **seven** days. [This is what the Maharal calls "m'al ha'teva" - above nature!]

Just as there is a progression within the first seven days of creation b'shem Elokim, from "domem" (inanimate - "shmayim v'aretz"), to "tzomayach" (vegetation), to "chai" (animal kingdom), to "adam" (man), so too on the 'eighth day.' The offspring of Avraham has been chosen to take God's creation and elevate it to a higher level.

This interpretation could reflect a statement made by Reish Lakish, explaining the meaning of God's name "Kel Sha-dai" which is first introduced at Brit Milah ([17:1-2](#)):

"What's the meaning of 'ani Kel Sha-dai?' God said: I am the One who said to the world 'dai' - [enough, or stop]."

([Yalkut Shimoni siman 81](#), [Chagiga 12a](#); see also the pirush of the "Torah Tmima" on this pasuk.)

This explanation may help us understand the complex opening of the Brit Milah narrative: God, b'shem Havaya - the Name of God that Avraham is familiar with up until this point - informs Avraham that He is "Kel Sha-dai," the God who had 'stopped' His process of creation after seven days ([17:1-2](#)). Now, b'shem Elokim, the Name of God that orchestrated the creation in seven days, intervenes yet one more time. He establishes a covenant with Avraham, to command him with the mitzvah of "brit milah," to raise him **one** level higher, i.e. closer to God.

Thus, God's commandment that we perform Brit Milah on the eighth day is not incidental. Rather, it reflects the very nature of our special relationship with God.

Back to Vayikra

Milah on the eighth day was only one example of this '7/8' relationship in Sefer Vayikra. Based on our shiur, we can now explain the other examples.

Seven Days of "Miluim" / "Yom HaShmini"

As explained in [last week's shiur](#), the seven days necessary to dedicate the Mishkan reflect the parallel between our construction of the Mishkan, to serve God, to God's creation of nature in seven days, to serve Him. [[See Tehillim 104](#) - "borchi nafshi..."] On the 'eighth day,' the Sh'china descends upon the Mishkan, allowing it to become the focal point for the development of the special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael.

Seven Days "Tahara" / Eighth Day "Korbanot"

Different types of "tum'ah" are caused by some abnormal behavior of the body. Seven days of "tahara" are required to return the "tamei" person back to the

'camp' - to his normal existence, his natural habitat. Then on the eighth day, he must bring a special korban to allow his entry into the Mishkan. [Note the parallel between this process and its korbanot, to that of the kohanim during the seven day miluim and Yom HaShmini.]

Seven Days of Succot / Shmini Atzeret

As agriculture and nature go hand in hand, all of the agricultural holidays follow cycles of seven ([see Vayikra chapter 23](#)). In the spring (chag ha'aviv), as the grain harvest begins, we bring "korban ha'omer" and celebrate chag ha'matzot for **seven** days. Then we count **seven weeks** until the completion of the wheat harvest, bring "korban shte ha'lechem," and celebrate chag ha'**shavu'ot**. On succot, "chag ha'asif," at the end of the agricultural year ("b'tzeit ha'shana" - [see Shmot 23:16](#)), we thank God for our fruit harvest by celebrating for seven days and bringing the "arba minim" to the Mikdash. At the very end of this cycle of agricultural holidays, we add **Shmini Atzeret**, a special gathering with no special agricultural mitzvah. It is simply a time to stop and reflect on the holiday season and year that has passed. On this 'eighth day,' we focus on the special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael.

This special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael, that begins with Brit Milah, reaches its fullest expression with Matan Torah at Brit Har Sinai.

Based on this interpretation, it is understandable why Chazal chose this holiday to celebrate as **Simchat Torah**, and to conclude on this day the yearly 'cycle' of reading the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom,
Menachem

Virtual Classroom enhancements by Reuven Weiser.

For Further Iyun

A. In what way could Shavuot be considered the "eighth," after seven cycles of seven? Compare this to the din of the Yovel year in parshat B'har. Why do you think that Chazal refer to Shavuot as "chag ha'atzeret?" In what way is it similar to "Shmini Atzeret?"

B. Based on the above shiur, why do you think that prior to Brit Milah, God changes both Avraham's and Sarah's names by adding a "hey?" Relate your answer to Hashem's name and His introduction in [17:1-4](#).

C. Based on the parallels between creation and brit milah, why do you think God chose to make the "ot" of this covenant on the part of the body which performs "pru u'rvu?"

Explain why we thank God in birchat ha'mazon for the "aretz," then "britcha asher chatamta bi'bsareinu," and then toratcha sh'limad'tanu."

D. Note in Sefer Yirmiyahu that even the Creation itself is considered a covenant; [see 3:25-26](#), and relate these psukim to the above shiur.

E. Relate the above shiur to the minhag of "sheva brachot" at a wedding, and the seven days of mourning after death.

F. See [Rambam Hilchot M'lachim chapter nine](#) [the laws concerning the **seven** mitzvot of Bnei Noach]. Relate this Rambam to the above shiur.