



The Amazing Connection between the Name “Kel Shakkai” and the Mitzvah of Milah

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.” Our blessed sages attest to the importance of this mitzvah (Nedarim 32a): **“גדולה מילה ששקולה כנגד—כל המצוות שבתורה—“milah” is so great that it is equivalent to all the mitzvos in the Torah.** HKB”H commanded Avraham Avinu to perform this essential mitzvah when he was 99y.o. to establish a covenant with him and his descendants for the duration of time. Here are the pertinent pesukim (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 וארבה 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, והפרתי אותך במאד מאד ונתתיך לגוים ומלכים ממך יצאו, והקמותי את בריתי ביני ובינך ובין זרעך אחריו לדורותם לברית עולם להיות לך לאלקים ולזרעך אחריו.”

“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.”

We will endeavor to explain why HKB”H chose to add the letter “hei” to Avraham’s name specifically in connection with the mitzvah of milah. Rashi explains that in the merit of performing the mitzvah of milah, Avraham became physically complete and perfect. His five major body parts were now sanctified—his two eyes, two ears and the organ of procreation. Nevertheless, we will endeavor to explain the matter further in keeping with the richness of Torah exegesis.

Additionally, it behooves us to consider why HKB”H introduces this mitzvah with the name **Kel Shakkai**. We find the following elucidation in the Gemara concerning this divine name (Chagigah 12a): **“אמר רב יהודה אמר רב, בשעה שברא הקב”ה את העולם היה מרחיב והולך... עד שגער בו הקב”ה והעמידו... והיינו דאמר ריש Rav Yehudah לקיש, מאי דכתיב אני אל שדי, אני הוא שאמרתי לעולם די.”** **said in the name of Rav: When HKB”H created the world, it was expanding continuously . . . until HKB”H rebuked the world and brought it to a standstill . . . And this bears out what Reish Lakish said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “I am El Shaddai?” I am the One Who told the world, “Enough.”**

This is extremely curious! If HKB”H created the world with boundaries and limits, why did it continue to expand of its own volition, so to speak? As we learn from the Gemara, this angered HKB”H and to halt the expansion, He was compelled to say, “Enough!” So, what is the connection between the name “**Kel Shakkai**”—the name that limited the expansion of the world—and the mitzvah of milah, which is introduced with this very same name: **“I am Kel Shakkai; walk before Me and be perfect”?**

This World Was Created with the Letter “Hei”

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing an elucidation from the Gemara (Menachos 29b) related to a passuk found toward the end of the creation (Bereishis 2, 4):

“אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם, אל תקרי בהבראם אלא בה”י בראם. ומפני מה נברא העולם הזה בה”י, מפני שדומה לאכסדרא שכל הרוצה לצאת יצא “ומאי טעמא תליא כרעיה דאי הדר בתשובה מעיילי וליעייל בהך לא מסתייעא מילתא.”

The passuk states: **“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth בהבראם.” Do not read the word as it is actually written—בהבראם—but rather as בראם** (indicating that the heavens and the earth were created with the letter “hei”). **And why was Olam HaZeh created with the letter “hei”? Because it resembles a pavilion** (Rashi: it is open underneath); **so that anyone who wishes to leave (go astray) can leave** (to lead a life of sin). Then the Gemara asks: **And for what reason is the left leg of the “hei” hanging** (i.e., it is not connected to the top of the “hei”)? **So that if he performs teshuvah, they can bring him back in** (through the upper opening between the suspended leg and the top of the “hei”).

Once again, the Gemara poses a question: **Why don't they simply bring him back through the very same opening** (through which he exited)? **That is not feasible.** In other words, once he has exited through that opening to embark on a life of sin, it is unlikely that he would succeed in returning through that same opening, because the yetzer hara lies there in wait prepared to trip him up a second time.

We can propose that this is the implication of the passuk (Shir HaShirim 5, 2): **“קול דודי דופק פתחי לי”—My Beloved knocks! He said, “Open your heart to Me.”** They expound on this passuk in the Midrash Rabbah: **אמר הקב”ה לישראל, בני פתחו לי—HKB”H said to Yisrael, “My child, open for Me a single opening of teshuvah like the eye of a needle.”** This teaches us that HKB”H asks us to create a small opening of teshuvah, in the upper part of the letter hei. Even though it is an exceedingly small aperture, like the eye of a needle, every individual can enter through it to appease Hashem via teshuvah. We can suggest that this is alluded to by the word **teshuvah--תשובה**. This word can be broken down to **תשובה**, alluding to the fact that teshuvah involves returning through the opening in the letter **“hei.”**

We must reconcile one issue, however. According to this, the opportunity for the sinner to return is through the aperture at

the top left side of the letter **“hei.”** Seemingly, this contradicts the formula we utter (in tachanun in Shacharis on Mondays and Thursdays): **“נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה ונשובה אליך, כי ימינך פשוטה—let us examine and scrutinize our ways, and return to You, for Your right hand is extended to accept those who return** (the penitent). Similarly, in Ne’ilah, at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, we say: **“אתה נותן יד לפושעים וימינך פשוטה—You offer a hand to wrongdoers, and Your right hand is extended to receive those who return.** Both of these statements imply that HKB”H accepts sinners back on the right side rather than the left side.

A Wonderful Revelation from the Great Rabbi of Ropshitz

I had a wonderful idea. I would like to reconcile this apparent contradiction by referring to a teaching in the impeccable teachings of the great Rabbi of Ropshitz, zy”a. In Zera Kodesh (First Night of Succos), he presents a teaching from the Midrash (B.R. 12, 9) related to the passuk cited above: **These are the generations of the heavens and the earth בהבראם—read this as באברהם.** They were created in the merit of Avraham (אברהם and באברהם are anagrams). Elsewhere in the Midrash (ibid. 10), they expound: **בהבראם indicates that He created them with the letter “hei.”**

The Zera Kodesh asserts that the two elucidations go hand in hand. The world was created with the letter **“hei”** in the merit of Avraham who had the letter **“hei”** added to his name by HKB”H. From the aspect of **“midas hadin,”** a person who sins against the King of Kings does not deserve a tikun; strictly speaking, his teshuvah should not be accepted. However, in His infinite mercy, HKB”H treats the sinner with divine **“chesed”** above and beyond the dictates of **“din,”** and accepts his teshuvah. This is evident from the following passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Makkos 7a): **“שאלו לחכמה חוטא מהו עונשו, אמרו להם חטאים תרדף רעה, שאלו לנבואה חוטא מהו עונשו, אמרה להן הנפש החוטאת היא תמות, שאלו לקודשא בריך הוא חוטא מהו עונשו, אמר להן יעשה תשובה ויתכפר לו, היינו דכתיב על . They asked “Chochmah” (Wisdom): “What should the punishment of a sinner be?” She answered them (Mishlei 13, 21): “Evil pursues sinners.” They asked “Nevuah” (Prophecy), “What should the punishment for a sinner be?” She answered them (Yechezkel 18, 4): “The soul that sins shall die.” They asked the Torah, “What should the punishment for a sinner be?” She answered them, “Let him bring an ‘asham,’ and**

it will atone for him.” They asked HKB”H, “What is the punishment for a sinner?” He answered that he should perform teshuvah, and it will atone for him, as it is written (Tehillim 25, 8): “Good and upright is Hashem; therefore, He guides sinners on the proper path”—for He shows the sinners the path; they should perform teshuvah.

Now, the acceptance of a sinner back into good standing via “midas hachessed” is in the merit of Avraham Avinu. He served Hashem with “midas hachessed” by hosting guests and teaching them to return to their Father in Heaven by means of teshuvah. As it is written (Bereishis 21, 33): “ויטע אשל בבאר שבע ויקרא שם בשם—ה' אל עולם—he planted an “eshel” in Be’er Sheva and there he proclaimed the name of Hashem, G-d of the Universe. Rashi comments: By means of that “eshel,” the name of HKB”H was proclaimed as G-d of the entire universe. After they would eat and drink, he (Avraham) would say to them, “Recite a blessing to the One of Whose you have eaten.” Do you think that you have eaten of mine? Of that which belongs to Him Who spoke and brought the universe into being you have eaten.

According to the Zera Kodesh, this explains HKB”H’s rationale for adding the letter “hei” to Avraham’s name. The right side of the “hei” is an uninterrupted, straight line. It represents Avraham’s flawless, unmitigated, right sided “midas hachessed.” The left side of the “hei,” on the other hand, is broken and incomplete. It represents the left sided “midas hadin,” which has been broken and diminished due to the merit of Avraham. Hence, there is an opening in its upper left corner to accept a sinner back once he has performed teshuvah. Thus, the two elucidations of “בהבראה” truly go hand in hand. The world was created with the letter “hei,” which has an entrance for “ba’alei teshuvah” in the merit of Avraham, who epitomized “midas hachessed.” This is the gist of his sacred remarks.

This explains quite beautifully the meaning of our utterance: “For Your right hand is extended to accept those who return.” The fact that the aperture for penitents is on the left side of the letter “hei” is not problematic. The left side represents “midas hadin.” The opening and opportunity for teshuvah in spite of “midas hadin” is solely due to the right hand of HKB”H. As represented by the right side of the letter “hei,” it is extended fully to accept the teshuvah of someone who has sinned. Let us apply this to the utterance: “For Your right hand is extended” on the right side of the letter “hei,” representing “midas hachessed”; “to accept those who return” through the

aperture in upper aspect of the left side of the letter “hei,” which has been broken and opened by “midas hachessed.”

The Association of the Letter “Hei” with the Mitzvah of Milah

Following this line of reasoning, we can now explain why HKB”H added the letter “hei” to Avraham’s name in conjunction with the mitzvah of milah. As our sacred sefarim explain, the purpose of the mitzvah of milah is not only physical, but it is also spiritual. As it is written (Devarim 10, 16): “וימלתם את ערלת—לבבכם—you shall cut away the barrier in your heart. Here are the enlightening words of the Kli Yakar (Bereishis 17, 9):

“As for you, you shall keep My covenant.” Why does it initially say only “you”? Why does it then repeat and say, “you and your offspring”? This is the explanation: The command was directed primarily to his offspring, because they require this external circumcision, so that they will achieve an internal circumcision and purification of the heart through it. As for you, however, who already has a pure heart, you did not require your milah for yourself but rather for the rest of the world. His offspring that come after him, however, require the milah for themselves.

In a related matter, we find an intriguing ruling in the Rama (Y.D. 72, 2) concerning eating an animal’s heart: It is customary to initially remove (cut off) the external layer of the heart and the internal sinews, but this is merely a stringency and cautionary measure. In the same vein, the Shach (14) cites the divine kabbalist, the Recanati, in parshas Lech Lecha. He writes that since the “Bris” resembles the heart, the rough, external surface of the heart is also initially incised to ward off the force of tumah. This is the meaning of: “You shall cut away the barrier of your hearts.”

We can now better understand why HKB”H added the letter “hei” to Avraham when He commanded him to perform the mitzvah of milah. He wished to teach us that the purpose of the physical circumcision is to serve as spiritual preparation enabling us to fulfill the command: “You shall cut away the barrier of your hearts.” In other words, even if a person sins and is swayed by the desires of his heart, it is within his power to excise that barrier created by the heart and to perform sincere, complete teshuvah. For, as explained, the right hand of HKB”H is extended on the right side of the letter “hei,” providing the sinner with the opportunity to return to good

standing through the tiny aperture on the left side of the letter “**hei**.” This phenomenon is attributable to Avraham Avinu, who personified “midas hachessed,” similar to the right side of the letter “**hei**.”

A Wonderful Revelation from the Chasam Sofer

It is with great pleasure that we will now explain the association of the name **Kel Shakkai** with the mitzvah of milah. When HKB”H commands Avraham to perform the mitzvah of milah, He says: **“I am ‘Kel Shakkai,’ walk before Me and be perfect.”** Above, we introduced the passage from the Gemara explaining that the Almighty had to halt the expansion of creation and say, **“Enough”**—“די”. We expressed our profound surprise that the world would attempt to transgress the boundaries and limits imposed on it by HKB”H and incur the wrath of G-d.

I express my gratitude to Hashem for enlightening me and providing me with an explanation for our sages’ enigmatic words. Let us introduce a precious insight from the teachings of the Chasam Sofer in his Derashos. His sacred remarks address the formula we recite on Mondays and Thursdays: **הפּוּתָה יָד בַּתְּשׁוּבָה** “**לקבל פושעים וחטאים—You Who open a hand for teshuvah, to accept wrongdoers and sinners.** In the writings of the Arizal (Sha’ar HaKavanos, Pesach, Drush 6), he explains that the letter “**hei**” has two forms. It is either a ד (“dalet”) with a ו (“vav”) within it or a “**dalet**” with a “**yud**” within it. The former represents the complete union, while the latter represents the union in times of galus. That being the case, why does tradition dictate that we write the letter “**hei**” in a sefer Torah with the left leg in the shape of a “**yud**” and not the shape of a “**vav**”?

To explain the matter, the Chasam Sofer refers to the Gemara cited above. There, we learned that this world was created with the letter “**hei**,” which has an opening on the left side to allow the return of sinners who wish to perform sincere teshuvah. Based on this premise, we can posit that this is why the letter “**hei**” is written in a sefer Torah as a “**dalet and a yud**” rather than as a “**dalet and a vav**.” This provides a larger opening for “ba’alei teshuvah.” If the left leg of the “**hei**” was a “**vav**,” which is taller and longer, the opening above it would be miniscule.

This then is the implication of our prayer: **הפּוּתָה יָד בַּתְּשׁוּבָה** “**לקבל פושעים וחטאים.** HKB”H, in His infinite mercy and kindness, provides us with a larger opening for teshuvah by determining that the shape of the letter ה—the letter with which this world

was created—be formed by the letters י”ד instead of the letters ד”י, because it is His desire **“to accept wrongdoers and sinners.”**

This provides us with a wonderful interpretation of the words of Rabbi Avahu (Berachos 34b): **במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין—“אין צדיקים גמורים עומדין”**—**in the place where “ba’alei teshuvah” stand, total tzaddikim cannot stand.** We can suggest that he is referring to the place of the opening in the letter “**hei**” that HKB”H has provided for “ba’alei teshuvah,” between the “**yud**” on the left side and the top of the letter “**dalet**.” That place does not exist for consummate tzaddikim, because their union is complete; it resembles the combination of the “**dalet and vav**.”

The World Continued to Expand Alludes to the Left Sided Appendage of the Letter “Hei”

This illuminates for us the profound words of Chazal: **When HKB”H created the world, it was expanding continuously . . . until HKB”H rebuked the world and brought it to a standstill.** Let us explain. When HKB”H created the world with the letter “**hei**,” which is made up of two letters, the left leg of the “**hei**” continued to expand. Instead of remaining in the shape of a “**yud**,” it attempted to elongate into the shape of a “**vav**.” After all, that is the ideal form of the letter “**hei**,” the form intended for tzaddikim—the combination of a “**dalet and a vav**.” Ultimately, HKB”H admonished it and instructed it to remain as a short appendage in the shape of a “**yud**”; so that an opening would remain for sinners who perform teshuvah.

This explains magnificently the substantiation added by the Gemara: **And this bears out what Reish Lakish said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “I am El Shaddai?” I am the One Who told the world, “Enough.”** Thus, HKB”H hinted that He intended for the letter “**hei**,” with which the world was created, to remain in the shape of a “**dalet and yud**” and not in the shape of a “**dalet and a vav**.” This is the implication of the name **Kel Shakkai**, indicating that the Almighty said to His world, **“Enough!”**—“די”. He provided an opportunity for the sinner who performed teshuvah to be accepted back into good standing through the wider opening in the letter “**hei**.”

We can now understand why HKB”H introduced the mitzvah of milah by saying to Avraham: **“I am ‘Kel Shakkai,’ walk before Me and be perfect.”** One of the names of HKB”H is **Kel Shakkai**. As we have learned, this name teaches us that the Almighty limited the expansion of creation by pronouncing

the word ד"י meaning **"Enough!"** We have explained that this pronouncement indicated that He wanted the letter **"hei"** to remain as a **"dalet and yud"** and not expand into a **"dalet and a vav."** HKB"H planned for a sinner to have ample room to perform teshuvah and thereby remove the barrier created by his heart. Therefore, he instructed Avraham: **"Walk before Me and be perfect."** He wanted Avraham to perform the physical mitzvah of circumcision in order to enable his offspring to also excise the barrier of the heart.

It was for this reason that HKB"H added the letter **"hei"** to Avraham in conjunction with the mitzvah of milah by informing him (Bereishis 17, 5): **"ולא יקרא עוד את שמך אברם והיה שמך אברהם"**—**your name will no longer be called Avram** (without a **"hei"**), **but your name will be Avraham** (with a **"hei"**). HKB"H added the letter **"hei"** to his name, the letter with which this world was created. It has an aperture on its upper left side to receive sinners who return to Hashem via teshuvah in the merit of Avraham Avinu, who served Hashem with **"midas hachesed,"** represented by the intact right side of the **"hei."** Hence, we say: **"For Your right hand is extended"**—this is the right side of the **"hei"**—**"to accept those who return"**—through the opening in its left side. For, in the merit of the right sided **"chesed,"** the left sided **"din"** was broken to facilitate the return of those who perform teshuvah.

The Milah of Yitzchak Avinu Opened the Closed Opening in the Letter "ches"

Continuing on this holy journey, we will now explain why HKB"H commanded Avraham to perform the mitzvah of milah for all future generations on the eighth day (ibid. 12): **"ובן שמונת ימים ימול לכם כל זכר לדורותיכם"**—**at the age of eight days, every male among you shall be circumcised, throughout your generations.** Now, HKB"H, the Grand Orchestrator, arranged for Yitzchak Avinu to be the first Jew to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life, as it is written (ibid. 21, 4): **"וימול אברהם את יצחק בנו בן שמונת ימים כאשר צוה אותו אלקים"**—**Avraham circumcised his eight-day-old son Yitzchak as G-d had commanded him.**

As we have discussed, it is entirely due to **"midas hachesed"** that HKB"H accepts the sinner who performs teshuvah back. For, based solely on **"midas hadin,"** he would be condemned to die; as per the pronouncement of Nevuah: **"הנפש החוטאת היא תמות"**—**the soul that sins shall die.** Now, we know that Yitzchak Avinu served Hashem with **"midas hadin."** Thus,

according to his doctrine, a sinner cannot achieve tikun through teshuvah. This belief-system is better symbolized by the letter **"ches"** as opposed to the letter **"hei,"** since the left side of the **"ches"** is sealed shut. In other words, there is no opening to accommodate a sinner who has performed teshuvah.

Therefore, HKB"H prepared the remedy in advance of the ailment. He commanded Avraham Avinu to circumcise all of his offspring on the eighth day, so that his son Yitzchak, who personified **"midas hadin,"** would have his milah on the eighth day. This served to mitigate the letter **"chet,"** which does not have an aperture for **"ba'alei teshuvah."** As a result of Yitzchak's milah—which is aimed at removing the barrier of the heart by means of teshuvah—the sealed opening in the letter **"ches"** was opened, transforming it into a **"hei."** This is the significance of the letter **"hei"** that was added to the name Avraham. Thus, even the left sided **"midas hadin"** would acquiesce to accept a sinner back through the door of teshuvah.

This then is the message conveyed by the passuk: **"Avraham circumcised his eight-day-old son Yitzchak as G-d had commanded him."** HKB"H commanded Avraham to perform the mitzvah of milah to open the gates of teshuvah for all Jews who excise the barrier created by their hearts. Furthermore, he circumcised Yitzchak, the representative of **"midas hadin,"** on the eighth day, to open up the sealed aperture in the letter **"ches."** As a result, it was transformed into the letter **"hei"** that HKB"H added to Avraham.

Let us embellish this thought based on the passuk (Tehillim 68, 31): **"גַּעַר חַיִּית קִנְיָה"**. We will ignore the interpretations of these words suggested by the commentaries and introduce a very literal interpretation based on the Zohar hakadosh (Pinchas 252a). These words inform us that HKB"H took out his rage on the side of the letter **"ches."** The Zohar teaches us that the difference between **חמ"ץ**—leavened bread symbolizing the klipah—and **מצ"ה**—matzah symbolizing kedushah—is that **חמ"ץ** contains the letter **ח** and **מצ"ה** contains the letter **ה**. The other two letters of both terms are the same—the letters **מ"צ**.

Thus, the passuk is saying that HKB"H took out His rage on the letter **חמ"ץ** of **חַיִּית**. Now, its left leg is completely closed and intact like a **קני"ה**—a reed. So, He broke the left reed of the letter **ח**, which extends upwards to the top of the letter, and transformed it into the **ה** of **מצ"ה**, whose leg is suspended, creating an opening superiorly.

