**Parenting from the Parsha- Parshat Tazria-Metzora- A Shared Mitzvah**
Rav Yossi Goldin

At the beginning of this week’s parsha, the Torah outlines the Mitzvah of Brit Milah, commanded to take place on day 8 to a boy’s birth. While Milah was already commanded to Avraham in Sefer Bereishit, our parsha marks the first time that it is commanded to the entire nation.

Much has been written about the importance and significance of Brit Mila within Jewish thought, and its centrality to the identity of the Jewish people. However, I would like to highlight one fascinating aspect of this mitzva that I believe underscores a couple of poignant lessons for us as parents.

The Rabbis engage in a great deal of discussion regarding who is obligated in the mitzvah of Brit Mila. The apparent conclusion that emerges from the Gemara and the Rishonim is that the mitzvah is an obligation on both the father and the son- depending on the time. While the child is young, the father is obligated to have his son circumcised. While the child is young, the father is obligated to have his son circumcised. If the boy reaches age 13, however, and has not yet been circumcised; he is now obligated to ensure his own circumcision. Some authorities maintain that, under such circumstances, the son alone is obligated, while others suggest that both father and son are now obligated in this mitzvah.

Brit Mila therefore emerges as an extremely unique commandment- *a shared mitzvah between father and son.*  We are not referring to a mitzvah in which both father and son are each independently obligated, as there are many examples of such mitzvot. Rather, it is a single act that is incumbent upon both father and son. Initially, it is the obligation of the father, and a later point, that same mitzvah becomes the obligation of the son- perhaps even the joint obligation of both father and son. This unique aspect of Milah highlights two beautiful lessons that I believe are valuable for us to consider.

Firstly, there is tremendous significance in the fact that the first mitzva a father is commanded to perform is a mitzvah that is shared with his child. This reality emphasizes to us, from the very beginning of fatherhood, the importance of creating shared experiences with our children, particularly in the world of mitzvot and spirituality. We must not take the position that “I have my mitzvot and my child has his.” Instead, Judaism must be seen as a journey that we share, a sacred spiritual mission upon which we embark upon together. As we have noted in the past, it is important to take advantage of all available opportunities to spend time with our children. Shared time and experiences build an extremely powerful bond between people- and certainly between parent and child. When we are privileged to have such shared experiences and opportunities within the realm of Torah, mitzvot, and avodat Hashem, we can learn from each other, as we deepen our connection with each other and with Hashem as well.

Secondly, this unique aspect of Milah underscores a crucial message regarding Jewish and familial continuity. With Brit Mila we are presented with a mitzvah that is incumbent upon a father- but if, for some reason, the father is unable to do carry out the obligation, the son is then charged with fulfilling the commandment instead. This highlights the crucial role that children play in continuing the legacy of their parents. As parents, we have many dreams and hopes as to how we wish to impact upon the world around us. Our children certainly have their own personal hopes and dreams, as well. On some level, however, all children are also charged with continuing the legacy of their parents and grandparents before them. Our successes are not simply defined by what we ourselves are able to accomplish, but by the accomplishments of our children and grandchildren as well. Just as our ancestors live on within us and our accomplishments, we will continue to live in through the accomplishments of those who follow us. If we are unable to achieve something ourselves, but we enable our children to do so; then we share in that achievement, as well. If a father is unable to perform the mitzvah of milah on his son for whatever reason, his son is charged to ensure the fulfillment of the commandment himself. In doing so, he allows his father to share in the completion of the mitzvah on some level, as well.

On a personal level, this message carries particular significance for me and my wife, as adult olim to Eretz Yisrael- especially as we celebrate Yom Haazmaut this week. Having grown up in a different society and culture during our childhood, formative teenage years, and young adult years, we often find ourselves feeling a bit like “outsiders” within the larger Israeli community. Although we are both relatively fluent Hebrew speakers and are relatively integrated into Israeli society- there are always certain aspects of the language and culture that do not come naturally to us. This is no one’s “fault” - and in no way does it cause us to question our decision to make Aliyah- it is simply a reality of circumstance. We have always felt, however, that despite the “in between” stage we sometimes find ourselves to be in, our success as olim will be defined by our children. If our Aliyah enables us to raise children in Eretz Yisrael who can fully integrate into Israeli society in a meaningful way, then we will have accomplished our goal- our children’s success will have become our own. And we could not be happier.

The mitzvah of Milah has become a foundational mitzvah in Jewish law and thought- fundamental to each and every male Jew. A unique aspect of the mitzvah- its status as a shared mitzvah between father and son- highlights meaningful messages for us as parents as well. On the one hand, it encourages us to seek shared experiences with our children in the arena of Torah and Mitzvot- to strengthen our connection specifically through enhanced spirituality and meaning. On the other hand, it reminds us that our success as parents will not be defined solely by what we are able to accomplish within our lives, but by the successes of our children and future generations as well.

Shabbat Shalom!