

Parashas
Lech Lecha

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ח' חשוון תשפ"ו

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י"ל ע"י

קהילת שבתי בבית ד'

בנשיאות מורנו ורבנו הרה"צ
רבי גמליאל הכהן
רבינוביץ שליט"א

טיב הקהילה

English edition

באנגלית

טיב הפרשה

להתגבר על היצר ותכסיסיו

To overpower the yetzer and its tricks

טיב המערכות

הפרד נא מעלי

Please separate from me

Moreinu HaRav shlit"z related: Hagaon R' Chaim Kreiswirth st"l once bought an apartment in the holy city of Yerushalayim and moved in. And behold, within just a few days after he was already living in the apartment, he sold the apartment and bought instead another apartment in a different neighborhood. All his acquaintances were astonished — why did he do such a thing? After a period of time, I met him and asked him to explain that puzzling purchase and sale. R' Chaim answered me: At first indeed that apartment found favor in my eyes, but within a few days I saw that there was a certain neighbor there with whom it would be difficult for me to get along, and therefore I hurried to move from there before I would enter with him into arguments.

Avraham Avinu — the man of kindness — does something that appears to be the complete opposite of his trait — the trait of kindness. The moment a quarrel breaks out between his shepherds and the shepherds of Lot, Avraham says to Lot (13:9), 'הפרד נא מעלי, אם השמאל ואימינה ואם הימין ואשמאילה' - "Please separate from me, if you go left, I will go right, and if you go right, I will go left." What happened? For Avraham Avinu received everyone — we know that even idol worshippers were accepted by him, and he fed them and gave them drink — so suddenly he is not willing to go together with his nephew? Especially since the argument was not between Avraham and Lot, but between the shepherds?!

Indeed — peace is great, so great that in the next parashah we will learn that HaKadosh Baruch Hu Himself altered the truth for the sake of peace. And who is greater than Avraham Avinu, who was the example of peace — and specifically therefore, here with Lot Avraham understood that for the sake of peace — they must separate. And thus, he says to him, "Please let there not be strife between me and you... for we are men who are brothers." Not instead of peace — but for the sake of peace!

Every person can point to certain situations in his life that, if he had distanced himself at the right time, he would have avoided a quarrel or at least an argument. But one does not cry over spilled milk. So at least from today onward we should always remember — that sometimes one needs to distance himself, even if it is difficult, and perhaps even appears not good — but if Avraham Avinu acted in such a manner and the Torah relates it to us, it is so that we learn from him and walk in his ways — that sometimes one needs to distance himself, not instead of peace, but for the sake of peace!

Tiv HaTorah – Lech Lecha

וְהָיָה רִיב בֵּין רֹעֵי מִקְנֵה אַבְרָם וּבֵין רֹעֵי מִקְנֵה לוֹט וְהִכְנַעְנִי וְהִפְרִדְי אֶזְיֵשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל לוֹט אַל תָּהִי מְרִיבָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין רֹעֵי וּבֵין רֹעִיךָ כִּי אֲנָשִׁים אַחִים אָנַחְנוּ: הֲלֹא כָל הָאֶרֶץ לִפְנֵיךָ הִפְרֵד נָא מֵעָלַי אִם הַשְּׂמָאל וְאִמְנָה וְאִם הַיָּמִין וְאִשְׁמְאִילָה: (יג, ז - ט)

There was quarreling between the shepherds of Avram's livestock and the shepherds of Lot's livestock, and the Canaani and Perizzi were then dwelling in the land. So Avram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my shepherds and your shepherds, for we are men who are brothers. Isn't all the land before you? Please separate from me, if to the left, then I will go to the right, and if to the right then I will go to the left." (13:7-9)

Rashi explains: And there was quarreling – because Lot's shepherds were wicked, and would graze their cattle in the fields of others, and Avram's shepherds would rebuke them over the theft, and Lot's shepherds would say, "The land has been given to Avram, and he has no heir, so Lot will inherit him, and this is not theft." But the Torah says, "and the Canaani and the Perizzi were then dwelling in the land", so Avram had not yet come into possession of it. Men who are brothers – this means relatives. Medrash Aggadah explains, they resembled each other in their facial appearance. If to the left, then I will go to the right – wherever you may live, I will not distance myself from you, but I will stand for you as a protector, as it says (14:14), וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אַחִיו, 'וגו' - 'And Avraham heard that his brother was taken captive...'

When delving into these posukim, several questions arise.

A. Behold, Avraham Avinu merited to illuminate the face of the world and to reveal faith in Hashem, and thereby he made many souls for his Creator. How is it possible that specifically into the heart of Lot, his nephew, he did not find pathways to draw him to uprightness, even though he always remained in his proximity and accompanied him in all his journeys?

B. Why did this quarrel not find favor in the eyes of Avraham? For it was not a quarrel of "baseless hatred," but rather a quarrel with evildoers — and this is a quarrel that is desirable in the eyes of Hashem, as Dovid HaMelech says (Tehillim 139:21), 'אתקוטט' - "Do I not hate those who hate You, Hashem, and do I not contend with those who rise up against You," etc.

C. There is a need to understand Avraham's reasoning that he did not desire a quarrel because they are "men who are brothers." For Rashi in his first explanation interprets "men who are brothers" — relatives. And we must understand why this would be a cause for peace even when Lot does not desire to walk in the ways of Hashem. Also, the second interpretation that Rashi brings from Medrash Aggadah — that

they “resembled one another in facial appearance” — is not understood. Why should that be a reason to be at peace with an evildoer?

D. There is a need to understand Avraham’s intent when he said, “If you go left, I will go right,” etc. For its simple meaning is that if you go to the left, I will go to the right. But Rashi chose to interpret the opposite — that he said to him, “Wherever you go, I will not distance myself from you.” And according to Rashi, Avraham intended to say to Lot that if you choose to go to my left, I will go to your right — in order to remain close to you. And the commentators on Rashi explained that Rashi’s interpretation is necessary, because if we interpret it simply, we find that Avraham would be repeating himself. For that was already his intent when he said, “Please separate from me,” that one should go right and one should go left. Thus, it is necessary that he intended to inform him that he would not distance himself too greatly from

him. However, what Rashi brings — that this was in order to be a protector for him — is astonishing, for why would he desire his welfare after sending him away because of his wickedness?

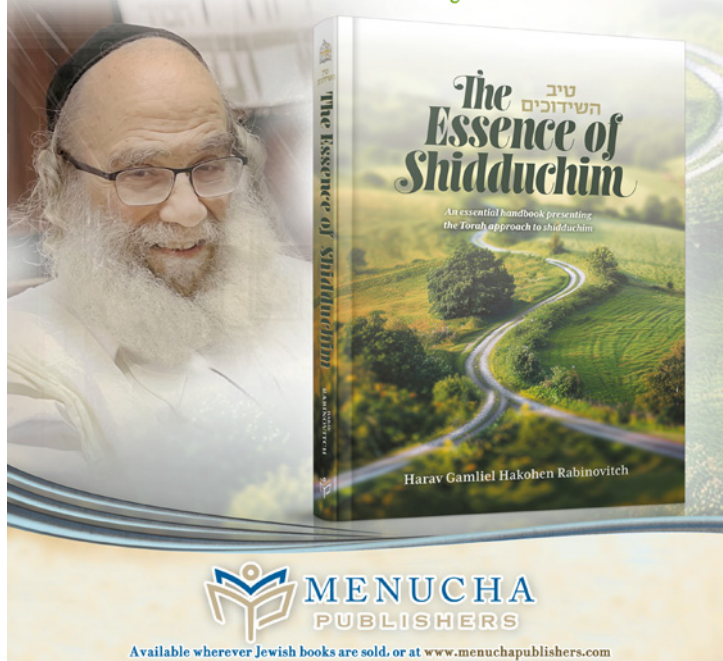
All of these questions are properly resolved when one considers the claims of Lot’s shepherds that are brought in the words of Rashi before us. Behold, Lot’s shepherds, besides acting unlawfully by grazing their sheep in others’ fields, added sin upon transgression by denying their evil through falsifying the law. For after they contrived a pseudo-legal fabrication that the matter was permissible, it was no longer possible to rebuke them. For if they were told “it is forbidden,” they would answer “it is permitted.” And it is understood therefore why Avraham could not draw Lot toward the truth — because Avraham succeeded only in illuminating and enlightening those who did not deny the truth, and whose wickedness was only driven by desire. Upon such hearts Avraham found an opening to entice them to subjugate themselves to the truth. Not so Lot and his shepherds, who denied the truth entirely.

Now we also understand why this quarrel did not find favor in the eyes of Avraham — it was not because his face was turned toward peace with evildoers, but rather he understood that the divine service of “and with those who rise

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against You I contend” is only desirable with those who, in the inner recesses of their hearts, recognize their evil. For then there is hope that contending with them will ultimately coerce them back toward the truth. Not so those who do not recognize their evil at all — not only will they not return, but they may further influence others with their breath and ensnare in their net those whose minds are limited and do not know how to answer the heretics. And this is what Avraham intended when he said, “For we are men who are brothers,” and Rashi explains: “Relatives.” Meaning — to some degree, one who looks upon us does not recognize the great difference between us, and imagines that we are close in outlook, since we both claim to conduct ourselves according to the Torah. And it is possible that there will be among the respectable people those who, due to this, will seek to attach themselves to you, chalilah. Therefore, I have one request — “Please separate from me.”

And according to this one may say that even in Rashi’s second explanation — that “their facial appearance was similar one to another” — this is what he intended. And it is nothing other than an explanation of what he first said, “relatives,” and it is a parable for “externality.” For externally their conduct appeared similar one to the other, as stated.

And according to this the question is also resolved regarding what is brought in Rashi — that Avraham asked that Lot not distance

himself too far from him, so that he would be able to assist and protect him. Behold, although Avraham understood that there was no escape from separating from Lot, he did not desire that Lot go too far from him. For it is true that Lot rejected Avraham and did not wish to adhere to all his ways. However, all the days that he dwelled in the proximity of Avraham, he merited to root within himself many good traits and upright qualities, and those he had not yet rejected. And Avraham feared lest, if he would be afar, there would be inhabitants of the world who would observe his pleasant conduct and be drawn to think that he is a “righteous man.” For his positive qualities would cover over his deficiencies, and since this is so, they would seek to attach themselves to him and to his ways — and they would rejoice to attach themselves also to his companions, for they would have a “support” in this from their “esteemed” master... Therefore, he desired that he remain somewhat close, so that all who wander in the surroundings of Lot would also encounter the surroundings of Avraham, and from

Avraham’s virtues they would recognize Lot’s deficiencies, and would seek to attach themselves only to Avraham. However, Avraham did not wish to reveal to Lot this true reason, for certainly Lot would not agree if his disgrace would be exposed. Therefore, he had to say to him that he seeks his welfare in order to be a protector and helper for him.

And behold, we have said that Lot and his shepherds were blemished in falsifications — and we have also chosen to cast blame upon the Mizrahi faction, that they are those who are blemished in this matter — however, to some degree many among us are blemished in this very matter. For the inclination of man is evil from his youth. And this is the way of the yetzer hara — it does not approach one who fears Hashem to entice him to rebelliously transgress sin and guilt, for it understands that he would not at all be seduced. Its primary tactic is to open gateways to permit what is forbidden. Then it can find pathways into the heart of man. Therefore, the primary labor of man is to outwit the yetzer that seeks to liken him to Lot... He must settle his mind and scrutinize all his ways, lest there be within them a step beneath which his yetzer hides, to permit it. Woe to one who is lax in this matter — as we see to what depths Lot descended when he established his actions according to the “uprightness” that the yetzer invented for him...

‘מקול עורב לקול ערב’

From the voice of a raven ‘to a pleasant voice

Do you know those who learn or *daven* aloud right in your ear?

I do not know if I am particularly sensitive or if everyone suffers from this, but I truly suffer from the matter. I already felt that I am not able to cope with it, and I began to comment to people to lower their voice.

And this is an unpleasant situation. I *davened* to Hashem to give me tools to cope like the many people who continue learning and praying without disturbance. On the very day that I *davened* to Hashem, a wondrous thing happened. I learned with my chavrusa as every day, and behold, an avrech sat next to us and learned Gemara aloud and with melody, and his voice was a thick voice that shook my ear. I changed places and still I could not succeed to concentrate. I asked my chavrusa that he should perhaps tell him to lower the volume of his voice, but the chavrusa whispered in my ear that this is one of the Gedolei HaDor. I was startled and asked, who is this? He answered me that this is the Rav of my Rav.

I felt uncomfortable and said, if so, let us continue learning and let us not disturb him, *chalilah*, from his learning. When we finished learning the chavrusa said to me: “See how everything is in our head. This man is indeed a very important *talmid chacham*, but the moment you understood that he is a Gadol HaDor, not only does he not disturb you, but it is even sweet and pleasant to your ear!!!” The chavrusa continued and explained to me that he too used to suffer greatly from the phenomenon, until every time that there was someone who disturbed him, he imagined that this is his Rebbe or a Gadol HaDor, and then it no longer disturbed him at all, and on the contrary, it became sweet and pleasant.

Only after we parted did I wonder at the fact that on the very day that I asked for help from the Creator, HaKadosh Baruch Hu sent me the solution that works excellently for me, and from then on, the voices of those who learn and pray in my ears no longer disturb me!!!

I am sharing the story so that there will be benefit to other people how to cope with noises without disturbing yourself or your environment!!!

Even if someone sings off-key and his voice is not pleasant to your ears, imagine that he is a great Mekubal and everything will settle in peace!!!

ש.א.

בַּעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִמּוֹל אַבְרָהָם וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנָו, וְכָל אֲנָשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ וְלִיד בֵּית וּמִקְנֵת כֶּסֶף
מֵאֵת בֶּן נֹכֵר נִמּוֹל אִתּוֹ” (וי, כו-כז).

On that very day Avraham and Yishmael his son were circumcised; and all the men of his household, those born in the house and those purchased with money from a heathen, were circumcised with him.” (Bereishis 17:26–27)

The plain meaning of the pasuk implies that the order of the bris milah was that Avraham first circumcised himself, then his son Yishmael, and only afterwards did he circumcise the members of his household, both those born in his house and those he acquired with money.

The commentators disagree regarding this matter (see Ramban and Radak ad loc., and others). Some have also proven this from the halachah (Avodah Zarah 27a): ha-mol yimol—that the one performing the circumcision must himself be circumcised.

From here we can derive a moral lesson for every matter: a person must first serve as an example himself in the fulfillment of the mitzvos of the Torah; only after he has acted himself may he influence his children and household.

But if a person does not himself serve as a good example of what he demands from others, he will not be able to influence them. As it is similarly stated in Bava Basra 15b: טול קורה מבין עיניך — “Remove the beam from between your eyes.”

Therefore, when all the members of Avraham’s household saw that even in his extreme old age, nearing one hundred years, he rejoiced and hastened to fulfill the mitzvah of bris milah—and that he circumcised himself first before all others—they too learned to perform the mitzvah willingly.

As explained in the Zohar (III, 135a): כָּל רִישָׁא דְעָמָא דְלֵא אֶתְתֵּקֵן הוּא בְּקִדְמִיתָא, לִית עָמָא מִבְּתָרָא. וְאִי אִיהוּ מִתְתֵּקֵן, כּוֹלְהוּ מִתְתֵּקֵן. וְאִי אִיהוּ לֹא מִתְתֵּקֵן, בְּקִדְמִיתָא, לֹא יִכְלִין עָמָא לְאַתְתֵּקְנָא. From here we learn: Every leader the people who is not rectified first, then the people cannot be rectified. And if he is rectified, all of them become rectified; but if he is not rectified first, the people cannot be rectified.

It is thus clear that from the mitzvah of bris milah we learn that one must first rectify himself, and only then can he guide others to follow his example—just as Chazal taught (Bava Basra 60b): קשׁוּט עֲצֻמָּךְ וְאַחֵר כִּי קִשׁוּט אַחֵרִים — “Adorn yourself first, and afterward adorn others.”

Rav Eliezer Gutfarb shlita was born in the renowned Shaare Zedek Hospital. In those days, infants were not discharged from the hospital until after the bris milah, once it was confirmed that the child was healthy and whole.

Usually, Dr. Wallach, the famous director of the hospital, personally served as the mohel for all babies born there. At this birth as well, Dr. Wallach approached the father, the gaon Rav Shmuel Gutfarb zt”l, and, when speaking with him about the bris milah, informed him that within the hospital he served as mohel for all the newborns.

Rav Shmuel, however, requested to bring another mohel to circumcise his son. Dr. Wallach replied, “If you wish to bring another mohel, I approve—you may bring whomever you desire.”

When the day of the bris arrived, however, the authorities imposed a citywide curfew. Owing to the difficult wartime conditions, such curfews were often declared, and it was strictly forbidden to go outdoors. As a result, no mohel could come to perform the circumcision, and Dr. Wallach had to serve as mohel for this bris too.

As an experienced and expert mohel, Dr. Wallach performed the bris with great beauty and dignity, following all the traditional customs from ancient times. But immediately after completing the ceremony, he called out a loud “Mazal tov!” and hurried straight back to his office.

Rav Shmuel wished to thank him for performing the bris milah. Seeing that Dr. Wallach had already gone to his office, he followed him there and sought to shake his hand with a heartfelt “Yasher koach.” To his surprise, Dr. Wallach said, “I do not shake hands after a bris milah.”

Perplexed, Rav Shmuel asked why specifically after a bris milah he refrained from shaking hands. The righteous doctor explained that when he had lived in Vienna, Austria, studying medicine and learning the craft of milah, he had become a well-known mohel. At times, when performing brissim for more modern Jews, after the ceremony, as people came to congratulate him, women too would approach to shake his hand.

Therefore, I took upon myself a vow never to extend my hand to anyone after a bris milah—neither to men nor, of course, to women. Thus, I would be entirely safeguarded from stumbling, as everyone came to know that “Dr. Wallach never shakes hands after a bris.”

“True,” concluded Dr. Wallach, “after I came to the Holy Land and established Shaare Zedek Hospital, most of the families were God-fearing and observant. Still, a vow is a vow. Therefore, I hastened after the bris back to my office, so as not to transgress my vow.”

My son, the gaon Rav Meir shlita, author of Meir Halachah, told me an amazing story which he personally witnessed from his grandfather’s brother, the renowned chassidic gaon Rav Elazar Brizel zt”l.

Once, Rav Elazar zt”l was brought and accompanied to participate in the bris milah celebration of one of his descendants, held in the Toldos Avraham Yitzchak beis midrash in the Holy City. It was toward the end of his life, when he was already in his nineties.

Upon entering the hall, he went straight to his grandson, the father of the child. After blessing him with a heartfelt mazal tov, he inquired who would be announcing the kibbudim (honors) at this bris. He then made an unusual request—that when his turn would come to be called for a certain honor, they should not add any titles of distinction to his name, as was customary to call him “the righteous rav,” and the like. They should simply announce: “The grandfather, Reb Elazar Brizel.”

Standing nearby was his son-in-law, Rav Menachem Mendel Munderer zt”l, who was the baby’s grandfather. Hearing this request, he smiled and remarked that in the Sefer Agudah—authored by one of the early sages who passed away in the year 5394 (1634), which Rav Elazar himself had edited and republished after it was no longer available—there is a clear teaching on this matter.

(The author was Rav Alexander Ziskind ben Moshe, who gathered halachic rulings from several disciples of the Rosh and called them “Agudah.” He is frequently cited by the Beis Yosef and other poskim.)

There it is written (Shabbos, ch. 1, end of sec. 17): “One should not name his son after a wicked person, as it says, May the name of the wicked rot. Therefore, the custom is to call a baby after his grandfather, for one considers his forefathers to be righteous.”

It is thus explicitly ruled that every Jew may name his son after his grandfather, as is the custom. Although there are wicked people after whom it is unfit to name, nevertheless with respect to one’s fathers and grandfathers, one must regard them as tzaddikim, for every man must consider his father and grandfather righteous; therefore, one may name children after them. Apparently, each person views his father as more righteous than himself, in line with the natural decline of generations.

“We learn, then,” concluded Rav Menachem Mendel, “from the Sefer Agudah that

grandchildren must regard their grandfathers as tzaddikim; accordingly, it is quite fitting for a grandson to refer to his grandfather with the title ‘the righteous Rav.’”

Hearing this, Rav Elazar replied, “I knew they would not listen to me! Yet, on the other hand, I know that these titles are not true, as it says, - לֵב יוֹדֵעַ מֶרֶת נַפְשׁוֹ The heart knows its own bitterness (Mishlei 14:10). But it is never too late... (S’iz keinmol nisht shpet!) I can still strive, at least from now on, that these honors should indeed be deserved. I can take it upon myself henceforth to be truly righteous—for it is never too late! Even one who was wicked all his days and repents in the end, as ruled by the Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 1:3).”

Then, for several long minutes, Rav Elazar began to murmur with trembling and deep emotion: “Lommer hoben ahavas Hashem! Lommer hoben yiras Hashem! S’keinmol nisht tzu shpet! Ich geizich yetzt nemen! Un fun yetzt vel ich vern gut!” [Let us have love of Hashem! Let us have fear of Hashem! It is never too late! I will take hold of myself now! And from now on, I will become good!]

He repeated these words again and again, as all present stood astonished and deeply moved—witnessing a venerable Jew of advanced years, yet still full of vigor, who even in old age refused to surrender to despair, and whose heart burned with longing to fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah sincerely and truthfully.

A trustworthy and renowned mohel, long experienced and expert in his sacred craft, told me of one unique bris milah in which Heaven granted him the merit not only to circumcise the flesh but also to perform a circumcision of the heart—to awaken a Jewish soul, lost and estranged, to complete repentance, as it is written, וְמַל ה' אֶלְקֶיךָ, אֶת לִבְךָ וְאֶת לִבְּבִרְךָ לְאֱהָבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְךָ אֶת לִבְךָ וְאֶת לִבְּבִרְךָ לְאֱהָבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ - And Hashem your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Devarim 30:6).

The circumstances of the event were as follows. As part of his professional calling, this God-fearing mohel often conducts brisos for adults—for converts or for Jews who, due to various reasons, had not yet been circumcised, such as those who came from the former Soviet Union, who, because of the oppressive rule of the wicked regime, were unable to fulfill this mitzvah behind the Iron Curtain.

When approaching such a bris, whose participants are often unfamiliar with the essence and sanctity of the mitzvah, this mohel makes it his practice to explain, in pleasant and inspiring words, the foundations and meaning of the commandment according to the listener’s level—teaching that the mitzvah traces back to the very first covenant which the Almighty made with Avraham Avinu, the father of all who are

circumcised, and that from him this covenant has continued from generation to generation, linking every Jew to the eternal bris of holiness. As the blessing states (Shabbos 137b): “Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to bring him into the covenant of Avraham our father.” That is, every Jew, wherever he may be, by virtue of his descent from Avraham, enters that same holy covenant which was established with our forefather, the sacred sign of which is impressed upon his very body, connecting him with the bond of holiness between the Holy One, blessed be He, and all Israel (see Sefer HaChinuch, mitzvah 2, and later authorities).

Once he was called to perform the bris of a fifty-four-year-old man, a Jew from Soviet Russia—one of the many anusim of that land who had been alienated from Hashem, from His Torah, and from His people, and who had even married a gentile woman, Rachmana litzlan. Following the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and the downfall of the communist regime, when freedom of religion returned, the man resolved that, being a Jew belonging to the chosen nation, he must undergo bris milah, as do all his brethren.

When the mohel arrived, he began, as was his custom, to speak gently with the man, explaining the meaning of the mitzvah. Because the man was so ignorant, the mohel even needed to tell him who Avraham Avinu was—the one into whose covenant we enter. He elaborated on these matters at length, with the help of Heaven. The man was deeply moved, and in the holy flame of newly awakened Jewish feeling he declared passionately that he wished to have the bris performed exactly as Avraham Avinu had performed it upon himself at the age of one hundred!

Now, it is customary for mohelim performing circumcisions on adults to administer a small dose of local anesthesia to lessen the pain, and to make certain technical preparations or minor sutures afterward. The man, enraptured by the story of Avraham Avinu’s bris, asked the mohel about each of these procedures: “Did Avraham Avinu do this as well? Did he also use anesthesia, stitches, or clamps?” The mohel replied plainly and firmly, “No! Avraham Avinu fulfilled the command of the Almighty simply and directly. He took the knife himself and circumcised without any aids or devices.”

(As explained in the words of Rashi on Bereishis 18:1: “That He gave him counsel regarding the circumcision”—meaning, he was advised to perform the milah plainly, without hesitation or stratagem, relying only on the God Who commanded the mitzvah.)

“In that case,” said the man with determination, “I too desire to perform the bris simply, just as Avraham Avinu did—without any anesthesia or contrivances. Since you have told me that I am entering the covenant of Avraham Avinu, I ask you, please perform it for me precisely as he did, and add nothing to lessen the pain.”