

# The Eighth Day

Why do we continue to read Torah portions which focus on sacrifice? I believe that if one looks closely, s/he can find a nice parallel between this portion and the life cycle event of circumcision. Our first Aliyah this morning began שור או כבש או עז כי יולד והיה שבעת ימים תחת אמו וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי וְהַלֵּאָה יִרְצָה לְקָרְבַּן אִשָּׁה לַהּ “For an ox or a sheep or a goat that gives birth, the young shall be with its mother for seven days and from the eighth day onwards it shall be offered as a sacrifice to G-d.”<sup>1</sup> It would be detrimental to the emotional well-being of the mother to take her young right after birth so there is a requirement to wait at least seven days, a complete cycle of the week, before doing so.

Similarly, in the case of a baby boy, the circumcision is not done until the eighth day. Why is this the case? Imagine taking a baby one or two days after birth to be circumcised. Not only would this be medically unsound but it also would be detrimental to the emotional well-being and stability of the mother. Because of that, a complete week (including

---

<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 22:26

one Shabbat) is given for the mother to be with her child before the two of them are reintegrated into society.

There is a broader purpose to this comparison: both examples have to do with making something sacred. Sacrificing an animal comes from the root *karov*, meaning “bringing close.” It was a holy act of consecrating an animal to G-d. Concurrently, the circumcision of a baby boy is an act of sanctification, bringing the boy into the Jewish people.

While with no Temple in Jerusalem we do not have animal sacrifice, we still enact circumcisions, and many moderns are uncomfortable with it. There have been campaigns to ban circumcision as a barbaric act, the most notable having been in 2011 in San Francisco and Santa Monica California.<sup>2</sup> Those who have argued for banning circumcision do not realize that this is more than removing a baby’s foreskin; it is a holy act of drawing a newborn close to G-d.

---

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/05/us/05circumcision.html> . While the attempt to ban circumcision for those under 18 years of age did not succeed, with Governor Jerry Brown signing a bill preventing a ban on circumcision, it was striking how close San Francisco in particular got to making it a crime to circumcise a baby boy.

My mentor, Rabbi William Lebeau, said that each rabbi student needs to develop a personal reason as to why circumcision is compelling. Mine is as follows: this is the first act of publicly celebrating the life of a baby boy and of bringing him into the Jewish people. It has been done continuously throughout the generations, beginning with our first ancestor Abraham. There have been times in the past when circumcision was outlawed and Jews were persecuted if they engaged in it, and often risked death to perform this ritual. There were even some who engaged in a practice of epispasm, trying to reattach the foreskin. Yet our ancestors time and time again reaffirmed the importance of continuing this ritual. They saw circumcision, like sacrifice, as an opportunity to draw closer to G-d.

When we get to a section of the Torah that might make us uncomfortable, I recommend that we take a moment to consider if we can find meaning in it for ourselves. While we might struggle with reading about sacrifice, we can appreciate that this ritual brought our ancestors closer to G-d. Similarly, we can take a ritual like circumcision

and find our own personal meaning as to why we continue to perform and celebrate it. May each of us find opportunities to personally connect with the texts of our tradition so that these texts will continue to speak to us in a meaningful way.