

MLPJ 17 - A CIRCUMCISED HEART?

As we see in Scripture, circumcision is a sign of covenant. On the eighth day of life, a Jewish baby boy is circumcised into the Covenant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by the act of circumcision and, thereafter, he physically carries the reminder of this covenant. Girls, being inherently more spiritual are welcomed into the covenant without need of this physical reminder. As Moshe Kempinski explains, “Women created as the last act of Creation are considered more spiritually intuitive than men.”

Also, they were created from inside the body - a rib taken from the man; from the inside, as it were. The Hebrew verb for God ‘made’ a woman is *va’yiven*, which is derived from the same root as *binah* that means spiritual intuition or understanding. Moshe Kempinski * adds that : “Jewish tradition believes that women gifted with their *Binah Yeteirah* [or extra spiritual awareness] have the ability to find their direction and re-orient their journey from within [more intuitively].”

However, whether man or woman, once one is in covenant with the God of Israel, the God of the Bible, Who is Love, every person needs to ensure, as a sign of this Covenant of Love, that they have a circumcision of the heart.

Erica Brown, in her book *Return*, makes an interesting connection with this circumcision of the heart and the experience of Joy. We find the connection in Deut. 28:47-48, which tells us:

“Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you...”

In that context Israel was facing, as she also faces today, many physical enemies. In a spiritual context, however, we know (according to 1 Peter 5:8) that the enemy of our souls is like an angry lion seeking whom he may devour - and it is the temptation of sin he causes to “crouch at the door” ready to devour us. However, as God reassured Cain (in Gen. 4:9), “You can overcome it and rule over it!”

Sin removes us from God; we are exiled from His Presence but it is in this exile that we can begin to understand the cost of separation from Him - as did the Prodigal Son in Yeshua’s parable - and we long for His closeness. When this understanding dawns in one’s mind, one can turn around in repentance and return. Repentance is the gift that offers the path out of sin and, when taken, results in the happiness of reconciliation. Our hearts are circumcised and we can experience Joy!

Interestingly, we cannot circumcise our own hearts. We are told in Deut. 30:6 -

“Then [once we repent and return], the LORD your God will open up [the Hebrew word here is *mal*; the root of *milah* - circumcision] your heart, and the

hearts of your offspring, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul, in order that you may live.”

The human heart is very complex. It can suffer many things and, as a result, one can harden one's heart in order to protect oneself from further pain. The sensitive, vulnerable areas of the heart become calloused - a thickness forms - and our capacity for feeling, and for grace and compassion, is deadened. Sin has the same effect.

During Yom Kippur services in the synagogue, public confessions are made called *Vidui*. One of these confessions, repeated multiple times, is:
For the sins we committed before you by callously hardening our hearts.

When the heart is hardened, no feelings can get in and, conversely, nothing can be released. When we trust God to circumcise and remove the outer, calloused layer - the blockage that numbs the depths of feeling - we begin to live more fully.

Erica Brown describes the opening of the heart well. She writes:

“Our hearts need that hole. It must be wide enough to admit passion and compassion and anguish, but small enough to filter the emotions that paralyse us and prevent us from transformation and caring.”

She quotes Rabbi Alan Lew in his book on the Days of Awe entitled, *This is Real and you are Completely Unprepared*: He says:

“We need this opening in order to move from anger to healing, from denial to consciousness, from boredom to renewal.”

Only God knows the correct dimensions of this opening in our hearts and, therefore, we place our heart in His hands to perform the circumcision we need. When we offer Him our hearts in humility and repentance, He is faithful to circumcise and renew them. His love and forgiveness give us Joy and we can go forward confidently on the path of His goodness.

Just as the first verse of the first Psalm describes:

“Happy - joyful - is the one who has not followed the counsel of the wicked, or taken the path of sinners, or joined the company of the insolent;
rather the Torah - the teaching - of the LORD is his delight.”

Erica Brown adds: “Without meditating on wrongdoing or believing that repentance is possible, we allow our lives to move in one direction: the spiral of descent.”

With repentance and return to the Lord, we receive the moral clarity that lifts us up and makes us whole again and we can spiral upwards, ever closer to His Presence - which is, ultimately, the fullness of Joy!

Amen....and Shalom Shalom - full wholeness of Life and Love to you in Him Who loves us!

* Moshe Kempinski, *Accessing Inner Joy - Insights into the Biblical Festivals*.