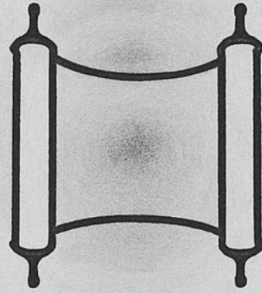


בס"ד

# The Maharal Of Prauge

תפארת ישראל

## Chapter 19



לע"נ

שָׂרָה מְרִים בֵּת אַבְרָהָם

*Dedicated By:*

משפחת ליטשקאווסקי

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# The Maharal of Prague

תפארת ישראל

## The Splendor of Israel

### Chapter 19

#### Introduction

This powerful exposition from the Maharal of Prague addresses a foundational question in Jewish thought: *Why were the Patriarchs (Avos) given only individual commandments rather than the full Torah?* Drawing on Talmudic sources, Midrashim, and the deep metaphysical insights of his own sefer *Gevuros Hashem*, the Maharal explores the unique spiritual roles of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and why specific mitzvos—such as bris milah and gid hanasheh—were given to them personally. Through the lens of symbolic anatomy and divine connection, the Maharal unravels the cosmic shift that began with Avraham’s circumcision and culminated in Yaakov’s engraved presence on the Divine Throne. This discourse weaves together halachic, aggadic, and kabbalistic threads to explain how certain mitzvos were organically suited to the essence of each Patriarch.

#### למה נתנו לאבות מצוות מיוחדות בלבד

#### Why were specific commandments given only to the Patriarchs?

We must explain: After we have stated that the Torah is particularly fitting for Israel, as was explained in the previous chapter, if so, why was circumcision given to Abraham (Genesis 17:9–14)?

יש עלינו לכבד, אחר שאמרנו שהתורה היא ראוייה בפרט לישראל, וכמו שהתבאר בפרק שעבר, אם כן (למה נתנו לאברהם המילה (בראשית יז, ט-יד).

A second question: For according to the opinion of our Sages of blessed memory, who said in Tractate Yoma (28b) that Abraham fulfilled the entire Torah, as it says (Genesis 26:5): “Because Abraham listened to My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”

השאלה השנית, פי כפי דעת חכמינו זכרונם לברכה שאמרו במסכת יומא (כח, ב) קיים אברהם כל התורה כלה, שנאמר (בראשית כו, ה): "עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקולי וישמר משמרותי מצותי חקותי ותורתי".

And the Talmud there says: Should we say he fulfilled only the seven Noachide laws and circumcision? Why then do I need “My statutes and My laws”? Rather, Abraham fulfilled even Eruvei Tavshilin. As it says “My laws” — one refers to the Written Torah, and one to the Oral Torah.

וקאמר (יומא שם): ואימא שבע מצוות ומילה, חקותי ותורתי למה לי? וקאמר: קיים אברהם אפלו ערובי תבשילין, שנאמר: "ותורתי" – אחת לשבתך, ואחת שבעל-פה.

And from this it appears that Abraham alone fulfilled the entire Torah. Why was it specifically he, and not the other Patriarchs?

ומדבר זה משמע כי אברהם בפרט קיים כל התורה כלה. ולמה הוא בפרט, ולא שאר אבות?

And in Bereishis Rabbah (65:13) they said regarding Yitzchak, that he warned Esav to slaughter properly, as they said: “Please take your gear” (Genesis 27:3) — take your weapons, so that you do not feed me unkosher meat.

ובמדבר (בראשית רבה סה, יג) אמרו על יצחק שהזהיר את עשו שישחט יפה. שכן אמרו: "שוא נא כליך" (בראשית כז, ג) שהזו מאני וינך, שלא תאכילני נבלות.

And in the chapter “Gid Hanasheh” (Chullin 91a), Rabbi Yosef Chanina said: What is meant by (Genesis 43:16), “Slaughter a slaughter and prepare”? He designated for them a

ובפרק גיד הנשה (חלין צא, א): אמר רבי יוסי בר חנינא: מאי דכתיב (בראשית מג, טז): "ויטבח טבח

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slaughterhouse. "And prepare" — he removed the sciatic nerve in their presence.

והכין" — פָּרַע לָהֶם בֵּית הַשְּׁחִיטָה. "וְהָכִין" — טָל גֵּיד הַנֶּשֶׁה בְּפָנֵיהֶם.

According to Rabbi Yehudah, who says: The sciatic nerve is forbidden even to the descendants of Noah.

בְּרַבִּי יְהוּדָה, דָּאָמַר: גֵּיד הַנֶּשֶׁה אָסוּר לְבָנֵי נֹחַ.

And when Abraham came, he was commanded regarding circumcision. It is known that "orlah" (foreskin) refers to blockage and covering, and anything hidden and separated is called orlah.

וּכְאֲשֶׁר בָּא אַבְרָהָם, נִצְטַוָּה בְּמִילָה. יָדוּעַ כִּי הָעֶרְלָה נִקְרָאת עַל שֵׁם כְּסוּי וְאַטִּימָה, וְכָל דָּבָר נִכְסָה וְנִבְדָּל. נִקְרָא עֶרְלָה.

And this is in every place where it says (Deuteronomy 10:16): "the foreskin of the heart," meaning that the matter does not enter the heart and is separated from it.

וְזֶהוּ בְּכָל מְקוֹם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דְּבָרִים י', טז): "עֶרְלַת לֵב", שֶׁאֵינּוּ נִכְנָס הַדָּבָר בְּלִבּוֹ, וְנִבְדָּל מִמֶּנּוּ.

And likewise, "foreskin of the ear" (Jeremiah 6:10) — a covering over the ear.

וְכֵן "עֶרְלַת אוֹז" (יְרֵמְיָה ו', י) — כְּסוּי אוֹז.

And every matter that separates and divides one thing from another has a blockage and a covering that separates — this is the orlah.

וְכָל דָּבָר מִפְּרֹשׁ וּמִבְדִּיל מִדָּבָר, יֵשׁ לוֹ אֶטִּימָה וְכְסוּי הַמִּבְדִּיל, שֶׁהוּא הָעֶרְלָה.

And all the generations until Abraham — all those generations were under nature and were not separated from nature.

וְכָל הַדּוֹרוֹת עַד אַבְרָהָם, כָּל הַדּוֹרוֹת הָהֵם הָיוּ תַּחַת הַטִּבֵּעַ, וְלֹא הָיוּ נִבְדָּלִים מִן הַטִּבֵּעַ.

Until Abraham came, and Hashem, blessed be He, chose him, as it is written (Nechemiah 9:7): "You are Hashem, the God, who chose Abram."

עַד שֶׁבָּא אַבְרָהָם, וּבַחֹר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בּוֹ, כְּדַכְתִּיב (נְחֵמְיָה ט, ז): "אַתָּה הוּא ה' הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתָּ בְּאַבְרָם."

And He brought them out from nature, until nature no longer separated between Hashem, blessed be He, and the creations.

וְהוֹצִיא אוֹתָם מִן הַטִּבֵּעַ, עַד שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה הַטִּבֵּעַ מִבְדִּיל בֵּין הַשֵּׁם וּבֵין הַבְּרִיּוֹת.

For nature, which is material, separates between Hashem, blessed be He, and the creations.

כִּי הַטִּבֵּעַ שֶׁהוּא חִמְרִית, הִיא מִבְדִּילת בֵּין הַשֵּׁם וּבֵין הַבְּרִיּוֹת.

Until Abraham came, and with him there was a connection with Hashem, blessed be He, who chose him and took them out from nature, so that there would no longer be separation or blockage between Hashem and man.

עַד שֶׁבָּא אַבְרָהָם, וְאֵלָיו הָיָה חִבּוּר עִם הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, שֶׁבַח בּוֹ, וְהוֹצִיא אוֹתָם מִן הַטִּבֵּעַ, שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה כְּאֵן הַבְּדִיל וְאַטִּימָה עוֹד בֵּין הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ וְהָאָדָם.

And then He commanded to remove the orlah — which is the blockage.

וְאָז צִוָּה לְהַסִּיר הָעֶרְלָה — הִיא הָאֶטִּימָה.

And circumcision is the covenant and the connection that exists with Hashem, blessed be He, because Hashem took him out from nature.

וְהַמִּילָה הִיא הַבְּרִית וְהַחִבּוּר שֶׁיֵּשׁ עִם הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוֹצִיא הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ אוֹתוֹ מִן הַטִּבֵּעַ.

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Therefore, the orlah, which is the blockage that man is born with by nature, Hashem commanded to remove it on the eighth day (Genesis 17:12) — which is after the seven days of nature, as we explained above at length.

Therefore, circumcision was given to Abraham specifically.

And this matter was revealed by the sages of truth in the first chapter of Berachos (7b): Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: From the day that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, there was no man who called Him “Master” until Abraham came and called Him “Master,” as it is said (Genesis 15:8): “And he said, My Master, Hashem, how will I know that I shall inherit it?”

They explained this with wisdom: That there was no union and connection between the Holy One, blessed be He, and the world until Abraham came.

For the material nature blocked and separated between Hashem, blessed be He, and the world — until Abraham came.

And therefore he called Hashem “Master” (Adon), for a master is joined and connected to the one he rules over, and is not separate from him.

And this matter is known to one who knows the secrets of wisdom and understanding.

Therefore, until Abraham, He was not called “Master” — until Abraham came.

And this is the removal of the orlah (foreskin) which was commanded to Abraham — it is the separation and covering between Hashem, who is exalted, and man.

And this matter is very clear — that this is why circumcision was given to Abraham.

Jacob came and was commanded regarding the sinew of the thigh (Gid Hanasheh).

This matter is explained in *Gevuros Hashem* (Chapter 66), why Jacob in particular was commanded regarding Gid Hanasheh, and it is not appropriate to repeat what was already explained there.

וּלְכַד הָעֶרְלָה שֶׁהִיא הָאֵטִימָה שְׁנוּלֵד בְּאֶדָם בְּטֻבְעוֹ, צְנִיחַ הַשָּׁמַיִם יִתְבַּרְךָ לְהַסִּיר אוֹתוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי (בְּרֵאשִׁית יז, יב), שֶׁהוּא אַחֵר שְׁבַע יָמֵי הַטֻּבְעוֹ, וּכְמֹו שֶׁבְּאַרְבָּנוּ זֶה לְמַעַלָּה בְּאַרְיִכוֹת לְכֹן נִתְּנָה הַמִּילָה לְאַבְרָהָם בְּפֶרְטוֹת.

וְדָבָר זֶה גָּלוּ חֻכְמֵי הָאָמֶת בְּפֶרֶק קָמָא דְבִרְכוֹת (ז, ב): אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן מִשּׁוּם רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאִי: מִיּוֹם שֶׁבְּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ-בְּרוּךְ-הוּא אֶת הָעוֹלָם, לֹא הָיָה אָדָם שֶׁקָּרָא "אֲדוֹן", עַד שֶׁבָּא אַבְרָהָם וְקָרָא אֲדוֹן, שְׁנֹאמַר (בְּרֵאשִׁית טו, ח): "וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי ה' בְּמָה אֲדַע "כִּי אֵירָשְׁנָה".

בְּאַרְוֹ וְכְרוֹנָם לְבִרְכָה בְּחֻכְמָה, כִּי לֹא הָיָה אֵל הַקָּדוֹשׁ-בְּרוּךְ-הוּא צְרוּף וְחַבּוּר אֵל הָעוֹלָם, עַד שֶׁבָּא אַבְרָהָם.

כִּי הָיָה הַטֻּבְעוֹ הַחֻמְרִית מַפְסִיק וְחוֹצֵץ בֵּין הַשָּׁמַיִם יִתְבַּרְךָ וּבֵין הָעוֹלָם, עַד שֶׁבָּא אַבְרָהָם.

וּלְכַד קָרָא לַהַשָּׁמַיִם יִתְבַּרְךָ: "אֲדוֹן", כִּי הָאֲדוֹן מְצֻטָּרֵף וּמִתְחַבֵּר אֵל אֲשֶׁר הוּא אֲדוֹן לוֹ, וְאֵינוֹ נִבְדָּל הַיְמִינוּ.

וְדָבָר זֶה יְדוּעַ לְמִי שִׁיּוּדַע בְּסֵתְרֵי הַחֻכְמָה וְהַתְּבוּנָה.

לְכַד עַד אַבְרָהָם לֹא נִקְרָא "אֲדוֹן", עַד שֶׁבָּא אַבְרָהָם.

וְזֶהוּ הַסֵּרֵת הָעֶרְלָה שְׁנֻצָּטָנָה לְאַבְרָהָם, שֶׁהוּא הַהִבְדָּל וְהַפְּסוּי בֵּין הַשָּׁמַיִם יִתְבַּרְךָ שֶׁהוּא הָעֶלְיָה, וּבֵין הָאָדָם.

וְהַדָּבָר הַזֶּה בְּרוּר מְאֹד, שֶׁלְכַד נִתְּנָה הַמִּילָה לְאַבְרָהָם.

בָּא יַעֲקֹב נֻצָּטָנָה עַל גִּיד הַנָּשֶׁה.

דָּבָר זֶה נִתְּבָאָר בְּחַבּוּר גְּבוּרוֹת ה' (פֶּרֶק ס"ו), לְמָה נֻצָּטָנָה יַעֲקֹב בְּפֶרֶט בְּגִיד הַנָּשֶׁה, וְאֵין רְאוּי לְכַפֵּל בְּדִבְרֵים אֲשֶׁר הִתְבָּאָרוּ שָׁם.

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For Jacob in particular was worthy of the commandment of Gid Hanasheh. See there and you will find it explained.

פי יעקב בפרט הנה ראוי למצות גיד הנשה, עין שם ותמצא מפרש.

The general principle: Jacob was fitting to be commanded in this mitzvah, because the sinew was distant from the level of man and from the sanctity of Jacob.

כלל הדבר: ראוי הנה יעקב להיות מצוה במצוה זו, פי הגיד הנה רחוק ממדרגת האדם וממעלת קדושתו של יעקב — הוא הגיד שהוא על הירף

And for this reason, the angel could not prevail over Jacob (Genesis 32:26), because man is created in the image of God, and Jacob especially had that level of image.

ובשביל כך לא יכול לו המלאך ליעקב (בראשית ל"ב, כ"ו), פי האדם הוא נברא בצלם אלקים, ובפרט ליעקב היתה לו מעלת הצלם הנה

Except for the thigh, which is distant from the image — as explained in *Gevuros Hashem*, see there.

חויז מן הירף שהוא רחוק מן הצלם, כמו שבארנו בחרבור גבורות ה', עין שם

And because Jacob in particular had the level of the image that is engraved on the Throne of Glory (Chullin 91b), as we explained there at length, therefore he could only be affected at the Gid Hanasheh.

ומפני פי היתה ליעקב בפרט מעלת הצלם אשר צורתו תקוקה בכסא הכבוד (חלין צא, ב), כמו שבארנו שם באריכות, לכן לא הנה יכול לו פי אם בגיד הנשה

And see there — you will find profound things.

ועין שם ותמצא דברים גדולים.

The general rule: Each mitzvah that was commanded to each individual was a mitzvah that was relevant and personally associated with him.

כלל הדבר: פי המצות שנצטווה כל אחד ואחד — היתה המצוה שייכת אליו, ומתחסקת אליו המצוה

And therefore, it was fitting that this particular mitzvah be given to him.

ולכן הנה ראוי שתנתן לו המצוה הזאת בפרט

And now the first question is resolved: Since Abraham was not commanded in the entire Torah, and likewise Jacob, why were they given individual mitzvos?

ומעתה היוקרה השאלה הראשונה: פיון שלא נצטווה אברהם בכל התורה, ויעקב גם כן לא נצטווה בכל התורה, למה נתנו לו מצות פרטיות?

Because this is according to the nature of things — that those particular mitzvos were suited to them.

פי דבר זה הוא למכא: שראויין להם אותן המצות הפרטיות.

And since those mitzvos were connected to them, they were commanded in them.

וכיון ששייך להם המצות, נצטוו בהם.

And this suffices as an answer to the first question.

ודי כזה בתשובת שאלה ראשונה.

#### [NOTE Summary

The Maharal opens by asking why the Avos were given only specific mitzvos and not the entire Torah. The Talmud (Yoma 28b) tells us that Avraham fulfilled the whole Torah voluntarily—even eruv tavshilin. Similarly, Midrashim show that Yitzchak and Yaakov observed mitzvos, such as careful shechitah and Shabbos boundaries. Yet halachically, only particular mitzvos were actually commanded to them: milah to Avraham, and gid hanasheh to Yaakov. Why?

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The Maharal explains that each mitzvah was divinely suited to the person it was given to. Avraham, representing the first human to transcend nature and form an active bond with Hashem, was chosen for milah—the removal of the orlah, which symbolizes separation and blockage. Before Avraham, the natural world created a divide between man and God. Avraham’s circumcision marked a metaphysical transformation, breaking through the material veil that distanced humanity from divinity.

Yaakov, by contrast, had the spiritual stature of the Divine image engraved upon the Heavenly Throne (as stated in Chullin 91b). The one place the angel could wound him was the gid hanasheh—the sciatic nerve on the thigh—because it is the part furthest removed from the image of God in man. This distance made the gid an appropriate location for spiritual confrontation and symbolic refinement. The mitzvah of abstaining from it reflects this unique interaction.

Thus, mitzvos were not assigned randomly. Each one was a spiritual expression of that individual's unique role in the divine plan. The Maharal concludes that the question is now resolved: Avraham and Yaakov were not commanded in the full Torah because the full system of mitzvos had not yet been revealed. Rather, they were each given specific commandments that corresponded exactly to their spiritual nature and mission.

#### Practical Takeaway

Mitzvos are not just laws—they are deeply personalized connections between a soul and its Creator. Each Jew has specific areas in Torah that uniquely resonate with their essence. Instead of viewing mitzvos as generic obligations, we can seek to understand how certain practices uniquely refine us. Like Avraham and Yaakov, our divine service can become deeply aligned with who we truly are—removing blockages, elevating our nature, and forging a direct relationship with Hashem.

#### Chassidic Story

The Maggid of Mezritch once asked his student, Reb Pinchas of Koretz, what he found most precious in serving Hashem. Reb Pinchas answered, “The mitzvah that was hardest for me to do.” The Maggid nodded and said, “That is because the hardest mitzvah for you is your own ‘gid hanasheh’—the place where your angel tries to hold you back. That’s the one that most truly belongs to you.”

This echoes the Maharal’s teaching: the mitzvah that corresponds to your essence is not always the easiest, but it is the most transformative. Just as Avraham had to remove the orlah—his physical and spiritual covering—and just as Yaakov’s struggle was embedded in his very body, our personal struggles often point us to our most meaningful service.

**Source:** *Shem uShe'erit* (Reb Pinchas of Koretz, Warsaw 1903), p. 19, and *Shivchei haMaggid*, story 11.

**END NOTE]**