

### תפארת ישראל The Splendor of Israel Chapter 2

#### Introduction

This profound teaching from the Maharal of Prague explores the essential distinction between the natural world and the world of Divine action. Through his analysis of circumcision (מֵילָה) and the nature of mitzvos in general, the Maharal argues that man is not born complete, but must actively elevate himself through Divine commandments. Drawing from Midrashic sources and philosophical reasoning, he shows that Torah and mitzvos are not enhancements of nature—they are beyond nature. In fact, the very purpose of mitzvos is to refine and transform the human being into something supra-natural, aligning with the ultimate Divine will. The discourse especially focuses on circumcision as a metaphor and prototype for all mitzvos: it is given not because nature is perfect, but because nature is intentionally incomplete—so that man, through free will and intellect, can partner with Hashem to transcend it.

#### קּיּוֹם הַמִּצְוֹת מַשְׁלִּים אֶת דְמוּת הָאָדָם. The fulfillment of the commandments completes the form of man.

It has been explained to you that the Divine actions, which are the commandments of the Torah, are fitting for man according to the level of his Divine soul that is within him.

And these actions are the completion of man, by which he becomes complete, until he is the being in whom his Creator desires. And this matter will be explained at length in the coming chapters, with the help of the Giver of the Torah. And in this chapter, it will be explained in brief, in general, that man—formed by the hands of the Holy One, blessed be He—the choicest of the lower creations, is lacking until he becomes complete through his own actions. And through the commandments of the Torah, man reaches completion.

For since he has a Divine soul, which possesses a Divine preparedness, therefore his completion is not through something natural, but his completion is through Torah and commandment, which is above nature. And this matter is explained in many places, that the commandments of the Torah are of a higher level and standing than nature.

הָתְבָּאֵר לָךְ כִּי הַפְּעַלּוֹת הָאֱלֹקיּוֹת, שֶׁהֵם מִצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה, הֵם רְאוּיִים לָאָדָם לְפִי מַדְרֵגַת נַפְשׁוֹ הָאֱלֹקִית שָׁהִיא בַּקרבּוֹ שִׁהִיא בִּקרבּוֹ

ְהַפְּעֲלוֹת הָאֵלוּ הֵם הַשְּׁלָמַת הָאָדָם, שֶׁבֶּהֶם יִשְׁלַם, עֵד שֶׁהוּא הַבְּרִיאָה אֲשֶׁר בָּה רְצוֹן בּוֹרָאוֹ. וְיִתְבָּאֵר בַּבְּרָקִים הַבָּאִים דְּבָר זֶה בַּאֲרִיכוּת, בְּעֶזְרַת נוֹתֵן בַּפְּרָקִים הַבָּאִים דְּבָר זֶה בַּאֲרִיכוּת, בְּעֶזְרַת נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה. וּבְזֶה הַפָּרֶק יִתְבָּאֵר דֶּרֶךְ כְּלְלוֹת בְּקְצוּר, שֶׁהָעִדָם יְצִיר כַּפּוֹ -שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ־בָּרוּהְ־הוּא, מִבְחַר הַתִּחְתוֹנִים חָסֵר. עַד שֶׁהוּא יִשְׁלַם עַל־יְדֵי מַצְשֶׂה עַצְּמוֹ. וְעַל־יְדֵי מִצְשֶׂה עַּצְמוֹ. וְעַל־יְדֵי מִצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה, יַצִּיעַ הָאָדָם אֶל הַהַשְּׁלְמָה

כִּי מְצַד שָׁיֵשׁ בּוֹ נָפָשׁ אֱלֹקִי שָׁיֵשׁ בּוֹ הַכָנָה אֱלֹקִית, לְכָךּ אֵין הַשְׁלָמָתוֹ בְּדָבָר שָׁהוּא טִבְעִי, אֲבָל הַשְׁלָמָתוֹ בַּתּוֹרָה וּבַמִּצְוָה, שָׁהוּא עַל הַטֶּבַע. וְדָבָר זָה מְבֹאָר בִּמְקוֹמוֹת הַרְבֵּה שֶׁמִּצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה הֵם יוֹתֵר בְּמַדְרֵגָה וּבִמִּעֵלָה מן הָטֵבע. וּבִמִעֵלָה מן הָטֵבע.

### תפארת ישראל The Splendor of Israel Chapter 2

And in the psalm "The heavens declare the glory of God..." (Tehillim 19:2), afterward it begins (verse 8): "The Torah of Hashem is perfect," until the end of the psalm. And there are seven verses from the beginning of the psalm until "The Torah of Hashem is perfect." For the conduct of nature was created in the seven days of Creation, whereas the Torah is above nature, and it is the eighth level.

וּבְמִזְמוֹר "הַשָּׁמֵיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֵל" וְגוֹ' (תְּהִלִּים יט, ב), וְאַחַר־כָּךְ הִתְחִיל לוֹמֵר (שָׁם פָּסוּק ח):
"תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה", עַד סוֹף הַמִּזְמוֹר. וְיֵשׁ מִן תְּחִלַּת הַמִּזְמוֹר עַד "תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה" שָׁבְעָה פְּסוּקִים,
וְאַחַר־כָּךְ "תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה". כִּי הַנְהָגַת הַטֶּבַע נִבְרָא וְאַחַר־כָּךְ "תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה". כִּי הַנְהָגַת הַטֶּבַע נִבְרָא בְּשִׁבְעַת יְמֵי בְּרֵאשִׁית, וְאִלּוּ הַתּוֹרָה הִיא עַל הַטֶּבַע,
וְהִיא מַדְרֵגָה שְׁמִינִית

And according to this idea, the psalm "Ashrei temimei derech..." (Tehillim 119), which is entirely about the Torah, has in it eight alef-to-tav cycles, for the Torah is the eighth level, which is above nature that was created in the seven days of Creation. And likewise, anything that is above nature, and is a rectification of what is lacking in nature, comes after the seven.

ְוְעַל־פִּי טַעַם זֶה מִזְמוֹר "אַשְׁרֵי תְמִימֵי דֶרֶךְּ" (תְּהִלִּים קיט) שֶהַפַּךְּ עַל הַתּוֹרָה, יֵשׁ בּוֹ שְׁמוֹנָה אַלְפָּ"א בֵּיתָ"א. שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה הִיא מַדְרֵנָה שְׁמִינִית, שֶׁהִיא עַל הַטֶּבַע שָׁנִּבְרָא בְּשִׁבְעָה יְמֵי בְּרֵאשִׁית. וְכֵן כָּל דָּבָר שָׁהוּא עַל הַטֶּבַע, וְהוּא תִּקוּון מַה שֶׁחָסֵר הַטֶּבַע, הוּא אַחַר הַשִּׁבַעָה.

And this is the reason for circumcision on the eighth day: for man by nature is born with the foreskin, and that is a deficiency of nature. And circumcision is a rectification of nature, and therefore, this rectification is on the eighth day—because it is after the nature that was created in the seven days of Creation.

ְוֶזֶה הוּא טַעַם מִילָה בַּשְׁמִינִי, כִּי הָאָדָם מִצַד הַטֶּבַע נִבְרָא עִם הָעָרְלָה, וְהוּא פְּחִיתוּת הַטֶּבַע. וְהַמִּילָה הִיא תִּקוּן הַטֶּבַע, וּלְפִיכָךְ תִּקוּן הַזֶּה הוּא בֵּיוֹם הַשָּׁמִינִי, לְפִי שֶׁהוּא אַחַר הַטֶּבַע שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּשִׁרְעַת יְמֵי בָּרָאשׁית.

And from now you shall know that the commandments, which are the Divine actions and are the deeds of man, through them man reaches a level that is above nature. And it is fitting that it be so: for the action of man—inasmuch as he is a being of intellect—is of greater stature than nature, for nature is merely a material force, whereas man is intellectual.

וּמֵעַתָּה תַּדַע כִּי הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁהֵם הַפְּעֲלוֹת הָאֱלֹקִיּוֹת, וְהֵם מַעֲשֵׂה הָאָדָם, יַגִּיעַ בָּהֶם הָאָדָם לַמַּדְרֵנָה שֶׁהִיא עַל הַטֶּבַע. וְרָאוּי שֶׁיָּהְיֶה כָּךְ; כִּי מַצְשֵׂה הָאָדָם בַּמָּה שֶׁהוּא בַּעַל שֶׁכֶל, הוּא יוֹתֵר בְּמַעֲלָה מִן הַטֶּבַע, שֶׁהְרֵי הַטֶּבַע הוּא כֹּחַ חַמְרִי בָּלְבַד וְאֵלוּ הַאַדָם הוּא שִׂכְלִי.

And if it should be said that the power of nature acts with a force that is from Hashem, blessed be He, we shall likewise say that man, who is intellectual, acts with the ability that Hashem, blessed be He, has granted him. Therefore it is fitting for man—who is intellectual, and whose ability is above nature—to perform Divine commandments, which are actions that are not natural. And through them man will attain a lofty level that is above nature: the separate world.

וְאָם יֵאָמֵר כִּי כֹּחַ הַטֶּבֵע כּּוֹעֵל בְּכֹחַ שֶׁהוּא מִן הַשֵּׁם
יִתְבָּרַךְ, נֹאמֵר גַּם־כֵּן כִּי הָאָדָם שֶׁהוּא שִׁכְלִי כּּוֹעֵל בְּכֹחַ
הַשְּׁבֶל שֶׁנְּתַן לוֹ הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ. וּלְפִיכָךְ רָאוּי אֶל הָאָדָם
- שֶׁהוּא שִׁכְלִי, וְהַשֵּׁבֶל הוּא עַל הַטֶּבַע - הַמִּצְוֹת
הָאֱלֹקיּוֹת, שֶׁהֵם הַמַּעֲשִׁים שֶׁאֵינָם טִכְעִיִּים. וְעַל יָדָם
הַאֶּלֹקיוֹת, שָׁהָם הָמַעֲשִׁים שֶׁאֵינָם טִכְעִיִּים. וְעַל יָדָם
יַגִּיעַ הָאָדָם אֶל מַעֲלָה עֶלְיוֹנָה, שֶׁהִיא לְמַעְלָה מִן
הַנָּבְרָּל

### תפארת ישראל The Splendor of Israel Chapter 2

And in the Midrash (Tanchuma, Tazria 5): Turnus Rufus the wicked asked: Whose actions are more pleasing—those of the Holy One, blessed be He, or those of flesh and blood? He said to him: those of flesh and blood. Turnus Rufus said to him: Behold the heavens and the earth—can man make anything like them? Rabbi Akiva said to him: Do not argue with me regarding something that is above created beings, over which they have no control, but rather speak about things found among human beings.

He said to him: Why do you circumcise? He said to him: I knew you would ask me about this matter, and therefore I said to you in advance that the deeds of man are more pleasing than those of the Holy One, blessed be He. Rabbi Akiva brought him sheaves and loaves of bread. Turnus Rufus said to him: If the Holy One, blessed be He, wants circumcision, why does the child not emerge from the womb already circumcised?

Rabbi Akiva said to him: Why does a child emerge with his umbilical cord attached and his mother cuts it? And what you are asking—why he does not emerge circumcised—is because the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the commandments only to refine man through them. Therefore David said (Tehillim 18:31), "The word of God is refined." Up to here.

And the explanation is: that Turnus Rufus thought that the deeds of man are inferior to the deeds of nature, because nature is a Divine act. Therefore, he said that circumcision is more inferior than the foreskin, which is the act of nature performed by Hashem, blessed be He—whereas circumcision is a human act.

And he was answered that this is not so—for the deed of man, when performed by man who is a being of intellect, is of higher stature than nature, which is merely a material force. And just as he proved to him from wheat, which is the product of nature, yet it is lacking until it is completed by the intellectual human being—from this you see that the act of the intellect is above nature.

וּבַמִּדְרָשׁ (תַנְחוּמָא תַּזְרִיעַ, ה): שָׁאֵל טוּרְנוּסְרוּפּס הָרָשָׁע: אֵיזֶה מַצְשִׁים נָאִים, שֶׁל בָּקֶדוֹשׁ־בָּרוְּדְ־הוּא אוֹ שֶׁל בָּשָׂר וְדָם. אָמַר לוֹ: שֶׁל בָּשֶׂר וָדָם. אָמַר לוֹ טוּרְנוּסְרוּפּס הָרָשָׁע: רָאִיתָ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ, יָכוֹל הָאָדָם לַצְשׁוֹת כַּיּוֹצֵא בָּהֶם. אָמַר לוֹ רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא: לֹא תֹאמַר לִי בְּדָבָר שְׁהוּא לְמַעְלָה מִן הַבְּרִיוֹת, שֶׁאֵין שׁוֹלְטִים עָלָיו, אֶלָּא אֱמֹר דְּבָרִים שֶׁהֵם מְצוּיִין

אָמֵר לוֹ: לָמָה אַתֶּם מוּלִים. אָמֵר לוֹ: אֲנִי הָיִיתִּי יוֹדֵעַ שָׁעֵל דְּבָר זֶה אַתָּה שׁוֹאֲלֵנִי, וּלְכָךְ הַקְדַּמְתִּי וְאָמֵרְתִּי לְךְּ שֶׁמֵּצְשֶׂה בְּנֵי אָדָם נָאִים מִשֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ־בָּרוּדְ־הוּא. הַבִיא לוֹ רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא שְׁבֵלִים וּגְלוּסְקָאוֹת. אָמֵר לוֹ טוּרְנוּסְרוּפּס הָרָשָׁע: אִם הַקָּדוֹשׁ־בָּרוּדְ־הוּא רוֹצָה בְּמִילָה, לָמָה אֵינוֹ יוֹצֵא הַוּלֶד מָהוּל מִמַּעֵי אִמּוֹ.

אָמַר לוֹ רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא: וְלָמָה טְבּוּרוֹ יוֹצֵא עַמּוֹ וְהוּא הָלוּי בְּבִטְנוֹ, וְאִמּוֹ חוֹתַכְתּוֹ. וּמַה שֶׁאַתָּה אוֹמֵר לָמָה אֵינוֹ יוֹצֵא מָהוּל, שָׁלֹא נָתַן הַקָּדוֹשׁ־בָּרוּךְ הוּא הַמִּצְוֹת אֶלֶא לְצָרֵף הָאָדָם בָּהֶם, לְכַךְ אָמֵר דָוִד (תְּהָלִים יז, לֹא): "כָּל אִמְרַת אֱלוֹהַ צְרוּפָה", עַד כָּאן

וּבָאוּר זֶה, כִּי טוּרְנוּסְרוּפּס הָיָה סָבוּר כִּי מַצְשֵׂה הָאָדָם פְּחוּתִים מָן מַצְשֵׂה הַטֶּבַע, בַּמָּה שֶׁהַטֶּבַע פּעַל אֱלֹקִי, לְכָךְּ אָמַר שֶׁהַמִּילָה הִיא יוֹתֵר פְּחוּתָה מִן הָעָרְלָה, שֶׁהִיא מַצְשֶׂה הַטֶּבַע שֶׁפָּעַל הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, וְאִלוּ הַמִּילָה מַצְשֵׂה הָאָדָם.

ְהַשִּׁיב לוֹ שָׁאֵין הַדָּבָר כָּךּ, כִּי מַעֲשֵׂה הָאָדָם - בַּמֶּה שָׁהוּא פּוֹעַל הָאָדָם שֶׁהוּא בַּעַל שֵׂכֶל – יוֹתֵר בְּמַדְרֵגָה מִן הַטֶּבַע, שֶׁהוּא כֹּחַ חָמְרִי בִּלְבַד. וּכְמוֹ שֶׁהוֹכִיחַ לוֹ מִן הַחִּטִים שֶׁהוּא פּעַל הַטֶּבַע, וְהוּא חָסֵר עַד שֶׁיֵשְׁלַם עַל־יְדֵי אָדָם הַשִּׂכְלִי. שֶׁמְּזֶּה תִּרְאֶה כִּי פּעַל הַשְּׂכֶל הוּא עַל־יְדֵי אָדָם הַשִּׂכְלִי. שֶׁמְזֶּה תִּרְאֶה כִּי פּעַל הַשְּׂכֶל הוּא

### תפארת ישראל The Splendor of Israel Chapter 2

And he continued to ask: If so, why does the infant not emerge circumcised, since Hashem, blessed be He, desires circumcision and does not desire the foreskin at all? For he still thought that even if the act of man is of higher level—as it is the act of the being endowed with intellect—nonetheless, one cannot say that the act of nature is deficient.

And if He desired circumcision, and the foreskin is bad, then why did Hashem not complete nature so that the infant would emerge from his mother already circumcised? And this cannot be sufficiently answered by the example of wheat, for even if bread is the act of one with intellect and more choice, still, the sheaves—which are the product of nature—are good. It is only that the act of the intellect is more praiseworthy; but one cannot say that the act of nature is lacking.

And to this he answered: indeed, the act of nature is also deficient. Just as you see that the infant is born with an umbilical cord, and the mother must cut it—so from this you see that nature is not complete. And if so, this is no question why the infant emerges with a foreskin, for the act of nature is not complete. For if the act of nature were complete, there would be no change in the act of nature—for things that are complete have no change. But nature lacks completion, especially regarding the intellectual human being, who has a superiority over nature due to his intellect.

And further it is stated in the Midrash (Tanchuma, Shemini 9): All the works of the six days of Creation require additional human action—like wheat, which needs to be ground; mustard, which must be sweetened; lupines, which also must be sweetened—until here. And all this is because the act of nature does not possess completion in itself for man, who possesses intellect that is above nature—and this is the level of nature, as we have said.

ְןְהוֹסִיף עוֹד לִשְׁאל: אִם־כֵּן לָמָה אֵין הַתִּינוֹק יוֹצֵא מָהוּל, אַחַר שֶׁהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ חָפֵץ בְּמִילָה, וְאֵינוֹ רוֹצֶה כְּלֶל בְּעָרְלָה. כִּי עֲדַיִן חָשַׁב אַף כִּי פּעַל הָאָדָם הוּא יוֹתֵר בְּמַעֲלָה, בַּמָּה שֶׁהוּא פּעַל הָאָדָם בַּעַל שֵׁבֶל, מִכָּל מָקוֹם אֵין לוֹמֵר שֶׁפּעַל הַטֶּבַע הוּא בְּחִסְרוֹן.

וְאָם הָיָה חָפַץ בַּמִּילָה, וְהָעֶרְלָה הִיא רַע, אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה לֹא הָשְׁלִים הַשָּׁם יִתְבָּרַהְ אֶת הַטֶּבַע, וְיֵצֵא הַתִּינוֹק לֹא הִשְׁלִים הַשָּׁם יִתְבָּרָהְ אֶת הַטֶּבַע, וְיֵצֵא הַתִּינוֹק מִמַּצֵי אִמּוֹ מָהוּל. וְדָבָר זֶה לֹא יַסְפִּיק הַתְּשׁוּבָה מִן הַחָּטִים, שֶׁאַף כִּי הַגָּלוּסְקָא פּעֵל בַּעַל שֵׁכָל - יוֹתֵר הַחָיִם, מַבְּל מָקוֹם גַּם הַשְׁבָּלִים שֶׁהֵם מַעֲשֵׂה הַטֶּבַע טוֹבִים, רַק שֶׁפּעַל בַּעַל הַשֵּׂכָל יוֹתֵר מְשֶׁבָּח. אֲבָל אֵין כּוֹבִים, עַק שֶׁפּעַל הַטֵּבַע הוּא חַסֵר

וְעַל זֶה הַשִּׁיב, כִּי בְּוַדַּאי פּעַל הַטֶבַע הוּא חָסֵר גַּם־כֵּן.
כְּמוֹ שֻׁתְּרְאֶה כִּי הַתִּינוֹק יוֹצֵא עִם הַטְבּוּר, וְהָאֵם
צְרִיכָה לְחָתְכוֹ. עַד שֶׁתִּרְאֶה מִזֶּה כִּי הַטֶבַע אֵין בּוֹ
הַשְׁלָמָה. וְאָם־כֵּן אֵין זֶה קַשְׁיָא מַה שֶׁיוֹצֵא הַתִּינוֹק עַם
הָעֶרְלָה, כִּי אֵין פּעַל הַטֶּבַע בִּשְׁלֵמוּת. כִּי אִלּוּ הָיָה פּעַל
הַטֶּבַע בִּשְׁלֵמוּת, לֹא הָיָה בְּמַעְשֵׂה הַטֶּבַע שְׁנּוּי,
הַטֶּבַע בִּשְׁלֵמוּת, בְּהָם הַשָּׁלֵמוּת אֵין שְׁנּוּי בָּהָם. אֲכָל
אֵין בּוֹ הַשְׁלָמָה, בִּפְרָט אֶל הָאָדָם הַשִּׂכְלִי, שֶׁיֵּשׁ לוֹ
בִמְּעָלָה עַל הַטָּבַע מְצַד הַשְּׂכָל

וּבַמִּדְרָשׁ עוֹד (תַּנְחוּמָא שְׁמִינִי, ט): כָּל מַצְשֵׂה שֵׁשֶׁת יְמֵי בְּרֵאשִׁית צְרִיכִים עֲשִׂיָּה אֲחֶרֶת, כְּגוֹן חַטִים — צְרִיכִים לְטְחֹן, הַחַּרְדָּל - צָרִידְּ לְהַמְתִּיק, הַתַּרְמוּם — צָרִידְּ לְהַמְתִּיק', עַד כָּאן. וְכָל זֶה מִפְנֵי כִּי אֵין פּעַל הַטֶּבַע בַּעַל הַשְּׁלָמָה בְּעַצְמוֹ אֶל הָאָדָם, שֶׁיֵשׁ בּוֹ הַשְּּכֶל שָׁהוּא עַל הַטָּבַע, וְזָהוּ מַדְרֵגַת הַטֵּבַע כִּמוֹ שֵׁאַמַרְנוּ שֹׁהוּא עַל הַטָּבַע, וְזָהוּ מַדְרֵגַת הַטֵּבַע כִּמוֹ שֵׁאַמַרְנוּ

### תפארת ישראל The Splendor of Israel Chapter 2

Therefore, all that was created during the six days of Creation lacks completion for man. And thus it is no question that the infant is created without circumcision—for this pertains to the action of nature, which is an incomplete act, and is not at the level of completion fitting for the intellectual human. And if man were created in a state of completeness when exiting his mother's womb, then he would be natural only.

Therefore, circumcision was given to him—for it is his completion on the eighth day. For all of man's perfection is above nature. Hence circumcision, which is his completion and is above nature, is equivalent to all the Torah. And do not say, Heaven forbid, that there is deficiency in the act or the word of Hashem, blessed be He; it is not so, but everything is with wisdom.

According to what is fitting for a world that contains existence and loss—one that is not inherently complete—especially for man who is intellectual, for intellect is above nature. Therefore, for man, nature is not inherently complete, since he must fix his food—grind wheat, cut the umbilical cord, and circumcise the foreskin.

And he further responded that indeed, this is no question—why the infant is not born circumcised—as has been explained. Nonetheless, beyond that, the question is not appropriate, for the mitzvah which Hashem, blessed be He, commanded to mankind—He desires thereby to refine man.

For from the perspective of Hashem's action, there is no circumcision—this pertains to creation, for Hashem created everything through nature, and according to nature, the foreskin is appropriate. But Hashem, blessed be He, gave man circumcision so that it be a refinement to man until he becomes beyond nature.

וּלְפִיכָךְ כָּל אֲשֶׁר נִבְרָא בְּשֵׁשֶׁת יְמֵי בְּרֵאשִׁית אֵין הַשְׁלָמָה בּוֹ אֶל הָאָדָם. וּלְכָךְ אֵין זֶה שְׁאֵלָה אָם נִבְרָא הַתִּינוֹק בְּלֹא מִילָה, שֶׁזֶּה שֵׁיָּךְ אֶל פּעַל הַטֶּבַע בַּמָּה שָׁהוּא פּעַל חָסֵר, וְאֵינוֹ בְּמַדְרֵגַת הַהַשְׁלָמָה אֶל הָאָדָם הַשְּׂכְלִי וְאָלוּ נִבְרָא הָאָדָם בִּשְׁלֵמוּת כַּאֲשֶׁר יָצָא מִבֶּטֶן אַמוֹ, אָם־כֵּן הָיָה הָאָדָם טִבְעִי בִּלְבַד.

וּלְכֶךְ נִתְנָה לוֹ הַמִּילָה – שֶׁהִיא הַשְׁלָמָתוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי, כִּי כָּל הַשְּׁלָמֵת הָאָדָם עַל הַטָבַע, לָכֵן הַמִּילָה - שֶׁהִיא הַשְּׁלָמָתוֹ, וְהִיא עַל הַטֶבַע – שְׁקוּלָה כְּנֶגֶד כָּל הַתּוֹרָה. וְאֵל תֹּאמֵר כִּי יִהְיֶה חַס וְשָׁלוֹם בְּפֹעַל הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַה וֹפִי, אֵין זֶה כָּךְ, רַק הַכּל הוּא בְּחָכְמָה.

לְפִי אֲשֶׁר רָאוּי לָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ בּוֹ הָוָיָה וְהָפְּסֵד, אֲשֶׁר אֵינוֹ בַּעַל הַשְּׁלָמָה, וּבִפְּרָט אֶל הָאָדָם הַשְּׂכְלִי, שֶׁהַשִּׁכְלִי הוּא עַל הַטֶּבַע, וּלְכָף אֶל הָאָדָם אֵין הַטֶּבַע בַּעַל הַשְּׁלָמָה, כִּי צָרִיךְ לְתַקֵּן מְזוֹנוֹת שֶׁלוֹ – הַחִטִים לִטְחֹן, וְהַטַבּוּר לָחָתּך, וְהַעַרְלָה לְמִילָה.

ְּוְעוֹד הַשִּׁיב לוֹ אַף כִּי בְּוַדַּאי אֵין זֶה קַשְׁיָא מַה שֶׁאֵין יוֹצֵא הַתִּינוֹק מְהוּל, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנִּתְבָּאֵר. מִכָּל מְקוֹם בְּזוּלַת יוֹצֵא הַתִּינוֹק מְהוּל, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנִּתְבָּאֵר. מִכָּל מְקוֹם בְּזוּלַת זֶה אֵין דָּבָר זֶה רָאוּי לִשְׁאֵלָה, כִּי הַמִּצְוָה שֶׁצְנָה הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרְךְּ לְצָרֵף אֶת יִתְבָּרַךְּ לְצָרֵף אֶת הַאַדָם. רוֹצָה הוּא יִתְבָּרַךְּ לְצָרֵף אֶת הַאַדָם.

כִּי מְצַד כַּעַל הַשָּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ אֵין מִילָה, וְזֶהוּ מִצַד הַבְּרִיאָה, שֶׁהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בָּרָא הַכֹּל עַל־יְדֵי הַטֶּבַע, וּלְכִּי הַטֶּבַע רָאוּי הָעָרְלָה. רַק שֶׁנָּתַן הַשֵׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ הַמִּילָה לָאָדָם, שֶׁיִהְיֶה צַרוּף לָאָדָם עַד שֶׁיִּהְיֶה בִּלְתִּי טִּבְעִי

תפארת ישראל The Splendor of Israel Chapter 2

For when one performs the mitzvah, he becomes refined beyond nature—and this is what Hashem, blessed be He, desired in circumcision. For if one were born circumcised, it would not be a refinement to man, since all men would be that way, and nature would be the same for all. But refinement exists only in what is not natural—for refinement is an emergence from nature. And this is refinement, as will be explained.

And so it is with all the commandments that Hashem, blessed be He, gave—they are refinements...

שֶׁכַּאֲשֶׁר עוֹשֶׁה הַמִּצְוָה, הוּא צַרוּף אֶל אָדָם מִן הַטֶּבַע,
וְזָה אֲשֶׁר חָפֵץ הַשֵּׁם יִתְּכַּרְךּ בְּמִילָה. וְאִם הָיָה נִבְרָא
מָהוּל, לֹא הָיָה צַרוּף אֶל הָאָדָם; כִּי הִיוּ כָּל בְּנֵי אָדָם
כָּּךְ, שֶׁהַטֶּבַע הִיא אַחַת לְכָל בְּנֵי אָדָם, וְלֹא הָיָה זָה
צַרוּף, שֶׁאֵין הַצֵּרוּף רַק בְּדָבָר שֶׁאֵינוֹ טִּבְעִי, שֶׁהַצֵּרוּף
בּרוּף, שֶׁאֵין הַצֵּרוּף רַק בְּדָבָר שֶׁאֵינוֹ טִבְעִי, שֶׁהַצֵּרוּף
בּהוּא הוֹצַאָה מִן הַטֶּבַע. וְזָהוּ הַצֵּרוּף כְּמוֹ שֵׁיִתְבַּאֵר

ּרִוּף בָּל הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁנָּתַן הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ הֵם צֵרוּף...

### תפארת ישראל The Splendor of Israel Chapter 2

#### **NOTE Summary**

The Maharal begins by explaining that the mitzvos of the Torah are Divine actions designed to complete the human being, who was created with an innate Divine soul. Because man's soul is spiritual and Godly, his perfection cannot come from natural or material forces but only through supra-natural actions—that is, mitzvos. The Torah, which was given after the seven days of Creation (symbolized by the eighth level), represents this transcendence of nature.

He elaborates that even nature itself is not complete without human refinement. As brought in Midrash Tanchuma, everything in the natural world—wheat, mustard, lupines—requires human processing to become useful or desirable. This illustrates that the world was intentionally created lacking, in order to give man—who possesses intellect—the opportunity to refine it. This is why circumcision is performed on the eighth day: it is a correction of nature, which by default produces man in an unfinished state. If man were born already circumcised, he would be merely natural, not a partner with God in refining the world.

The Maharal uses the famous dialogue between Rabbi Akiva and the Roman Turnus Rufus to further illustrate this point. Turnus Rufus argues that if God truly desires circumcision, He should have created man already circumcised. Rabbi Akiva responds that the mitzvah of circumcision—and by extension, all mitzvos—exist specifically to refine the human being. Man is not created perfect; he is created with potential, and mitzvos are the tools by which he fulfills that potential. Circumcision, therefore, symbolizes man's role in transcending nature, turning himself into something "more than natural."

#### **Practical Takeaway**

The human being is not meant to passively accept the world or himself as-is. You were created lacking in order to rise. Every mitzvah is a tool for you to refine, elevate, and transcend your natural state. This worldview empowers personal responsibility: instead of seeing our imperfections as flaws, we understand them as opportunities for spiritual greatness. Don't ask, "Why wasn't I created perfect?" Ask, "How can I partner with Hashem to perfect myself?" Especially in the performance of mitzvos—even the most basic ones—know that you are actively transcending nature and aligning with a purpose far beyond the material world.

#### **Chassidic Story**

Once, the Maharal of Prague was asked by a nobleman: "Why does your religion focus so much on actions—mitzvos—when true religion should surely be about beliefs and contemplation?" The Maharal replied by pointing to a rough stone lying in the courtyard. "That," he said, "is nature—untouched, raw, unfinished. It's what God created. But now look at the cornerstone of this palace—perfectly shaped, aligned, beautiful. That was cut and polished by man. God gives us raw material; we are called to perfect it." The nobleman stood silent, moved by the depth of the metaphor. The Maharal concluded: "Our mitzvos are chisels. With them, we cut away the excess and reveal the holy structure that lies beneath."

## The Maharal of Prague תפארת ישראל

The Splendor of Israel Chapter 2

(Source: Sippurei Maharal, Prague traditions)

END NOTE