

On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. (12:3)

The *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah*, ritual circumcision, is unique in that it has been accepted throughout the generations with joy. Our people have responded to the call of *Bris Milah* with *mesiras nefesh* - self sacrifice. The imprint of the *Bris Milah* is a permanent imprimatur on the child, identifying him as a partner in the Covenant and a member of the Jewish Nation. It is a sign that stays with the child throughout his entire life. The circumcision is an event marked with pride and joy - regardless of the circumstances surrounding the event. It is one *mitzvah* that all Jews, even those who have otherwise become alienated from Jewish observance, have continued to embrace.

While we are proud to execute this *mitzvah*, it is regrettable that the actual circumcision - which has always been performed by a G-d-fearing, scholarly Jew - has been relegated to individuals who do not fit any of these criteria. It is not the purpose of this paper to be a sounding board, reacting to *Klal Yisrael's* ills. It is painful, however, to observe a *mitzvah* that for thousands of years has meant so much to us, a *mitzvah* for which so many Jews have risked their lives, carried out by professionals who are either not Jewish or who have no respect for the *Torah*. Our People have been persecuted throughout the millenia, but we have remained faithful throughout to this unique *mitzvah*. We should not destroy the *halachic* and moral essence of this *mitzvah* by having it performed by one who denigrates - or at best does not represent - the message of the covenant of *Bris Milah*.

Many stories relate the overwhelming *mesiras nefesh* our People have demonstrated for *Bris Milah*. There is one very poignant narrative that took place during the Holocaust that was told over many times by the *Bluzhober Rebbe, zl*. It is the hope of this writer that as a result of the world-wide dissemination of this paper to members of the entire Jewish spectrum of belief, someone who might otherwise not have chosen to have his son's ritual circumcision performed "ritually" by a G-d fearing *mohel*, will be moved to do so.

Rabbi Yisrael Spira, *zl*, the *Bluzhober Rebbe*, was sawing wood as a member of a slave-labor contingent in the notorious Janowska Road camp. One morning, on *Hoshanah Rabah*, the forest was filled with terrible, heartrending cries. It soon became known that a children's "aktion", selection, was occurring. The Nazi beasts were grabbing little children away from their mothers to be slaughtered like cattle in a nearby field. One can imagine the heartbroken mothers as their children were torn from them. The mothers knew it would only be a little while before they, too, would follow the tragic path of their children. As the procession of weeping, distraught mothers and children came closer to the *Bluzhober's* labor group, one mother broke ranks. Clutching her infant in her arms, she cried out, "*Yidden!* Have mercy, give me a knife!"

Assuming the woman sought to commit suicide, the *Rebbe* attempted to dissuade her. A Nazi officer, infamous for his sadistic behavior, approached the woman and handed her his penknife,

hoping to enjoy the last moments of this hapless woman's life.

They did not know the Jewish spirit. Clutching the knife in her hand, the woman carefully placed her child on the ground and circumcised her baby son. In a clear, loud, emotion-filled voice she recited the *Bircas Ha'milah*, to the loud response of *Amen* by all those assembled.

This is the way one Jewish mother inducted her son into the covenant of our People. We should learn from the *mesiras nefesh* of our forbears to perform this most precious *mitzvah* according to Jewish law - not to our convenience.