

At the age of eight days, every male among you shall be circumcised throughout your generations. (17:12)

The following incident, which occurred about two hundred years ago with the saintly *Chasam Sofer*, gives us a glimpse into the extraordinary greatness of the man who is responsible for saving Hungarian Jewry from the tentacles of the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment. The *Chasam Sofer* was not only the leading *posek*, *halachic* arbiter, of his day, but also a holy and righteous Torah giant, who obviously was as comfortable in the Heavenly sphere as he was in the mundane world. The story is cited by *Horav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, zl*, who heard it from the son-in-law of the *Rav* of Kashua, a disciple of the *Chasam Sofer*. It happened that in one of the small communities close to Pressburg, where the *Chasam Sofer* reigned as *Rav*, a gentile came to the *Rav* of the community and asked to be converted. He was tested, his background thoroughly investigated, and his character and integrity substantiated. He was sincere and deserving of a *halachic* conversion, which was performed. The problem arose as a result of the necessary *Bris Milah*. On the third day, which is usually the most painful and critical, he became gravely ill, to the point that the doctors despaired for his recovery. The members of his family, who were no friends of the Jews, immediately revealed their anti-Semitic animus and began to instigate the gentile populace to exact vengeance against the Jewish perpetrators – a term targeting the entire Jewish community.

The *Rav* was beside himself with fear for the repercussions which might result and affect the Jews in his community and the surrounding Jewish communities. He traveled to Pressburg to seek the counsel of the *Chasam Sofer*. The sage was visibly upset with the *Rav* for using a *mohel*, ritual circumciser, whose experience was solely with eight-day-old infants, for an adult, for whom this was a surgical procedure. In any event, it was too late; what had been done could not be reversed. In order to remove the danger that hung over the Jewish community, the *Rav* and *mohel* would have to be *moser nefesh*, literally sacrifice themselves, as penance for their actions.

The *Chasam Sofer* instructed them to obtain a wagon in which they would transport the critically ill *ger* and themselves on the pretense of traveling to see a specialist. Instead, the three of them would ride into the Danube River and succumb to its waters. This way, the gentiles would consider the *ger's* death to be an unfortunate accident and the deaths of the Jews a penance for their error, which would circumvent the decree hanging over the Jewish community.

These righteous men humbly accepted the *Chasam Sofer's* ruling and prepared themselves with the appropriate *vidui*, confession, preceded by immersing themselves in the *mikvah*, recitation of *Tehillim*, and a tearful plea for atonement for their souls. They placed the deathly ill man on the wagon, and all three left their homes with the intention to give up their lives for the future of the Jewish community. They reached the shore of the Danube and were about to plunge forward, when suddenly they heard a voice calling out to them in *Yiddish*, "Where are you going?" They turned to see a Jewish man chasing after them, "*Yidden*, where are you going?" They ignored him and trudged on. The man caught up with them, however, and put his hand on the horses that were

pulling the wagon, and they came to a halt. He asked the *Rav* where he was going. The *Rav* explained their predicament and the *Chasam Sofer's* ruling, to which the man said, "There is another way." He removed a small jar from his pocket and instructed them to sprinkle the liquid in the jar on top of the wound that had become infected. Within a few moments, the *ger* regained consciousness and began to speak as if nothing had ever happened. Clearly, they had been privy to a Heavenly miracle. They returned home to the joy of all involved. Needless to say, the danger hanging over the Jewish community was diffused. The *Rav* traveled to the home of the *Chasam Sofer* to relate the miracle to him. He replied, "Eliyahu *HaNavi* is the *Malach HaBris*, the Heavenly Angel appointed over the *Bris Milah*. Due to your willingness to accept to be *moser nefesh*, relinquish your lives, to save the Jewish community, he appeared to save you. Although, veritably, as Shlomo *HaMelech* writes in *Koheles*, *Shomer mitzvah lo yeida ra*, 'He who obeys the commandments will know no evil' (*Koheles* 8:5), you would have been otherwise protected."