

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

The mitzvah of Milah, circumcision, leaves an indelible mark on a Jew, one that is with him throughout his life. It is a mitzvah which connects generations, since one's father is obligated to make sure that his son is circumcised. It is a rite of passage for a Jew, a mitzvah for which Jews throughout the millennia have died. Many stories demonstrate the Jew's commitment to this special mitzvah. The following is a very poignant story, which demonstrates not only Jewish resolve, but Jewish commitment under the most trying circumstances.

Horav Arye Levin, z.l., was accustomed to go to shul early on Erev Shabbos, so that he could recite Shir HaShirim in a relaxed atmosphere and with great joy. Once, he sat next to his rebbe, Horav Chaim Berlin, z.l., the rav of Yerushalayim, and together they recited the Shir HaShirim. They came to the pasuk, “Behold, you are beautiful My beloved; behold, you are beautiful, your eyes are doves” (1:15). This pasuk extols Klal Yisrael for their deeds and resolve and liken its leadership, the “eyes” of the nation, to doves, who remain faithful to their mates. Rav Chaim's eyes began to tear. “Why are you crying?” Rav Arye asked his rebbe. “These pesukim praise Klal Yisrael's faithfulness. It is no reason to cry.” Rav Chaim explained his display of emotion with the following story:

“When I was rav in Moscow, a distinguished gentleman once came over to me and asked to speak to me in private. He related that his wife had just given birth to a boy, and would I honor him by being the Mohel, ritual circumciser. Since this request was not uncommon, I was somewhat taken aback by his desire for secrecy. He soon explained that his business was in the wholesale vending of crucifixes. It would certainly not serve his business well to acknowledge publicly that he was Jewish. A public celebration was definitely out of the question.

“I agreed to perform the Bris in secrecy. The man's servants were given the day off and the father and I attended to the ceremony. Afterwards, I asked the father to notify me on the third day as to the child's welfare. On the third day, the father arrived with the good news that the baby was well. He also brought an envelope of cash to pay for my services. I refused his money, stating that I do not take remuneration for this mitzvah. The father thought I was really waiting for more money, which he immediately gave me. I said, “No – I do not take money for the mitzvah of Milah.” Before the father left, I asked him to explain his behavior to me: “I visited your home and did not notice even the slightest testament to your Jewish heritage. Why then would you risk everything for the mitzvah of Milah? Why chance exposure after so many years of hiding your true faith?” He responded, ‘Rebbe, I know that I have distanced myself from the faith of my ancestors. I do not know if I personally can ever go back to my roots. One thing I do know for certain: my son will never know his Jewish heritage. I was, at least, raised among Jews. He will have nothing of the sort. If one day in the future, however, when he grows up and meets other Jews who may inspire him to return to his faith, I do not want to be the one that precluded his return. He was born a Jew,

and I will raise him as such. I cannot deprive my son of his legacy.'

"Now you know," said Rav Chaim, "why I cry when I recite these pesukim. As the dove remains faithful to its dovecote, never flying farther than its eyes can still see the dovecote, so, too, do our People retain their inner commitment to Hashem, regardless of how far they have strayed."