

When a woman who conceives and gives birth to a male...on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. (12:2,3)

The commentators, each in his own unique manner, offer various reasons that one is required to perform the *bris milah* on the eighth day. One of the fundamental reasons is to make sure that the child has lived through a *Shabbos*. The *kedushah*, sanctity, of the seventh day/*Shabbos* infuses a holiness into the child which prepares him for entrance into *Klal Yisrael*. **Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita**, notes that while on the one hand we infer the remarkable *kedushah* of *Shabbos*, we also note that *milah bizmanah*, a circumcision performed at the designated time, the eighth day, overrides *Shabbos*. One may desecrate *Shabbos* in order to perform a *bris milah*. This indicates the awesome significance of *bris milah*. Even the fundamental *mitzvah* of *Shabbos*, which proclaims and attests that Hashem is the Creator and Ruler of the universe, is secondary to *bris milah*.

Because *bris milah* has long been considered the seminal rite of passage for a Jewish child, Jews --regardless of their commitment to religious observance-- have upheld this *mitzvah*, even under the most challenging circumstances. A number of stories of faith and courage demonstrate *Klal Yisrael's* singular devotion to this particular *mitzvah*. There is one story that took place during the Holocaust that characterizes the Jew's commitment to *bris milah* and to the affirmation of Judaism that accompanies it.

While a Jew is often confronted with challenges to his faith, during times of persecution and pain his conviction is tested to a greater degree. The period of the Holocaust, in whose specter we all live, was a time during which the conventional challenge to our belief was magnified to great proportion. Indeed, the victims of the Holocaust exhibited a tenacious dedication to the eternal bond between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*. Their spirits rose to such heights that they gave new meaning to the term, *kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying Hashem's Name.

The **Blushover Rebbe, zl**, who was a witness, related this story. The *Rebbe* was sawing wood, a member of a slave-labor contingent of the infamous Janowska Road Camp. It was the morning of *Hoshanah Rabbah*, when suddenly terrible screams filled the forest. The workers soon found out that the Nazi's had declared an Aktion, wholesale slaughter of infants and young children. Heartrending cries emanated from the mothers and their little children, as the Nazis cruelly tore them away to be massacred like sheep in a nearby clearing. The procession of weeping, heartbroken mothers and their doomed children was passing by the *Rebbe's* contingent. Suddenly, one woman, desperately holding on to her infant, abruptly cried out, "Jews, have mercy, give me a knife!"

The *Rebbe*, assuming she wanted to commit suicide, attempted to discourage the woman from killing herself. One of the Nazi beasts observed this interchange and came over, extending his

penknife to the distraught woman. The fiend thought he would he would have some fun watching the Jewish woman take her life.

That is not what happened, however. Holding the knife in her hand, the woman placed her child on the ground and quickly circumcised her son. In an emotion-filled voice, she loudly recited *birkas ha'millah*. The murderer looked on in complete shock at what had taken place before his eyes. He turned to the woman and asked her to explain her strange action. "Today my son turned eight days old, the time at which a Jewish boy is to be circumcised and brought in as a member of our people. Soon he will be murdered, but he will die as a Jew." Only a couple of hours later, the woman's words rang true as the mother and her infant were led to slaughter.

Every time the **Blushever Rebbe, zl**, served as a *sandek* at a *bris* he would relate this story with tears streaming down his face, filled with pride at the superhuman strength of a simple Jewish mother on the way to her death. The spiritual heroism which our people exhibited during those tragic times should serve as inspiration to us, as well as a declaration to the world of a nation that did not go to their death as "sheep to the slaughter."