

The Mitzvah of Bris Milah

In contrast, we offer the following story that demonstrates the kedushah of our People. In Russia, during the reign of the N.K.V.D., Russian secret police, who were notorious for their ruthlessness, it was forbidden to perform a bris milah, circumcise Jewish boys, or to shecht, ritually slaughter animals. Heaven-help he who was caught in such "defiance" of the state. Rav Aizik Roth, zl, was a mohel, ritual circumciser, who shared an apartment with another chasid who happened to be a shochet, ritual slaughterer. One night there was a loud knock on their apartment door. They knew that such a knock could only be a sign of trouble, since they were both "employed" in vocations that were strictly prohibited by the government. Rav Aizik told the shochet to gather his knives and leave through the back door. He would deal with the police. He opened the door to be greeted by a major in the Secret Police. "Where is the mohel?" he asked somewhat forcefully. Rav Galinsky, who happened to be in the apartment, looked at the officer and innocently asked, "Do you think, Major, that we would circumcise our children knowing that it goes against the government? No, we would never do this." The Major was relentless; he would not budge: "Where is the mohel?" He walked through the apartment and saw that no one was there but himself and the two rabbanim. He turned to them and said in Yiddish, "I am also Jewish. My wife has given birth to a little boy, and I need a mohel to circumcise him." Imagine what was occurring. There is no doubt that if it had been discovered that this Major was circumcising his son, there would not be a gallows high enough for him. The Russian Secret Police would make him their paradigm of one who commits treason. His death would be slow and torturous. Yet, his overwhelming devotion to fulfill a mitzvah for which Jews died throughout the ages superceded all of his fears.