

Circumcision

The story is told that Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, once came to an inn at St. Petersburg to join in a halachic conference. The question arose regarding the acceptability of children whose parents did not circumcise them. The majority of rabbonim opined that a child who was not circumcised may not be included in a community's Jewish register. It was their way of censuring those assimilated Jews who rejected Bris Milah as their way of showing disdain against what they felt was an archaic religion. The consensus of opinion was that by excluding these children from the public register, their renegade parents might change their minds regarding circumcision.

Hearing their decision, Rav Chaim arose and emphatically demanded, "Show me where it says that an uncircumcised child is not a Jew! I understand that an 'areil,' uncircumcised Jew, is prohibited from eating Kodoshim and Terumah. He may also not eat of the Korban Pesach. But, where does it say that he is not Jewish? Why blame the child for the fault of the father?"

One of the speakers at the conference recounted that, in the city of Warsaw, a certain Jew refused to circumcise his son. After awhile the child became ill and died. The community leaders did not permit this child to be buried in the Jewish cemetery. Indeed, most of the attendees at this conference agreed with the decision of the Warsaw community who took a stand for the Torah. The only one who issued a declaration of protest was Rav Chaim Brisker. "There is no halachah that forbids an uncircumcised child from being buried in a Jewish cemetery. While there are certain areas that exclude an "areil" - burial in a Jewish cemetery is not one of them. If you are concerned about making a safeguard to serve as a deterrent against assimilation - do not take it out on the children. Take it out on the parents. Do not bury the father who refuses to have his child circumcised! This reaction was applauded by many people - even those who had become alienated from Torah and mitzvos. Rav Chaim had the courage to place the blame where it belonged. It would serve us well to attempt to conjure up some of this same courage.