

Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz - Yerachmiel Sepowitz. From the archives of "Torah Talk"

TORAH TALK (From the Archives)

TAZRIA (Leviticus, 12:1-13:59)

?Timing?

(Message from two years ago)

This week's message is dedicated to the brave soldiers of the coalition forces fighting for security and liberation in the Middle East, with a special prayer for the POW's. May the Master of the World watch over them, keep them safe, and grant them swift victory. May G-d bless America.

Timing is everything. If you pick a fruit before it's ready to be picked, it won't be edible. If you wait too long, it will be too late.

A woman has given birth. There are several ritual laws that apply to her at that time. There are times when she may enter the Temple, and times that she may not.

And then, there's her son: "...and on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin should be circumcised." (Leviticus, 12:3)

Timing is very essential. If the Bris is done too early, or at night, the Mitzvah has not been fulfilled. (In such a case, a drop of blood must be drawn at the appropriate time, to fulfill the Mitzvah.) If the Bris is done too late, the Mitzvah has been fulfilled, but not optimally.

There are several reasons given for the Bris being performed on the eighth day. Some commentaries point to the fact that the baby should experience the holiness of a Shabbos before the Bris. Before entering into a covenant with the King, it would be appropriate to be introduced to the Sabbath ?Queen.?

There are many other reasons given. The bottom line is that G-d has His own schedule that we are required to follow.

Rabbi Mordechai F was a Mohel. In the last two decades of his life, health issues prevented him from practicing his holy work. He put away his instruments and retired. For years, they sat unused in the home of his son, who is a neighbor and dear friend of mine.

Last spring, on the last day of Passover, Rabbi F passed away. My neighbor, like every good son, sat Shiva, and recited Kaddish for his father.

A word about Kaddish. We are given a certain number of years during which we have the opportunity to serve G-d and make the world a better place. As I said above, timing is everything; once our time is up, there is nothing else we can do. G-d judges us on the basis of

how we utilize the time that has been allotted. There is no opportunity to perform Mitzvahs in the next world. There are no poor to whom we can give charity, and there are no pork chops for us to avoid.

However, there are still opportunities for spiritual ?growth.? Judaism teaches us that when a loved one dies, his friends and relatives are encouraged to do Mitzvahs on his behalf. When a child gives Tzedokah -- charity, or studies Torah as a tribute to his father, that is considered, in a sense, as if the departed father is himself doing that Mitzvah. Kaddish, a public declaration of G-d's holiness, is one such Mitzvah.

Last summer, I approached Rabbi F's son with a ?business proposition.? I asked him to lend me his father's knives, to be used ?in memory? of his father. I assured him that he could take them back at any time, whenever he wanted.

He loved the idea, and agreed immediately. He invited me to his home, where he lovingly took his father's two Bris knives out of their cases. Imagine the nostalgia he must have felt! He was happy that his father's knives were going to be used once again, and I was honored to be the vehicle through whom they were to be used.

I took the knives home to prepare them for my next Bris. They needed to be sterilized. I put them, together with my other stainless steel instruments into an autoclave. (You know how your dentist always has a small paper or plastic envelope containing his instruments? They have been sterilized by high-pressure steam in an autoclave; it works like a pressure cooker.)

After the sterilization cycle was finished, I opened the autoclave, and took a look. To my horror, I discovered one shiny sterile knife, and one misshapen, brown glue-covered tarnished knife. I had melted the glue that held the blade in the handle, and stained the ?stainless? steel blade. I was mortified! How was I going to tell my friend that I had destroyed his father's knife?!

But, I decided, I'll have to worry about that later. I had a Bris to do. I put the good knife, which was obviously sturdier, into a new envelope and put it back into the autoclave. (Since I had handled it to examine it, it was no longer sterile.) I placed the sealed envelope containing the re-sterilized knife into my bag (AKA my ?BrisKit?9) and left for the Bris.

Imagine my shock when I opened the envelope at the Bris to find that this too was now tarnished! Well, it may have been discolored, but it was sharp and sterile, so I used it. Before I began the Bris, I recited my standard preliminary prayers, adding that I was performing this Mitzvah ?L?Iylui Nishmas (to ?elevate? the soul of) HaRav Mordechai ben Aharon.?

The Bris came out beautifully and I reported to my friend that his father ?did a good job.?

Now I had to deal with somehow undoing the mess I had made of his father's knives. I brought them to a jeweler who was able to reassemble the broken knife, and polish them to the best of his ability. But many of the stains were still there. They would never be the same.

Now what was I going to do? My friend had lent me his father's knives in good faith, and I had ruined them! If it was only a financial issue, I could just buy new ones. But these were Bris knives that had belonged to his departed father! And I had destroyed them! How was I going to tell him?

For months, I tried to find someone who could restore the knives. Finally, about a month ago I found a custom knife maker in Canada who said he could repair them. (If you happen to be interested, it's AJH Custom Knives and Services. <http://ajh-knives.com/>)

After several emails back and forth, I packed up the precious knives and sent them to Tony, who has never fixed a circumcision knife before. (He also mentioned that he had decided to leave his own sons 'intact')

Last Wednesday, an insured package arrived from Canada. I removed two beautiful, shiny, and super-sharp Bris knives. What a relief! Now I could face my friend with a clear conscience.

He got to me before I got to him. Last Shabbos, I bumped into him on the way to Shul. He had a big smile on his face. 'Mazel Tov!' he said. 'My daughter had a baby boy yesterday!'

The baby was born almost exactly a year to the day after his great-grandfather passed away. In addition, the baby's cousin, also a great-grandson of Rabbi Mordechai F, was born the same day.

The Bris for both boys will be today (Friday), G-d willing. Guess what their name is going to be. Guess whose Bris knife will be used.

How's that for timing? As I said above, G-d has His own schedule.

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>From last year's message - "Blood Libel 2005"

I really didn't want to write this article.

Often, the best way to react to negative PR is to ignore it. When you respond to ugly accusations, you sometimes exacerbate the problem by giving a forum to a topic that does not deserve one. I hoped that the story would die down and go away. Therefore, I chose to remain silent.

Ironically, this terrible tragedy has been great for business. I have received phone calls and emails from concerned parents in search for a Mohel who wouldn't 'endanger' their child. After a satisfactory conversation, they have been relieved of worry, and happy to utilize my services.

Then, someone went too far.

I was examining a baby prior to his Bris. The father asked me about my methodology. When I responded to his questions, he responded, "Good. That's terrible, what that rabbi did to that baby!?"...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576327>

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>From two years ago - "Dueling Brisses"

What do you do when you have conflicting responsibilities?

... A Mohel once asked Rabbi Moshe Feinstein whether he should perform a Bris on Saturday if the people attending the Bris are desecrating the Sabbath ...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576427>

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>From three years ago -- "Timing"

... I approached Rabbi F's son with a "business proposition." I asked him to lend me his father's knives, to be used "in memory" of his father. ... he lovingly took his father's two Bris knives out of their cases. Imagine the nostalgia he must have felt! He was happy that his father's knives were going to be used once again, and I was honored to be the vehicle through whom they were to be used... After the sterilization cycle was finished, I opened the autoclave, and took a look. To my horror, I discovered ... one misshapen, brown glue-covered tarnished knife. I had melted the glue that held the blade in the handle, and stained the "stainless" steel blade. I was mortified! How was I going to tell my friend that I had destroyed his father's knife?!... Now what was I going to do? My friend had lent me his father's knives in good faith, and I had ruined them! ...

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>From Four Years ago -- "No 'Short Cuts' To The Bris"

... Rabbi Akiva takes the position that there is no excuse for not doing everything in your power to avoid desecrating the Sabbath. If you could have made the knife before Shabbos, and you didn't, it's your own fault!

You're too far away on Saturday morning? Too bad! Why didn't you take care of this yesterday? No dispensation. No Shabbos Bris. See you on Sunday! ...

"Okay, G-d, I'm going to smoke and drink and be irresponsible. Please make sure I stay healthy."...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576227>

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>From Five years ago -- "A Taste Of His Own Medicine"

... Many have praised the wisdom of the ancient Hebrews in realizing the importance of isolating

patients with communicable diseases. The leper was segregated from the Camp of Israel, dressed in a way that clearly identified him as contagious, and would announce "Unclean! Unclean!" to anyone who approached. (Leviticus, 13:45) How insightful of the Israelites in the desert to realize that they could prevent an epidemic by keeping people with infectious diseases away from the general population.

Except for one problem. It makes no sense! ...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576127>