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Brit Millah on Shabbat

The nineteenth *perek* of *Shabbat* raises a question that has many different halachic and hashkafic implications. When the *Torah* commands one to perform an act that would normally be forbidden, does the prohibition remain albeit unpunishable or has the prohibition been taken away? One implication of the way this question is answered is whether one must now perform the action in the shortest and quickest way. According to the first option, one would have to ensure that it is completed in the most efficient manner while according to the second understanding there would be no such requirement.

The *Tana Rebbi Eliezer* raises this point with regards to the question of a *brit millah* on *Shabbat*. The question arises from the *pasuk*, "as it shall be on the eighth day that you have circumcised". The question is what should one do if the eighth day falls on *Shabbat*? The problem is that one must desecrate the *Shabbat* to fulfil this *mitzvah*. We know, for example, that when *Rosh HaShanah* falls on *Shabbat* we do not blow the *shofar*. We have a clear rule that even though there is a commandment, *Shabbat* overrides and prevents me from doing this act. However, by the *brit millah* everyone agrees that it has to be performed on *Shabbat* if that is that eight day.

The philosophical question is why does the *Torah* instruct man to do *millah* on *Shabbat* and not let *Shabbat* override the *mitzvah*? The Rabbis have explained three ways of understanding the commandment to have the *brit*:

1. The action of the *brit* is a fulfilment of a commandment.
2. The person should be in the state of having had a *brit millah*.
3. There is a prohibition for a Jewish male over the age of eight days to have a foreskin.

It appears that only according to the last reason could one argue that having a *brit* might override *Shabbat*; the Jewish baby is in an incomplete state while he is still uncircumcised.

The *Midrash Tanhuma (Tazriah 19)* brings a discussion between a Roman general Turnus Rufus and Rabbi Akiva. He asked Rabbi Akiva why Jews circumcise their sons. Do Jews believe that they can improve on G-d's creation of man?

Rabbi Akiva placed grain and bread before the general and asked him which one he would prefer to eat. The general made the obvious choice and took the bread, representative of man's improvement on nature. Just as baking bread is an act of improving wheat, so is circumcision an act of improving man.

This helps us understand the first two reason of why one would allow the *brit* on *Shabbat*. The action is the completion of the creation of man where man stretches outside his existence and becomes more G-dlike. To understand the second reason, we explain that one must be in the most complete form possible, as the Jew is the *tzelem Elokim*, he therefore cannot be lacking spiritually.

This helps us understand *Shabbat* in a clearer way. On *Shabbat* we move closer to the real ideal - how man should be. He is drawing closer and nearer to the source. Therefore when the *Torah* gives us a commandment to physically change ourselves bringing us closer, it is clear that this should be permissible. The *brit* on the eighth day is bringing time and matter to the service of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. However interestingly this is only when the eighth day is on *Shabbat*. If the *brit* is postponed it cannot be performed on *Shabbat*. This is due to the fact that the part of the *mitzvah*, the control over time being on the eighth day, is no longer.

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Revision Questions

שבת י"ח:ב' – כ"א:א

- When is one allowed to move bundles of wood on *Shabbat*? (י"ח:ב')
- In what manner can one return a chicken that has escaped from its pen? (י"ח:ב')
- What restriction does *R' Yehuda* place on a parent walking with their young child? (י"ח:ב')
- In what manner is one allowed to assist an animal that is giving birth? (י"ח:ג')
- Do the same restrictions apply when a women is giving birth? (י"ח:ג')
- Is there a special manner in which one must carry a knife for the *brit millah* if he is carrying it on *Shabbat*? (י"ט:א')
- To what extent does *R' Eliezer* allow *melacha* to be performed on *Shabbat* for a *brit millah*? (י"ט:א')
- What general principle does *R' Akiva* with respect to performing *melacha* for a *brit millah*? (י"ט:א')
- Are there any differences between a *brit millah* performed on *Shabbat* and a *brit millah* performed on a weekday? (י"ט:ב')
- On which day after the *millah* does *R' Elazar ben Azarya* permit the baby to be washed even on *Shabbat*? (י"ט:ג')
- Explain the debate regarding whether an *androginus* can have a *brit millah* on *Shabbat*. (י"ט:ג')
- The *Mishnah* described two cases where a person has two babies:
 1. One is meant to have a *brit* on *Shabbat* and the other on Sunday.
 2. One is meant to have a *brit* on *erev Shabbat* and the other on *Shabbat*.
 The *Mishnah* rules that if the wrong baby had its *brit* on *Shabbat* then in one case everyone agrees that the person would be obligated to bring a *chatat* while the other case is debated – which of the two cases is the subject of the debate and why? (י"ט:ד')
- The *Mishnah* explain that it is possible that a healthy baby can have its *brit millah* on the 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th day – how? (י"ט:ה')
- A kohen that has not had a proper *brit millah* is invalid from what? (י"ט:ו')
- *R' Eliezer* and the *Chachamim* debate setting up and using a *mashmeret* on *Shabbat* and on *Yom Tov* – explain the debate and state both opinions. (כ':א')
- Can one strain wine on *Shabbat*? (כ':ב')
- Can one strain an egg through mustard on *Shabbat*? (כ':ב')
- In what manner can one separate the *psolet* from *carshinim* on *Shabbat*? (כ':ג')
- Is one allowed to given food separately to each of his animals? (כ':ד')
- How does one remove straw found on their bed? (List two possibilities) (כ':ה')
- Can one carry a child that is holding something *muktza*? (כ"א:א')
- According to which *Tana* can one separate (replacement) *trumah* from *meduma* produce? (כ"א:א')

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Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
30th October כ"ז תשרי	31 st October כ"ח תשרי	1 st November כ"ט תשרי	2 nd November ל' תשרי ראש חודש	3 rd November א' חשוון ראש חודש	4 th November ב' חשוון	5 th November ג' חשוון
Shabbat 21:2-3	Shabbat 22:1-2	Shabbat 22:3-4	Shabbat 22:5-6	Shabbat 23:1-2	Shabbat 23:3-4	Shabbat 23:5 – 24:1

