

CHAPTER XIX.

REGULATIONS ORDAINED BY R. ELIEZER CONCERNING CIRCUMCISION ON THE SABBATH.

MISHNA: R. Eliezer saith: If the knife used for circumcision was not brought on the day preceding the Sabbath, one is to bring it publicly on the Sabbath; in times of danger (during persecutions) one may conceal it (about the person) before witnesses. Further, R. Eliezer saith: One may even cut wood to be burnt into charcoal, in order to forge an iron instrument (knife for circumcision). The following rule was laid down by R., Aqiba: All work (necessary in aid of circumcision) which *could* have been performed on the day before (Sabbath) does not supersede (the observance of) the Sabbath, but such work as could *not* have been performed on the day before, *does* supersede (the observance of) the Sabbath.

GEMARA: A question was propounded by the schoolmen: "What does R. Eliezer mean by saying, 'one is to bring it *publicly* on the Sabbath'? [Does](#) she mean to say, that the man thereby demonstrates how dear a commandment (of the Lord) is to him, that he is ready to violate the Sabbath for its sake, or is it rather, because the man would be suspected of carrying a prohibited thing oil the Sabbath, if he did so surreptitiously?" What difference does it make what R. Eliezer meant? The difference is this: "If the man does it in order to allay suspicion, it would be sufficient to have two witnesses see him conceal the knife about his person and then carry it even in times of peace; but if the man does it in order to demonstrate his love of God's commandments, he must carry it publicly even if he have two witnesses." What is the conclusion? It was taught that R. Levi said: "R. Eliezer meant only for the man to demonstrate his veneration of God's commandments." This is supported by a Boraitha, which plainly states, that a man should carry it publicly, and not have it concealed, such are the words of R. Eliezer. Said R. Ashi: All this is unnecessary. Our Mishna plainly teaches us the same, for it says, that only in

times of danger the knife should be concealed, and it is easily understood that only in times of danger is this to be done, but not under ordinary circumstances, and for what purpose? Only to show that a commandment should be venerated. It follows, therefrom, that the argument is accepted.

We have learned in another Boraitha: "One is to bring it publicly," and not have it concealed, such are the words of R. Eliezer; and R. Jehudah said in the name of R. Eliezer, that in times of danger the custom was to conceal it about the person before two witnesses.

"*Further, saith R. Eliezer,*" etc. The rabbis taught: In the place where R. Eliezer resided, wood was cut and burnt into charcoal, in order to forge an instrument (knife for circumcision) on

Sabbath. In the place where R. Jose of Galilee lived, fowls were eaten with milk. R. Itz'hak said: There was a city in Palestine where R. Eliezer's teaching was carried out, and there were no premature deaths in that city; and not only this, but at one time when the government prohibited circumcision in the entire land, that city was not included in the decree.

We have learned in a Boraitha: R. Simeon ben Gamaliel said: "Every commandment of the Lord which was received by the children of Israel with joy, for instance circumcision, concerning which it is written [Psalms cxix. 162]: 'I am rejoiced over thy promise, 1 as one that findeth great spoil,' is even now observed with joy; but every commandment which was received with protest, for instance the law of incestuous marriages, concerning which it is written [Numbers xi. 10]: 'And Moses heard the people weep according to their families,' meaning the case (of intermarriage) among the families, is even now observed reluctantly, for there are no marriages celebrated without some discord among the families."

We have learned, that R. Simeon ben Elazar said: "Every commandment for the observance of which the Israelites were ready to lay down their lives, as for that prohibiting idolatry and commanding circumcision, is observed punctually even to this day; but such commandments as they would not sacrifice themselves for are even now lightly regarded, as is the case with the commandment concerning Tephillin." As R. Yanai said:

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[paragraph continues] "Tephillin require a clean body, such as Elisha the man of doves possessed." What is meant by a clean body? Abayi said: "A body that emits no odor when clothed with Tephillin," and Rabha said: "A body that will never become drowsy while wearing Tephillin." Why was Elisha called "the man of wings"? It once happened that the government promulgated a decree by which all Israelites who would use Tephillin (phylacteries) were to be decapitated. This Elisha donned his phylacteries and went out into the market. He was seen by a casdor (quæstor), and the latter pursued him. Seeing that he could not escape, Elisha took the phylacteries from his head and carried them in his hand. When questioned by the quæstor what he carried in his hand, he replied: "Wings of doves." When opening his hand, he really found doves' wings, 1 and was therefore called the man of wings ever afterwards.

R. Aba the son of R. Ada said in the name of R. Itz'hak: "It once happened, that having forgotten to bring the knife for circumcision on the day before Sabbath, a man brought it on Sabbath, by way of the roof and private ground, against the will of R. Eliezer." R. Joseph opposed this: "How canst thou say, that this occurred against the will of R. Eliezer? It was R. Eliezer himself who permitted bringing the knife on Sabbath? Thou wouldst infer, then, that bringing the knife by way of private ground, and not publicly, was against his will, because he

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insists that the knife should be brought publicly through public ground only. In accordance with whose will was it done? If thou wilt say, it was done in accordance with the decree of the rabbis, who prohibit bringing the knife through public ground, and permit it through private ground and roofs, did the rabbis indeed permit this? Have we not learned in a Boraitha, that in the same measure as it is not allowed to bring the knife through public ground, it must also not be brought through roofs and private ground?" Therefore R. Ashi supplemented the statement of R. Aba by

adding, that the knife was brought against the will of R. Eliezer and *his opponents*; but in accordance with the decree of R. Simeon, who permits the carrying of everything through private ground and roofs, even if they were not combined by an Erub (in Tract Erubim).

R. Zera once found R. Assi sitting and saying: R. Simeon ben Lakish said in the name of R. Jehudah Hanassi as follows: It once happened that they forgot to bring a knife for circumcision on the eve of Sabbath, so they brought it on Sabbath. This angered the sages very much, for the reason, that the decree of the former sages had been set aside and that they had acted according to the decree of R. Eliezer. Firstly, because R. Eliezer was an adherent of the school of Shamaï; and secondly, because where one man is opposed to a number the majority should prevail, and the majority was against R. Eliezer; and R. Osiah answered the sages, who were angered, that the case was not as it appeared to them. "For," said he, "I asked R. Jehudah the circumciser, and he told me, that the knife was brought through an alley which was not combined by an Erub, from one end to the other, but not through public ground."

R. Zera then said to R. Assi: "Does the master hold, that things may be removed in an alley which was not combined by an Erub?" R. Assi answered, that they might. Said R. Zera again: "Did I not ask thee once before and thou gavest me another answer? Was it because thou wast engaged in other matters and this Halakha escaped thee?" and the answer was: "Such was the case."

R. Hyya bar Aba said in the name of R. Johanan: "The rule laid down by R. Eliezer, that for everything pertaining to circumcision the Sabbath may be violated, does not apply also to other duties of the day which should happen to fall on the Sabbath; because, where the preparations necessary for the

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bringing of the two loaves on Pentecost are concerned, R. Eliezer permitted them to be made on Sabbath merely through deduction by analogy, although this was also a duty of the day based on a biblical ordinance." Which other duties of the day does R. Johanan intend to except from this rule? We know, that in preparing the booth, the palm-branch, and all their accessories (for the feast of Booths) the Sabbath may be violated. The same is the case with Lulab, with Matza, and with Shofar, as it is stated in other Boraithas. Such is the dictum of R. Eliezer. Said R. Ada bar Ahabha: "R. Johanan intended to except Tzitzith (show-threads) for a garment and a Mezuzah (door-post inscription) for a house (although both of these are duties of the day, for if a man wear a garment he must have Tzitzith, and if he enter a house he must have a Mezuzah.)" This we have also learned in a Boraitha: "They all agree (even R. Eliezer), that if one made a show-thread for his garment, or a Mezuzah for his door, on the Sabbath, he is liable for a sin-offering." Why so? Said R. Joseph: "Because no specified time is set for the accomplishment of these duties." Said Abayi to him: "On the contrary, just because no specified time was set for the accomplishment of that duty, every moment is the time for performing it (so, if he have the garment on Sabbath, or enter the house On that day, he should perform those duties, and hence it must be considered a duty of the day)." Therefore said R. Na'hman in the name of R. Itz'hak, and according to others R. Huna the son of R. Jehoshua The reason is, because one is enabled to abandon these things for the time being (and hence the duty does not devolve upon him for that day)."

From what we have learned above, we see, that for the circumcision itself and all its necessary

accessories the Sabbath may be violated, according to the dictum of R. Eliezer. Whence does he deduce this? This is the reasoning of R. Eliezer: It is written [Leviticus xii. 3]: "And on the eighth day shall the flesh of his foreskin be circumcised." Thus, as it says distinctly the eighth day, it makes no difference what (day) the eighth falls on, whether it be Sabbath or not. Let us see: The rabbis and R. Eliezer differ only as far as the preparations for circumcision on the Sabbath are concerned, but not as to the circumcision itself. If, then, they do not regard the text quoted as does R. Eliezer, they should not even permit the violation of the Sabbath on account of circumcision itself. What source

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do they base their permission on? Said Ula, and also R. Itz'hak: "This is traditional."

An objection was raised: We have learned that the Sabbath may be violated in order to save life. Whence do we know this? Said R. Elazar ben Azariah: "Why! if it be permitted when circumcision is concerned to violate the Sabbath, where but one of the many members of the body is concerned, it should certainly be permitted in so much greater a degree when the whole body is to be saved. If thou sayest, then, that the permission to perform circumcision on the Sabbath is only traditional, how is it possible that thou shouldst derive an *a fortiori* assumption from a traditional institution?" Therefore R. Johanan saith, that the permission to perform the rite of circumcision on Sabbath is not based upon tradition, but is derived from the word "day," as the verse quoted above reads: "And on the eighth day," etc.; whereas it could read simply, "And on the eighth"; for in the preceding verse we read "seven days," etc.

Said Resh Lakish to R. Johanan: "The word 'day,' however, is also necessary, that we may know that the rite must be performed during the day and not at night!" This can be inferred from another passage [Genesis xvii. 12], where it expressly says: "And at eight *days* old shall every man-child in your generations be circumcised," etc.

R. A'ha bar Jacob said: As far as the rite of circumcision itself is concerned, the rabbis also hold that the permission to perform it is based on the passage quoted, "and on the *eighth* day"; but as for the preparations necessary for circumcision, they claim to find no justification for violating the Sabbath on that account. But it is absolutely necessary that "the eighth" be mentioned, for otherwise how would we know that the rite should not be performed on the seventh? That is also definitely settled by the other passage, as stated above: "And at eight days old," etc. Still, both passages are necessary, in order to prove that the eighth day is the day for circumcision; because, if it did not state expressly "on the eighth day," it might be presumed that the seventh day would do, and if it did not state "at eight days old," it might be presumed that after the child is eight days old any other later day, *e.g.*, the ninth, would do. Hence R. Johanan's explanation is the most acceptable; and we have learned in a Boraita in support of R. Johanan's explanation, and not of that of R. A'ha bar Jacob, as follows: "On

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the eighth day shall he be circumcised, even though it be Sabbath." How, then, is it possible to keep the commandment in Exodus xxxi. 14? "And ye shall keep the Sabbath, for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death." This refers to other labor, but not to that of circumcision. How, then, do we know that circumcision is not included in the prohibited labor, and that the eighth day does not refer to all other days except Sabbath? To this end it

reads "the eighth *day*," and "day" means, even on Sabbath.

The rabbis taught: Although it is written [Deut. xxiv. 8]: "Take heed in the plague of leprosy," which signifies, that the leprous spot must not be cut; but if the white spot (the symptom of leprosy) show itself on the member to be circumcised, it may be cut off, whether the member be circumcised at the prescribed time or afterwards.

A biblical festival must not be violated on account of circumcision, unless it happen to be the eighth day (precisely the prescribed time). Whence do we adduce these two ordinances? From the teaching of the rabbis, as follows: The first one is based on the verse [Leviticus xii. 3]: "And on the eighth day shall the *flesh of his foreskin* be circumcised." The order is imperative, regardless of whether the member be leprous or not. Whence do we know this? Perhaps it means to say, that only the healthy flesh of the foreskin be circumcised? Nay; it could say merely the foreskin, but it says expressly the *flesh* of the foreskin, meaning that even if the flesh be leprous it should also be circumcised. What need is there of a special verse for this purpose? During circumcision no intention to cut leprous flesh exists; hence, if it be done, it is done unintentionally, and an unintentional act does not involve culpability? Said Abayi: "The verse is used here to counteract the opinion of R. Jehudah, who holds, that an act committed unintentionally also involves culpability." Rabha said: "The verse must be used, even if the opinion of R. Simeon be adhered to, who holds, that an act committed unintentionally does not involve culpability. For in this case it is different; the act committed here is like the one where a man would behead another and still claim no intention to kill him (and when circumcising the flesh of the foreskin, if there be a leprous sore, one cannot help but cut it) This, even R. Simeon admits, would involve culpability, were it not for that exonerating verse." Does Rabha alone hold thus? Have we not learned elsewhere that Abayi and Rabha both

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agree, that R. Simeon declares even an unintentional act, which is, however, like the case of one beheading another without the intention to kill him, to be prohibited? After Abayi had heard Rabha's explanation, he accepted it.

The second ordinance mentioned is, according to Rabha, based upon the verse [Exodus xii. 16]: "No manner of work shall be done on them, save what is eaten by every man; *that only* may be prepared by you." "That" stands for circumcision only in its prescribed time, but not for the preparation for it and "only" stands as a prohibition not to perform the rite unless it be the prescribed time. R. Ashi, however, said: "No special verse is needed for this, for a festival is referred to [in Leviticus xxiii. 32] as "a sabbath of rest shall it be unto you." Hence it is a positive commandment, and the verse stated (immediately before this) is a negative commandment; thus a festival is covered by both a positive and negative commandment, while circumcision is covered by a positive commandment only, and one positive commandment cannot supersede a joint positive and negative commandment.

"A rule was laid down by R. Aqiba." Said R. Jehudah in the name of Rabh: "The Halakha according to R. Aqiba prevails." We have learned also in the matter of Passover sacrifices to the same effect, that every act of labor that can be performed on the day before Sabbath must not supersede the (due observance of) Sabbath, but the killing of the sacrifice, which cannot be done on the day before Sabbath, *does* supersede (the due observance of) Sabbath; and R. Jehudah declared also, in the name of Rabh, that the Halakha according to R. Aqiba prevails. It is

necessary that he should so instruct us at both times, because, if he instructed only as concerns circumcision, we might assume that where sacrifices for the Passover are concerned, the preparations which could have been made on the day before Sabbath, but were not, would supersede the due observance of the Sabbath; because failure to bring that sacrifice would involve the punishment of Karath (being cut off), while failure in circumcision would not involve Karath, if not performed at the right time; and, on the other hand, had he instructed us only as concerns sacrifices for the Passover, we might assume that the Sabbath could be violated if the acts necessary for circumcision which could have been performed on the day before, were not; for the reason, that the covenant regarding circumcision is mentioned thirteen times in the Thora,

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and is in consequence regarded as a thirteenfold commandment, which must under all circumstances be observed. Hence the necessity for the twofold instruction.

MISHNA: One may perform everything necessary for circumcision on the Sabbath, as circumcising, tearing open, sucking out the blood, applying a plaster or caraway seed. If the latter had not been ground before the Sabbath, one may masticate it with the teeth and then apply it. If one had not mixed wine with oil before the Sabbath, he may apply each separately. One must not prepare an actual bandage (on the Sabbath), but may apply an old piece of linen; and if such had not been prepared before the Sabbath, the circumciser may bring it with him tied around his finger and even from another court (yard).

GEMARA: Let us see: The Mishna enumerates all the acts necessary for the performance of the rite of circumcision; why, then, does it commence by saying, "everything necessary" for circumcision, and then proceed to detail "everything"? What act is there that has not been enumerated? The Mishna means to include what was taught us by the rabbis, as follows: "The circumciser, while engaged in finishing the circumcision, if noticing that excrescences still remain on the gland, whether they are of a nature which make the circumcision invalid or such as do not make it invalid, may remove them. But if he had already finished (and put up his instruments), if excrescences which make the circumcision invalid remain, he may remove them; but if they do not make the circumcision invalid, he must not remove them." (Hence by stating "everything that is necessary," etc., the Mishna means to include, that it is permitted even to remove excrescences which do not make the circumcision invalid, provided the operator had not already finished and put up his instruments.) Who is the Tana who holds, that if the circumciser had already finished he must not return and remove the excrescences? Said Rabha bar bar Hana in the name of R. Johanan, it was R. Ishmael the son of R. Johanan ben Berokah, as we have learned in a Boraita: "If the fourteenth of Nissan fall on a Sabbath, the animal used for the Passover sacrifice may be skinned only as far as the breast, so saith R. Ishmael the son of R. Johanan ben Berokah; but the sages say, that the whole animal may be skinned." (Now, we see that R. Ishmael holds, that after the work had been completed as far as was necessary no more may be done; hence he is the one who says, that the circumciser must not return to remove the excrescences.) This

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is not conclusive evidence! It may be that R. Ishmael in the case of the sacrifice holds, that because it is not necessary that the commandment be beautified. 1 But in the case of

circumcision, where the beautifying of the commandment is necessary (as is taught in Tract Sakkah), we might say, that R. Ishmael is of a different opinion; therefore the sages of Neherdai say, that the Tanas who hold, that after having finished the circumcision the operator must not commence anew, are in reality the rabbis who differ with R. Jose in Tract Menachoth concerning the law of the showbreads. [2](#)

The rabbis taught: "If excrescences remain on the gland after circumcision, and are such as make the circumcision invalid, they must be removed; and failure to do so involves the punishment of Karath." Who becomes liable to be punished by Karath? Said R. Kahana: "The circumciser." (If he performed the circumcision on Sabbath and did not finish it, he simply made a wound and did not perform a commandment; hence he becomes amenable to Karath. R. Papa opposed this: "The circumciser might say, 'I have performed one half of a commandment; come ye and complete the other half. Why should I be punished by Karath?' Therefore if the circumcision was performed on an adult who, excrescences which make it invalid having remained, will not permit them to be removed, he becomes amenable to Karath." This was opposed by R. Ashi: "As for an adult, what news does that impart to us? It is expressly stated [Genesis xvii. 14]: 'And any uncircumcised male, who circumciseth not the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people'? Therefore *he* says nay; it really refers to the circumciser, and only then if he came late on Sabbath, near twilight, and was told that it would be impossible to finish the operation before night, but persisted in performing it. If in consequence he left excrescences which make the circumcision invalid, he simply made a wound without performing a commandment, and thus he becomes amenable to Karath."

"*Sucking out the blood.*" R. Papa said: "The circumciser who does not suck out the wound places the child in danger, and should be discharged from office." Is this not self-evident?

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[[paragraph continues](#)] It certainly must be dangerous not to do this, or the Sabbath would not be violated in order to perform that duty! We might assume, that the blood having already come to the surface it would run out of itself, and hence by sucking it out the Sabbath is not violated; hence we are given to understand that this is not so: the blood is moved only by the suction, and the Sabbath is violated; but failure to do this would involve danger for the child and hence it is permitted, and is regarded the same as applying a plaster or caraway seeds (mentioned further on in the Mishna), the omission of which would also involve danger to the child.

"*Applying a plaster or caraway seeds.*" Abayi said: "My mother told me, that the most effective plaster for all ills is made of seven different kinds of fat and one kind of wax; and Rabba said: "The best plaster for all ills is one made of wax and resin." Rabha stated this publicly in a lecture in the city of Mehuzza, and two brothers the sons of Minyumi, who were physicians, tore their clothes in anger; for they had known of it and made capital out of the secret, until Rabha came and revealed it. Said Rabha to them: "I will tell you of something that I shall not proclaim publicly, and that is, Samuel said, that one who washes his face and does not dry it thoroughly, becomes afflicted with scabs, and the remedy for such is the fluid extract of mangold."

"*If the latter (caraway seeds) had not been ground before the Sabbath,*" etc. The rabbis taught: "In preparing for circumcision, such things as must not be done on Sabbath, may be done on a festival. One may grind the seeds and mix wine with oil." Asked Abayi of R. Joseph: Why may the caraway seeds be ground on a festival? because they may be utilized for cooking; then why

should it not be permitted to mix wine with oil on Sabbath? It may be utilized for a sick person who is not dangerously ill. As we have learned in a Boraitha: "Wine and oil must not be mixed for a sick person on the Sabbath," but R. Simeon ben Elazar in the name of R. Meir said, that it may be. Said R. Simeon ben Elazar: It once happened, that R. Meir was sick with stomach trouble, and we wanted to mix wine with oil for him (on the Sabbath), but he would not permit us to do this. So we asked him whether he wished his own words to be made void during his lifetime, and he answered: "Nay; it is allowed to mix wine with oil on Sabbath, but I cannot bring it over me to act contrary to the decree of my colleagues."

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[paragraph continues] Thus we see, that it is at all events allowed to mix wine with oil on the Sabbath. Why, then, does the Mishna say, that if this was not done on the day before the Sabbath, each should be applied separately? The difference lies therein, that when giving it to a sick person, it is merely mixed, but when used for a balm (at circumcision) it must be thoroughly stirred and requires a good deal of labor. Let it be given (applied) just mixed. That is just what the Mishna prescribes, each to be applied separately; *i.e.*, it should not be stirred.

Abayi said: "My mother told me, that if a child appears red all over it is a sign that the circulation is imperfect, and hence circumcision should be postponed until the circulation is perfect. If a child has a greenish cast it is a sign that the blood is impoverished, and circumcision should then be postponed until the blood is richer." This we have also learned in a Boraitha, as follows: "R. Nathan said: 'I once went to a city by the sea, and there met a woman whose first and second child both died in consequence of circumcision. The third child she brought to me, and I noticed that it was quite red. I told her to wait until the blood had settled and then circumcise it. She did so and then circumcised it, and the child lived. The child was then named after me, Nathan the Babylonian. At another time I came to the country of Cappadocia, and a woman came to me telling me that she had had two children circumcised, both of whom had died in consequence of circumcision. The third she brought to me, and I noticed that it had a greenish cast. I also noticed, that if it were circumcised no blood would flow; so I told her to wait until the circulation of the blood was in order. She did so, and the child was circumcised, and lived. She named it also after me, and called it Nathan the Babylonian.'"

MISHNA: One may bathe the child both before the circumcision as well as after (on Sabbath), by sprinkling water over it with the hand, but not by pouring water over it from a vessel. R. Eliezer ben Azariah says: One may bathe a child on the third day (after the circumcision), even if it fall on a Sabbath; for it is written [Genesis xxxiv. 25]: "And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore." On account of a doubtful child (a child about which there is a doubt whether it was born in the eighth month of its gestation, and is therefore not expected to live) or an hermaphrodite, the Sabbath (-rest) must not be desecrated. R. Jehudah permits this in the case of an hermaphrodite.

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GEMARA: The Mishna commences by saying: "One may bathe the child," and then goes on to say that it may only be sprinkled by hand. *That* is not bathing! Said Rabha: "The Mishna means to state, that a child may be bathed as usual on the day of circumcision, either before or after the performance of the rite; but on the third day after circumcision, if that day should be a Sabbath, one may only sprinkle the child by hand, and not bathe it in a vessel." R. Elazar ben Azariah,

however, said, that even if the third day fall on a Sabbath the child may be bathed as usual, as it is written [Gen. xxxiv. 15]: "And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore."

When R. Dimi came from Palestine, he said in the name of R. Elazar, that the Halakha prevails according to R. Elazar ben Azariah. In the West the question was discussed whether R. Elazar ben Azariah meant that the whole body of the child might be bathed, or whether the part circumcised only might be bathed. Said one of the rabbis, whose name was R. Jacob: "It seems to me that the whole body is meant, because if the wound only was meant, wherein does the wound caused by circumcision differ from any other wound? Any wound may be bathed on the Sabbath in water and oil, according to Rabh's opinion." This was opposed by R. Joseph: "Is it immaterial whether the water was warmed on the Sabbath or before the Sabbath?" This was again opposed by R. Dimi: "Whence dost thou know that the Mishna refers to water that was warmed on Sabbath, perhaps they (the sages and R. Elazar) differ even as to water warmed before the Sabbath set in?" Said Abayi: "I was prepared to answer this question myself, but R. Joseph preceded me and said, that of a necessity the water must have been warmed on Sabbath, because the precariousness of the child demanded it."

We were also taught, that when Rabhin came from Palestine, he said in the name of R. Abuha quoting R. Elazar, and according to another version, in the name of R. Abuha quoting R. Johanan, that the Halakha prevails according to R. Elazar ben Azariah, whether it be with water that was warmed on the Sabbath or before the Sabbath, or whether the whole body or only the circumcised part is concerned, because it would be dangerous not to bathe the child on that day.

It was said above in the name of Rabh, that every wound may be bathed on the Sabbath with water or oil; but Samuel said that water may be poured to one side of the wound and it may

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run down into the wound. An objection was made: "We have learned, that oil or water must not be put on a piece of cotton to place on a wound?" This is prohibited on account of the necessity to wring the piece of cotton. We have been taught by a Boraitha in accordance with Samuel's opinion; viz.: "Water must not be placed directly on the wound, but near it, that it may run down into the wound."

The rabbis taught: "Dry cotton and dry sponge, but not dry papyrus or dry cloth, may be placed on a wound." This presents a contradiction. Is not dry cotton the same as dry cloth? This is no difficulty. By cloth is meant new cloth, which must not be used, whereas old cloth may be. Said Abayi: "From this we see, that pieces of cloth heal a wound."

"*On account of a doubtful child or an hermaphrodite,*" etc. The rabbis taught: It is written [Leviticus xii. 3], "*his foreskin*"; so, on account of a foreskin which *must* be circumcised, the Sabbath may be violated, but on account of one which is doubtful the Sabbath must not be desecrated. Such also is the case with the circumcision of the foreskin of a true male, but not with that of an hermaphrodite. R. Jehudah, however, says, that the Sabbath may be violated on account of an hermaphrodite, and if the latter is not circumcised he becomes amenable to Karath. The Sabbath may also be violated on account of a child who was born at a certain time, but not on account of one who was born at twilight (and it is not known whether it was born on Sabbath or on the following day). It is not allowed to violate the Sabbath on account of a child

who was born without a foreskin, because the school of Shamai (only) contends, that even if a child is born without a foreskin, some blood must be drawn in commemoration of the covenant. The school of Hillel, however, says, "That is not necessary." Said R. Simeon ben Elazar: "The school of Hillel and the school of Shamai did not differ as to a child born without a foreskin; both agree that blood must be drawn from it, because the foreskin is not wholly missing, but is merely ingrown. They differ only as regards a proselyte who was born without a foreskin. When seeking conversion, the school of Shamai contends that blood of the covenant must be drawn from his gland, whereas the school of Hillel does not require this to be done.

The Master said: "On account of a doubtful child, the Sabbath must not be desecrated." What does he mean by "doubtful"? He means to say, what we learned from the rabbis;

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viz.: A child born in the seventh month may have the Sabbath violated for it, but if born in the eighth it must not. If it is doubtful whether it was born in the seventh or in the eighth month, the Sabbath must not be violated on its account. Not only this, but a child born in the eighth month must not even be carried on the Sabbath, because it is like a stone (and cannot live). It is allowed, however, for the mother to stoop down and suckle the child, because it is dangerous for the mother to carry too much milk.

We were taught that Rabh said (referring to a child born without a foreskin): The Halakha prevails according to the unknown Tana, while Samuel said, the Halakha prevails according to R. Simeon ben Elazar. R. Ada bar Ahabha had a child that was born without a foreskin; so he carried him to thirteen circumcisers, until the child was maimed and made impotent. Said he: "I deserve this fate, because I did not follow the dictum of Rabh." Said R. Na'hman to him: "Thou hast not only disobeyed Rabh, but also Samuel, for Samuel said, that a child born without a foreskin should be bled only if it was born on a week-day, but not on a Sabbath; and thy child was born on a Sabbath." R. Ada bar Ahabha, however, held, that he had only disobeyed Rabh, because, he was certain that the foreskin of a child is never wholly missing, but is merely ingrown and should be lanced even on Sabbath, as we were taught: Rabba said, that there is fear lest it be an ingrown foreskin; but R. Joseph said, that we were certain that it is so. Said R. Joseph: "Whence do I know this? From the following Boraitha: R. Elazar Hakappar said, that the school of Shamai and Hillel do not differ as to a child that is born without a foreskin. Both agree that the blood of the covenant must be drawn from the gland. The school of Shamai, however, contends that this may be done on the Sabbath, while the other holds that the Sabbath must not be desecrated on that account. If, then, R. Eliezer Hakappar holds, that they differ only as to the desecration of the Sabbath, the first Tana must hold, that both schools agree that the Sabbath may be desecrated on that account, and in consequence must also hold, that the foreskin is not wholly missing but is merely ingrown (hence I am certain that it is so)."

Whence do we know that the first Tana holds, as above, and not that both schools agree to the contrary; viz.: that the Sabbath must *not* be desecrated? If such would be the case, for what reason would Hakappar tell us that Beth Shamai holds

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that the Sabbath *should* be violated? The Halakha would not prevail thus? Nay! Perhaps R. Eliezer means to tell us, principally, that both schools hold, that if a child is born without a

foreskin on a week-day he must have his gland lanced (and incidentally mentions that if a difference existed, it was concerning the Sabbath).

R. Assi said: If a child be born of a woman who, after giving birth, must keep the law mentioned in Leviticus xii. 2, the child must be circumcised on the eighth day; but in a case where the woman need not keep the law mentioned (for instance, if the child was taken out through the sides by means of instruments), or if the woman was a Gentile on the day of giving birth to the child and became a convert to Judaism on the day following (and hence need not observe that law), the child need not be circumcised just on the eighth day (but at any time), as it is written [ibid. ibid.]: "If a woman have conceived seed, and born a male child: then shall she be unclean seven days," etc., etc.; [ibid. 3]: "And on the eighth day shall the flesh of his foreskin be circumcised." Said Abayi to him: "What about the generations before the Law was given? The women knew nothing of the law of uncleanness, and still the children had to be circumcised on the eighth day?" Answered R. Assi: "Since the Law was given, a new Halakha has been in force." Nay; this is not so! Have we not learned, that if a child was taken through the side of a woman, or if it had two foreskins, R. Huna and R. Hyya bar Rabh entertained different opinions as to whether it should be circumcised on the Sabbath or not? one claimed that it should, and the other that it should not. Now we see that they differed only as to a desecration of the Sabbath, but nothing is said about the non-necessity of the child's being circumcised on the eighth day? One is dependent upon the other. (He who holds that the Sabbath should be violated, does so because he also holds that the child must be circumcised on the eighth day; while he who holds that the Sabbath must not be violated, does so because he holds that such a child need not be circumcised on the eighth day.)

We have learned in a Boraitha: Rabbon Simeon ben Gamaliel said: Every human child that has lived for thirty days cannot be called a miscarriage, as is written [Numbers xviii. 16]: "And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem"; and any young of an animal that has attained the age of eight days, cannot be called a miscarriage, as it is written

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[paragraph continues] [Leviticus xxii. 27]: "When a bullock, or a sheep, or a goat is brought forth, then shall it remain seven days by its mother; and from the eighth day and henceforth shall it be favorably received," etc. And how is it, if the child has not yet attained the age of thirty days, is it still a doubtful child? How then is it allowed to circumcise any child on the Sabbath? (perhaps it is a miscarriage, and in that event it would be wrongful to inflict a wound in vain). Said R. Ada bar Ahabha: "We may do so at all events. If it is a regularly born child, the commandment is fulfilled; and if not, no wound is inflicted, but merely a piece of flesh is cut."

Now, then, we have learned in the above Boraitha, that if it be doubtful whether the child was born in the eighth or in the seventh month the Sabbath must not be violated on its account. Why should this be so? Let it be circumcised at all events. If then it proves to be a regularly born child, it was right to circumcise it; and if not, no labor was performed, but merely an incision in the flesh was made. Said Mar the son of Rabhina: "I and R. Nehumi bar Zacharias have explained it thus: "The child should be circumcised, but the injunction of the above Boraitha not to violate the Sabbath refers to the preparations which are necessary for circumcision, and this is in accordance with the decree of R. Eliezer.""

The schoolmen propounded a question: Do the rabbis differ with R. Simeon ben Gamaliel, or do

they not? If they do, does the Halakha remain according to R. Simeon, or not? Come and hear: R. Jehudah said in the name of Samuel, that the Halakha prevails according to R. Simeon ben Gamaliel. Now if he says that the Halakha prevails according to R. Simeon, there must be some who differ with R. Simeon.

Abayi said: "If a child was killed by accident, either through falling off a roof or through being killed by a lion before it had lived thirty days, all agree, that it must be presumed that it was a regularly born child. A point of difference arises concerning a child that had lived less than thirty days and during its lifetime was very weak and merely breathing. Some say that it was a miscarriage and others that it was a regularly born child." What difference does it make? It makes a difference where the levirate marriage 1 is concerned. (If the child is presumed to be a regularly born child, it exempts a man from the levirate

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marriage; but if it is presumed to be a miscarriage, it does not exempt a man.)

Let us see! It is said above, that if the child die by accident, all agree, that it is a regularly born child; yet we know that it happened to R. Papa, and R. Huna the son of R. Jehoshua, who were the guests of R. Idi bar Abin, that the latter prepared for them a calf, which was the third in birth of its mother, in the seventh day of its life, and they said to him: "If ye had waited to kill this calf until evening we would eat of it (because it would then have been in its eighth day); but now we will not eat of it." Hence we see, that although this was a healthy calf and met its death violently, they regarded it as doubtful whether it was a miscarriage or not. Hence say, rather, that on the contrary, if the child was weak and barely breathing prior to its death, all agree, that it must be presumed to be a miscarriage; but they differ as to a child which had met its death by accident. Some say, that it must be regarded as a regularly born child, and others, that it was a miscarriage.

The son of R. Dimi bar Joseph had a child born to him which died inside of thirty days, so he went into mourning for it. Said his father to him: "What wouldst thou? Eat delicacies 1 (that thou sittest in mourning)?" And he answered: "I am positive that the child was a regularly born child."

"*R. Jehudah permits this in the case of an hermaphrodite.*" Said R. Shezbi in the name of R. Hisda: "Not in every case does R. Jehudah hold an hermaphrodite to be a male; for if we would say that in all cases he considers him to be a male, the hermaphrodite would come under the law of estimations [Leviticus xxvii. 2-15], and in the Tract Erachim (estimations) we may learn, that according to R. Jehudah he is exempt. Why is he considered a male as concerns circumcision? because it is written [Genesis xvii. 10]: "Every man child among you shall be circumcised" (and "every" includes also hermaphrodites).

MISHNA: If one have two children to be circumcised, one after the Sabbath and the other on the Sabbath, and through forgetfulness circumcised the former on the Sabbath, he is culpable. If one of the children, however, was to be circumcised on the day before Sabbath and the other on the Sabbath, and through forgetfulness one had the former circumcised on the

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Sabbath, R. Eliezer declares him liable for a sin-offering and R. Jehoshua declares him free.

GEMARA: R. Huna learns the Mishna literally; in the first case, "he is culpable." R. Jehudah, however, learns to the contrary, that "he is *not* culpable." R. Huna learns "he is culpable," from what we have learned in a Boraitha; viz.: Said R. Simeon ben Elazar: "R. Eliezer and R. Jehoshua do not differ as to the case where a man has two children to be circumcised, one *after* the Sabbath and the other on the Sabbath, who through forgetfulness circumcised the former on Sabbath. They both declare him culpable. Their point of difference is, if one of the children was to have been circumcised on the day *before* Sabbath and the other on the Sabbath, and through forgetfulness the former was circumcised on the Sabbath, the former declares him culpable and the latter free. Both of them derived their decrees from the law concerning idolatry (all sin-offerings are based upon the sin-offerings incidental to the laws of idolatry). R. Eliezer holds, that as in idolatry so also it is with the Sabbath. If the commandment is, "Thou shalt not do so," and the man did so, he is liable for a sin-offering; and R. Jehoshua says: "Here it is different. The intention was to fulfil a commandment, and if accidentally it was not done he should be free."

And R. Jehuda learns the Mishna "not culpable," deriving his support from the following Boraitha: R. Meir said: "R. Eliezer and R. Jehoshua do not differ as to the case where a man has two children to be circumcised, one before the Sabbath and the other on the Sabbath, and through forgetfulness circumcised the former on Sabbath. They both declare him not culpable. Their point of difference is, if one of the children was to be circumcised on the day after Sabbath and the other on Sabbath, and through forgetfulness the former was circumcised on the Sabbath, R. Eliezer declares him culpable and R. Jehoshua declares him free. Both of them derived their decrees from the law concerning idolatry, as is said above."

MISHNA: A child may be (legally) circumcised on the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth day (after its birth), but neither before nor after. How so? Usually (it may be circumcised) on the eighth; one born at (the evening) twilight, on the ninth; one born at (the evening) twilight before Sabbath, on the tenth; if a feast day follows that Sabbath (it may be circumcised) on the eleventh; if both New Year feast-days follow that

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[paragraph continues] Sabbath, on the twelfth. A sick child must not be circumcised until it is thoroughly recovered.

GEMARA: Said Samuel: "After the fever has left the child, seven days should be allowed to elapse until the child get well, before the circumcision is performed." The schoolmen propounded a question: Must every day be of twenty-four hours' duration, or may the last of the seven days be counted if only a few hours have passed? Come and hear: Luda taught, the last day of the child's convalescence is more important than the day of its birth; for a child may be circumcised on the eighth day after its birth, even if only one hour of that day be passed; but the seventh day of its convalescence after a sickness must be one of fully twenty-four hours, before circumcision is permitted.

MISHNA: The following principal excrescences (knobs) make the circumcision invalid: Flesh that covers the larger part of the gland (of the organ). A man so circumcised must not (if he be a

priest) partake of Terumah (heave-offerings). If the child be very fleshy and (such imperfect circumcision) is caused thereby, the knobs must, for appearances' sake, be cut away. One who was circumcised without having had the skin torn open, is considered as uncircumcised.

GEMARA: R. Abbina in the name of R. Jeremiah bar Aba, quoting Rabh, said: "By stating 'flesh, that covers the larger part of the gland,' the Mishna means to say the 'upper part of the gland.'"

"If the child be very fleshy." We have learned in a Boraitha: "R. Simeon ben Gamaliel said: 'If the gland of the child be surrounded by a fleshy coating, and when erect the gland appears to be circumcised, the coating need not be cut away; but if it does not appear to be circumcised, the coating should be cut away.'

"One who was circumcised without having had the skin torn open," etc. The rabbis taught: The benediction to be pronounced by the circumciser (before performing the rite) should be as follows: "Praised art Thou, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who hast sanctified us with Thy commandments and hast commanded us the circumcision." The father of the child should pronounce the following benediction (in the interval between the circumcision and the tearing open of the skin): "Who hast sanctified us with Thy commandments and hast commanded us to enter the child into the covenant of Abraham our father." The

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bystanders must respond: "As he hath been entered into the covenant, so may he also be entered into the Law, into the bridal canopy, and into good deeds." The man who makes the benediction (over the goblet of wine) should say as follows: "Blessed art Thou, etc., who hast sanctified Thy favored one (meaning the patriarch Isaac, see Genesis xxii. 2) even in the womb (as it is written in Genesis xvii. 19: 'And I will establish my covenant with him'), who hath made a sign in his body, and hath sealed his children with the sign of the holy covenant. Therefore as a reward for this we pray Thee, Thou living God, to command that our children be saved from the grave because of the covenant that is sealed in our flesh. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who hast made the covenant." One who circumcises proselytes must say: "Blessed art Thou, etc., and hast commanded us the circumcision." The one who pronounces the benediction (over the goblet) must say: "Blessed art Thou, etc., and hast commanded us to circumcise the proselytes, and to draw from them blood of the covenant. For were it not for the blood of the covenant, heavens and earth would not exist, as it is written [Jeremiah xxxiii. 25]: 'If not my covenant by day and night, I would not have instituted the ordinances of heaven and earth.' Blessed be Thou, O Lord, who didst make the covenant." One who circumcises slaves pronounces the same prayer as is used for proselytes, inserting "slaves" where "proselytes" is used; and the one making the benediction does likewise.

Footnotes

[289:1](#) Promise stands for the Hebrew "Imrothecho," literally "thy word," and the word here referred to signifies the first commandment given to Abraham, which was the commandment of circumcision. Hence the deduction, that the commandment of circumcision was received with

joy.--*Rashi*.

[290:1](#) This seeming miracle is explained at length in our History of Amulets, pp. 24-26, and the gist of the explanation is as follows: The government referred to above and in power at the time of Elisha was Greek and not Roman, a fact demonstrated by the late Dr. Krochmal in his "Eyon tephilah." The Greeks, being at that time at war with the Egyptians, sought to destroy any ties of affinity existing between the Jews and the Egyptians, and to that end promulgated the decree prohibiting the wearing of Tephillin by the Jews, for those Tephillin bore close resemblance to the totaphoth (amulets) worn by the Egyptians. As a matter of fact, all amulets worn at that time by the different nations bore a symbol of their gods or idols, and was also a mark of nationality; hence the government in power desired that all its vassals wear its own amulets. The Talmud elsewhere relates that the Samaritans worshipped as their idol the form of a dove, for on Mount Gerizim, which is in Samaritan territory, an idol of that kind was found, which had been worshipped by them. Elisha knew of this, and, mindful of the fact that the Greeks were at peace with the Samaritans, carried along with him amulets in the form of doves' wings (which was the amulet of the Samaritans) in order to substitute them for his Tephillin, whenever the necessity for the deception arose. When closely pressed by the quæstor, and not considering the commandment of wearing Tephillin sufficiently important to sacrifice his life on their account, he, while endeavoring to escape, changed his Tephillin for the doves' wings, to which the quæstor could raise no objection.

[297:1](#) The Hebrew word "Veavvehu" is interpreted by the Talmud to signify "and I will beautify him," while in the translation of the Bible, by I. Leeser, it is translated, "I will sing his praise," and the reference made to the verse by the Talmud accepts the term in its Talmudical sense.

[297:2](#) This will be explained in the Tract Menachoth.

[304:1](#) Concerning the law of levirate marriage, see Deut. xxv. 5-11.

[305:1](#) It is a custom amongst Jews, that the first meal eaten by a mourner after the burial of his dead must be given him by friends or strangers, and usually some delicacy is brought to him.

[Next: Chapter XX: Regulations Concerning Certain Acts of Labor Which Must be Performed Differently on a Sabbath and on a Festival](#)