

33.

Saving Oneself with a Baptismal Certificate

Question: ON THE FIRST OF NISSAN 5702—MARCH 19, 1942—I was asked whether one could purchase a baptismal certificate which—if he could escape into the forest—would enable him to join the partisans.

Response: A BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATE HAS ONLY ONE connotation: that the owner of the certificate has, G-d forbid, forsaken his Creator and denied his people, the people G-d chose as His treasure. It is absolutely forbidden for a Jew to use one even though he believes wholeheartedly in the Rock of Israel and its Redeemer. He is commanded to sanctify G-d. I concluded that there was absolutely no way to allow using a baptismal certificate, even if one expected to save his life with it.

Halbi Ephraim Oshry:
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37.

Contraceptives in the Ghetto

Question: ANGUISHED BY THE DESPERATE SUFFERING THE Germans imposed upon us, I have put into writing some of the horrors they inflicted so that future generations will know what the defiling evildoers did to us. They darkened the world about us, locked the ghetto gates around us and proceeded to daily issue new and strange decrees aimed at annihilating us and eradicating the name Jew from the world.

On 20 Iyar 5702—May 7, 1942—the Germans issued an edict that if a Jewish woman were found pregnant they would immediately kill her. I was asked whether Jewish women in the ghetto could use contraceptive devices to avoid pregnancy and the concomitant risk of death.

Response: I RULED THAT BECAUSE THERE WAS AN ABSOLUTE danger to women's lives if the Germans discovered them pregnant, women could use contraceptive devices.

Performing a Caesarean Section on a Dead Woman

Question:

ONCE THIS EDICT REGARDING PREGNANCY WAS issued other problems came up. The very day the edict was issued, a pregnant Jewish woman passed by the ghetto hospital. A German noticed her swollen belly and shot her for violating the German order against reproduction. His bullet penetrated her heart and she fell dead on the spot.

Passersby immediately carried her into the hospital, thinking there might be a chance to save her or the baby. Since she had clearly been in her final weeks of pregnancy, a Jewish obstetrician was rushed over. He said that if surgery was performed immediately, the baby could be saved. Since I had witnessed this shocking murder and was present in the hospital, I was asked if, according to halacha, it was permissible to perform the Caesarean section. Since no one could be sure that the baby was still alive, was there a halachic concern with the desecration of the dead mother? In addition, in the remote possibility that the mother was still alive, cutting open her abdomen would surely kill her.

Response:

IT WAS CLEAR TO ME THAT WHEN A DOCTOR WHO knows his medicine rushes to operate minutes after a woman's death, declaring that the baby can be saved, one must listen to him because the issue at that moment is saving the baby's life.

Where saving a life is involved, we are not concerned with the desecration of the dead. In this case, the mother would be overjoyed if the desecration of her body meant her baby's life would be spared. I therefore ruled that the operation proceed as quickly as possible. As it states in the Talmud: "Whoever saves a

single Jewish life is credited with saving an entire world."

The baby, miraculously, was alive. However, to our great sorrow, our hopes were soon shattered. The cruel murderers, with typical mad German punctiliousness for keeping records of the living and dead, soon entered the hospital to record the name of the murdered woman in their book of the dead. When they found the baby alive, their savage fury was unleashed. One of the Germans grabbed the infant and cracked its skull against the wall of the hospital room. Woe unto the eyes that saw this! Charge this act to these cruel murderers and to their children and to their children's children! Let them be repaid for what they have done to us!