

Dr. Shields is a practicing physician in Toronto, Canada.

## THE MAKING OF *METZITZAH* — 1972

The precept requiring ritual circumcision is derived from a number of Biblical passages, such as "Every male shall be circumcized" (Gen. 17:10) and "On the eighth day, his foreskin shall be circumcized" (Levit. 12:3). Circumcision and abhorrence of the uncircumcized state (*Arel*) are mentioned or alluded to in other Pentateuchal passages,<sup>1</sup> as well as in Prophets and Scripture.<sup>2</sup> The *Mishnah* in the Babylonian Talmud (*Shabbat* 19:2) states:

We perform all the requirements of circumcision on the Sabbath: we circumcize (*mohalin*), uncover the corona (*poreyin*), suck the wound (*motzetzin*), and place a compress and cummin upon it (*venosnin aleha ispalanus vekammun*).

The rules of circumcision and the method of performing a ritual circumcision (*Berit Milah*) are derived from this *Mishnah* and the Talmudic discussion thereon. There are four separate acts to be performed.

The two Biblical sources mentioned above illustrate that only the acts of excision (*chittuch*) and uncovering of the corona (*priyah*) are of Mosaic origin. In fact, the Talmud (*Yebamoth* 71b) states that only the act of excision was commanded to Abraham, and the act of uncovering the corona was commanded to Joshua. Various commentators, however, argue that both of these aspects are in fact in the original command to Abraham.<sup>3</sup> The author of the text *Ta'amei Haminhagim*<sup>4</sup> states that the verse "let each man place his sword upon his thigh" (Exodus 32:17) is a source for deriving the requirements for these two acts in ritual circumcision.

None of the sources in the Bible mention the last two aspects listed in the *Mishnah* (namely sucking out the wound and ap-

## *The Making of Metzitzah — 1972*

plication of a bandage). Rabbi Chaim Attar, author of *Or Hachayim*, commenting on the passage in Leviticus 12:3 “his foreskin shall be circumcized,” interprets that this verse alludes to three aspects of the precept of circumcision, that is: excision of the foreskin, uncovering the corona and sucking out the wound (*metzitzah*).

The Talmud (*Yebamot* 71b) in discussing ritual circumcision, states quite explicitly:

Rabbah the son of Rab Isaac said in the name of Rav — “the act of stripping the membrane was not given to Abraham our father as it states — ‘At that time the Lord said to Joshua, take for yourself swords of flint and circumcize the children of Israel for the second time’” (*Joshua* 5:2) . . . And what do we learn from this? This teaches a comparison between the first step and final step of the ritual. Just as when the first step [excision] is not performed, the circumcision is invalid; so too if the latter [uncovering the corona] is not done the circumcision is not valid.

It appears from this quotation that only two aspects of the circumcision ritual (i.e., excision and uncovering the corona) are legally required, and that the absence of either invalidates the entire act. This view seems to be substantiated by the statement in another *Mishnah* (*Shabbat* 19:6):

If one circumcizes (*mol*) but does not uncover the corona (*velo pora*), the circumcision is considered invalid.

Further support for this contention is found in another quotation in the Talmud (*Shabbat* 123b):

Rav Papa said — “if a surgeon does not suck out the wound, it is dangerous and he is to be dismissed.” Is this not obvious that it is dangerous, since we may desecrate the *Shabbat* to do it? You might say that this blood is stored up, therefore he informs us that it is the result of a wound, and it is like the bandage and cummin. Just as when one does not apply a bandage and cummin there is danger, so here too if one does not suck the wound there is danger.

These Mishnaic and Talmudic passages apparently illustrate that even though there are four separate acts to the ritual of

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

circumcision, two are religious, legal requirements (excision and uncovering the corona) and two are medical necessities (sucking the wound and bandaging).

However, there are no instructions in the Bible, Mishnah or Talmud as to how this act of sucking or *Metzitzah* should be performed. *Metzitzah* appears to have been developed and instituted sometime between the time of the Judges (1200 B.C.E.) and the time of the Mishnah (second century C.E.), as a safety precaution. As such it was integrated into the ritual of circumcision together with the bandaging and the use of coagulant powders. Some authorities<sup>5</sup> claim that *Metzitzah* was instituted during the Maccabean period (approximately 200 B.C.E.).

In Jewish legal literature from the eleventh to eighteenth centuries, a few sources illustrate that *Metzitzah* was performed by actual direct oral suction. Jacob and Gershom Hagozer (12th century) in their classic text, *Zichron Brith Larishonim*, describe direct oral suction as the method for performing this act. They emphasize that *Metzitzah* is required for medical reasons, to prevent any danger to the child.<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Jacob Molin (Maharil) in his discussion of the time for blowing *shofar*, states that he personally performed a ritual circumcision immediately prior to blowing the *shofar*; and that he kept the blood of *Metzitzah* on his lips so that there would be direct symbolic contact between the covenant of Abraham (*Berith Avraham*) and the sacrifice of Isaac (*Akedat Yitzchak*).<sup>7</sup> Four centuries later, Rabbi Jacob Emden describes that *Metzitzah* must be done by direct oral suction. He ascribes various mystical reasons for the insistence on performing *Metzitzah* in this manner, but explains that "it is a danger to the child, if not done."<sup>8</sup>

Maimonides, in his *Mishneh Torah*,<sup>9</sup> and later Karo, in the *Shulkhan Arukh*,<sup>10</sup> in almost identical language, describe the procedure for performing a ritual circumcision. Neither, however, discuss how the act of *Metzitzah* should be performed. Both describe the other three aspects of the circumcision ritual in detail; but in discussing *Metzitzah* state very briefly:

One sucks out the circumcision until the blood comes from the distant places, so that the child shall not come to any danger.

Explicitly detailed are the implements to be used for the excision of the foreskin and uncovering the corona, and the manner in which these tasks are to be performed. Even the type of bandages and powder or medication for stopping the bleeding and for expediting healing are explained. Early commentators on Maimonides<sup>11</sup> and on Karo<sup>12</sup> fail to explain or comment on the manner of performing *Metzitzah*.

Rabbi Aaron Halevy, author of the *Sefer Hachinuch*<sup>13</sup> omits mention of the act of *Metzitzah* in his discussion of the commandment of circumcision. Rabbi Joseph Babad, author of *Minchat Chinuch*,<sup>14</sup> does not comment on this rather obvious omission.

The impetus for finding an alternative method for performing the act of *Metzitzah* was based principally upon the threat to prohibit the ritual of circumcision in its entirety by European governments and health authorities, about 150 years ago. There had been reports of a number of serious infections of infants. A *Mohel*, who had an oral infection, was implicated in one case, in that it was alleged that he had transmitted disease to some children when he performed *Metzitzah* by direct oral suction.<sup>15</sup>

Since then major controversy has developed about the manner of performing *Metzitzah*. Much has been written, and much ill-will has been developed over this aspect of ritual circumcision, that a polarization of sides has been produced. There are the retentionists who are vociferous in their plea for retention of direct oral suction as *the* method of *Metzitzah*. At the same time these individuals completely forget the intent of the act, which is to prevent harm or danger to the child. Other, less stringent, Rabbinic views have attempted to mould the act of *Metzitzah* into its proper hygienic and medical role. The former group insists that direct oral suction is the *only* acceptable manner, while the latter group discards this attitude as hazardous, foolhardy and irresponsible.

Those opposed to any alteration in the manner of performing *Metzitzah*, base their arguments on the responsum of Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger<sup>16</sup> whose thesis is developed around the meaning of the word *Metzitzah*. He contends the word must be interpreted to mean sucking and drawing. Rabbi Ettlinger states that "it is

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

obvious that Maimonides means direct oral suction. For in order to pull blood from distinct places one requires the strength of pulling, and this is not possible through hand pressure." After discarding, what he considers the irresponsibility of some medical authorities of his generation, he concludes that "one must not change a method which Jews have been doing for more than 2000 years." He is very insistent that the act of *Metzitzah* must, by definition, be suction, and by tradition, oral suction.

Rabbi Israel Lifshuetz, known as *Tiferet Yisroel*,<sup>17</sup> voices his displeasure with the medical opinion that wishes to eliminate *Metzitzah* entirely. He concludes that even though the Torah shows no preference as to how this act should be performed, the fact remains that Rabbinic authorities of the Middle Ages were insistent that it be done in the same manner as performed by their teachers, i.e., it should be done by sucking with the mouth.

Rabbi Abraham of Sochatchov, author of *Avnei Nezer*,<sup>18</sup> takes the view that the direct oral suction technique was proclaimed by God to Moses at Mount Sinai, and therefore may not be altered.

Those authorities who favored an alteration in the manner of performing *Metzitzah*, base their arguments on "change in human nature" (*nishtana ha-teva*), i.e., that direct oral suction has caused illness to both circumcizer and child. They contend that since *Metzitzah* was originally instituted as a safety precaution, it should be done in a manner which follows the intent of *Halakhah*, and at the same time is not in conflict with established medical standards of sanitation, hygiene and safety.

A responsum written in 1837 by Rabbi Moses Schreiber (*Chatam Sofer*) is a major source for support of this view. Rabbi Schreiber endorsed the use of a swab or sponge (*se'fog*) for *Metzitzah*, with the proviso that "expert medical opinion must be careful that they give truthful witness in stating that the *se'fog* performs the same function as oral suction."<sup>19</sup> Rabbi Moses Schick maintains that this opinion by his teacher was only given for a specific time, place and situation.<sup>20</sup> Rabbi Zvi Chayas of Vienna, a contemporary of Schick, disagrees with this interpretation.<sup>21</sup> Rabbi Eliezer Horowitz, author of *Yad Eliezer* in mid-nineteenth century Vienna, permitted only the

## *The Making of Metzitzah — 1972*

cotton swab technique for *Metzitzah*.<sup>22</sup> His contention was that this method in actual practice had proven to be better than direct oral suction. Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan (*Chofetz Chaim*) in his *Mishnah Brurah* notes that the swab-sponge (*se'fog*) may be permitted even on the Sabbath.<sup>23</sup>

Through the ingenuity of Rabbi Dr. Michael Cahn of Fulda, Italy, in the late nineteenth century, a glass cylindrical tube was devised that meets both the medical requirements of hygiene and lack of discomfort to the child, and the Jewish ritual requirements of drawing out blood from distant places by a minimal amount of oral suction force.<sup>24</sup>

Other methods suggested for the act of *Metzitzah* and used by ritual circumcizers in this century have included oral suction through the interposition of a sterile gauze pad, and the use of a manually operated rubber bulb attached to a glass cylinder.<sup>25</sup>

In spite of these alternatives, many authorities remain unimpressed and adamant in their opposition. Chaim Medini in his *Sedei Chemed* (1907)<sup>26</sup> quotes many authorities who argue for retention of direct oral suction for *Metzitzah*. Their opposition can be summarized as follows: that direct oral suction is part of the original commandment of ritual circumcision as enunciated at Sinai and cannot be altered (in spite of medical opinion to the possible hazards); that direct oral suction is safer than any other method that has been suggested and has some curative value; that no Jewish child has ever died because of any orally-transmitted infection by *Metzitzah* (if this infection did ever occur); that altering the method of performing *Metzitzah* would only be one concession to those who would abolish the entire ritual of circumcision; and that the condition written by the *Chatam Sofer* (vide supra) in his Responsum has been defied by those seeking change. The opinion of Rabbi David Aryeh of Rotterdam, quoted by Medini, explains that the Talmud (*Shabbat* 123b) purposely uses the word *Umman* (professional or surgeon) rather than the word *Mohel* (circumcizer). He suggests that the intent of the Talmud was to warn us against those experts and professionals who would alter the method of *Metzitzah*, and these are the ones that Rav Papa insists should be dismissed from performing ritual circumcisions.

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

Rabbi Joseph Rosen (the Rogachover Rebbe), author of *Tsofnas Pa'aneach*, explains that *Metzitzah* requires an active physical force for removing blood,<sup>27</sup> a commandment which must mean that this removal of blood be done by the body of the circumcizer (i.e., by the force of oral suction) and not through any hand-operated apparatus, in order for it to be ritually valid.

Rabbi Yechiel Michael Epstein, author of the *Arukh Ha-shulkhan*, prohibits the use of a *se'fog* (swab or sponge), and insists that *Metzitzah* be done by oral suction,<sup>28</sup> as this has been the traditional custom. He also states that *Metzitzah* is not part of the actual commandment of *Milah*, but is necessary for health reasons only.<sup>29</sup> For this reason he instructs the *Mohel* to ensure that his oral cavity is perfectly clean and healthy.

Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapira in his text of 1921 frowns upon any changes.<sup>30</sup> His claim is that the direct oral suction method for *Metzitzah* has its source in Tradition and Mysticism (*Kabbalah*) and this precludes any alteration in technique.

In more recent times Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak Hacohen Kook<sup>31</sup> and his successor Rabbi Isaac Halevy Herzog<sup>32</sup> recognize that oral suction through a sterilized glass cylinder is the best and safest method for performing *Metzitzah*.

To the present time, a divergence of opinion by authoritative Orthodox Rabbis continues to exist. One extreme view insists that actual direct oral suction is the only acceptable method with which to perform *Metzitzah*. The opposite extreme opinion states that direct oral suction must be prohibited, and that *Metzitzah* be accomplished by suction through a cylindrical piece of apparatus. The moderate view agrees that oral suction through the interposition of a sterilized piece of glass tubing is the preferred method for performing *Metzitzah*, but refuses to declare a public prohibition against actual direct oral suction.

The word *metzitzah* has three possible meanings: To suck, to compress, or to drain.<sup>33</sup> The specific meaning depends on whether the Hebrew root of the word *metzitzah* is *matzah* (squeeze) or *matzatz* (suck). The Biblical sources for this are:

1. "And he squeezed (*Vayametz*) dew out of the fleece," (Judges 6:38);

## The Making of Metzitzah — 1972

2. "You drank the cup, even the cup of staggering, and you drained it (*Matzith*)" (Isaiah 51:17); and
3. "So that you may suck (*Tamatsu*) with delight of the abundance of her glory" (Isaiah 66:11).

Furthermore, the Hebrew prefix "b" can have several meanings and interpretations depending on the situation: in, at, on, to, when, against, with, through, in exchange for, in a manner, and because of.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the phrase *metzitzah be'peh* may have several meanings. In fact by various permutations and combinations at least 33 different definitions can be produced. The simple translation "direct oral suction" is only one definition. The traditional custom over the centuries that has been transmitted from generation to generation has been "direct oral suction." However, it is quite logical to conclude that *metzitzah be'peh* could mean suction *with* or *by* the mouth as well as *into* the mouth. The following facts should be considered:

- a) Infection can be transmitted by direct oral suction, and therefore on the general principle of danger to life (*pikuach nefesh*), this practice should be abandoned.
- b) oral suction through the intermediary of a sterilized cylindrical apparatus (glass or plastic) may be more efficient for "drawing blood from distant places," is probably more sanitary and therefore an enhancement of the act of *Metzitzah*; and
- c) the use of a special instrument, reserved solely for *Metzitzah* might add more honour and prestige to this act.

The commandment of circumcision (*mitzvat milah*) was not given to the Jews for hygienic purposes. The commandment was given to Abraham to transmit to his offspring as a sign of the covenant (*Os Brith*) between man and God — as a brand on the flesh of each Jew. *Milah* is necessary to perfect the physical body of each Jewish male, as it is written: "Go before Me and be perfect" (Genesis 17:1). Ritual circumcision is also considered to be an act of saving life (*pikuach nefesh*), viz: Tractate *Shabbat* 132a<sup>35</sup> and Tractate *Yoma* 85b.<sup>36</sup> It seems fair to conclude that the ritual of circumcision should be performed in a manner that would have the least chance of causing any physical harm. Since the *Halakhah* is deliberate in listing those

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

conditions when circumcision *must* be postponed (e.g., fever, illness, jaundice, etc.) including abnormalities for which medical science cannot demonstrate it to be contra-indicated (e.g., physiological jaundice of the newborn which persists in breast-fed babies), then the *Halakhah* ought to insist that the surgical aspect of the ritual be performed in as sterile a manner as possible.

*Metzitzah* was originally performed by direct oral suction, as it was probably found to be the safest method available at that time. It is also true that tubes (*kanneh* or *shifoforet*) were in use even in Talmudic times for suction. But quite likely experience demonstrated that these crude, unsanitary pieces of apparatus were less beneficial than direct oral suction, i.e., direct oral suction caused less infection than suction through unsterilized tubes (disinfection or sterilization were unknown).

It is true that *Metzitzah* has been performed by direct oral suction for centuries, and it is conceded that oral suction, as a requirement for *Metzitzah*, was enunciated at Mount Sinai. (Although it has been argued that there is no proof that *Metzitzah* is of Mosaic origin.<sup>37</sup>) But, if we are to accept the opinions of those who propose these statements, as valid arguments against permitting any change, then, based on this sort of argument we should return to the use of a sharp flint for the excision of the foreskin as it is written:

And Zipporah took a flint and circumcized her son (Exod. 4:25); and Take for yourself swords of flint and circumcize the Children of Israel for the second time (Joshua 4:2).

The *Halakhah* gives preference to the use of a metal cutting implement for this aspect of the ritual:

It is best to circumcize with a metal implement, either a knife or a scissors. The custom is to use a knife.<sup>38</sup>

And sharp metal instruments were available during the time of Noah:

And Zillah bore Tubal-Cain, the father of every sharpener and of

## *The Making of Metzitzah — 1972*

every artificer in copper and iron (Genesis 4:22).

Almost universally a metal guard is used to protect the glans penis during the excision. This was not part of the original command, but is used to prevent maiming the shaft of the penis (*croos shafcha*).

Similarly other arguments quoted by Medini in *Sedei Chemed* can be disputed. The statement attributed to Rabbi David Aryeh of Rotterdam (vide supra) is an effective indictment of those who would eliminate *Metzitzah* entirely. It is an excellent defense for retention of *Metzitzah* but not for retention of the direct oral suction technique. The Talmud states (*Shabbat* 123b) that the *Umman* who does not perform *Metzitzah* at all, must be dismissed. It does not state the *Umman* who alters the way of performing *Metzitzah*.

We must not continue to be obstinate in objecting to valid improvement! None of the commandments given to man were intended to be either physically or spiritually harmful. We must not tempt fate when we are aware of potential danger; nor should we rely on the idiom: "the Lord watches over the simpletons" (Psalms 117:6).

With the accumulation of all branches of knowledge, we must utilize all the information that is available to demonstrate our faith in God and observance of His commandments — providing that we do not in any way remove the intent or purpose of the *Halakhah*, nor refute the eternal validity and irrevocability of the *Torah* laws.

The permanence of Torah is proven by its ability to be interpreted by qualified men in the light of scientific achievement, and the truth of its message by its applicability in each generation. Without this potential the Torah would not be the valid and significant document it is.

The intent of this article is not to seek abolition of *Metzitzah* from the ritual circumcision. *Metzitzah* is an integral part of this ritual, but unlike the excision of the foreskin (*chittuch*) and uncovering the corona (*priyah*) it is not a separate commandment. *Metzitzah* is not part of the essential substance (*ik-kur*) of ritual circumcision,<sup>39</sup> but since without it there is poten-

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

tial danger to the infant, then even the Sabbath laws are suspended to permit it to be done. If the *chittuch* or *priyah* are not done, then the entire circumcision is religiously invalid and must be repeated. If the *Metzitzah* is omitted, then the *Mohel* must be dismissed, but the *Milah* is considered ritually valid.<sup>40</sup>

We should re-examine the purpose of *Metzitzah* and place it in its proper perspective. *Metzitzah* should be performed in a manner consistent with the intent of the *Halakhah* — with a minimum of trauma and/or other pathological consequences. Those who encourage and insist on direct oral suction should be made aware of the potential danger inherent in this technique, and the practice abandoned.

### NOTES

1. Genesis 17:1-14, and 23-27 — original commandment to Abraham to perform circumcision. See also Genesis 21:4; Genesis 21:8; Genesis 34:14-25; Genesis 50:23; Exodus 4:24-26; Exodus 12:44; Exodus 12:48; Exodus 32:27; Numbers 23:10; Numbers 24:11-12.

2. Joshua 52:28; Judges 14:3; Samuel 17:26; Kings I 19:10; Jeremiah 9:24; Jeremiah 33:25; Ezekiel 16:6; Psalms 65:5; Psalms 105:8; Psalms 119:162; Psalms 119:165; Psalms 119:166; Psalms 148:6; Nehemiah 9:8; See also: Kohn, S.: *Os Brith*, Krakau 1903, pp. 3-6.

3. *Midrash Rabbah* on Genesis 17:13 commenting on the phrase "he shall be circumcized," (*Himol Yimol*) explains that these two words refer to excision of the foreskin and uncovering the glans, to circumcision and shreds that may remain, and that the circumcizer must be himself circumcized.

4. *Sefer Ta'amei Haminhagim*—Paragraph 916.

5. Jacobovitz, I.—*Jewish Medical Ethics*, New York: Bloch, 1962, p. 337.

6. Hagozer, J. & G.—*Zichron Brith Larishonim*, ed. A. J. Glassberg, Berlin: 1892, pp. 20 and 116.

7. *Mishna Berurah: Hilkhos Rosh Hashana* 1084:4 and commentary by Yehuda Ashkenazi (*Be'er Hetev*) and Chaim Mordechai Margolis (*Shaarei Teshuvah*).

8. Emden, J.—*Migdal Oz, Laws of Milah*, Division 9, sub-section 17:3: "After he uncovers the corona he should immediately put the organ into his mouth: and it is necessary to suck until he has estimated that blood has been removed from other places in the child's body (since he swallowed such blood while in utero) and any *Mohel* who does not perform *Metzitzah* correctly should be dismissed. Therefore one performs *Metzitzah* even on the *Shabbat*, because it is a danger to the child if not done."

9. Maimonides, M.—*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Mila*, 2:2.

## The Making of Metzitzah — 1972

10. Karo, J.—*Shulkhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, Hilkhoh Mila*, 264:3.
11. Karo, Joseph in *Kesef Mishne* (15th century); Meir Hacoheh in *Hagahuth Maimuni* (13th century).
12. Isserles, Moses (*Rema*) 16th century), Shabatta Hacoheh (Schach), 17th century; David Halevy (*Turai Zahav*) (17th century); Elijah of Vilna (*Biur Hagro*), (18th century).
13. Halevy, Aaron—*Sefer Hachinuch* (2nd commandment).
14. Babad, Joseph—*Minchath Chinuch* — 2nd commandment discussion.
15. Kohn, S.—*Os Brith*, Krakau 1903, p. 198. See also Zimmels, H. J.—*Magicians, Theologians and Doctors*, London: 1952, p. 163.
16. Ettlinger, J.—*Binyan Zion, Articles* 23 and 24, 1846.
17. Lifschuetz, I.—*Tiferet Yisrael, Mishnah Shabbat*, 19:2.
18. Abraham of Sochatchov—*Avnei Nezer, Yoreh Deah*, Part I, art. 338.
19. Translation of the Responsum of the *Chatam Sofer*, written to Rabbi Eliezer Horowitz, author of *Yad Eliezer* on 20 Shevat, 1837:

—You have written correctly that there is no mention that *Metzitzah* must be done actually by mouth, except by the Cabbalists who say that it must be done by the mouth and lips. We have no right to rely on mysticism when there is the possibility of the slightest danger. It should be noted that the Hebrew root of “*Mitz*” and “*Motzatz*” are identical, viz. Proverbs 30 and Judges 6:38. In both instances *Rashi* explains the word as squeezing or pressing—to remove something with strength. Therefore it is only necessary for us to remove blood from distant places, no matter how it is done. We must trust experts to let us know which method is as effective as sucking with the lips. I also maintain that even if the Talmud had expressly stated “*Metzitzah* by mouth,” in any case, since this is not part of the preparations of *Milah*, but is only done for danger, and one who circumcizes and removes the membrane over the corona has completed the commandment, and the child may eat from the Priestly portion (*Terumah*) and his father may make the Passover sacrifice; except that the child is in danger until this act is performed, to remove blood from distant places. In the Chapter in Tractate *Shabbat*, Rav Papa compares *Metzitzah* to the bandage or cummin, i.e. that they are necessary to prevent danger. And nowadays we do not use the same type of bandage or cummin as was described in Talmudic times. This proves that since this is done for medical reasons, one should not be particular if doctors have found other suitable medications. And this applies also to *Metzitzah* — even had the *Mishnah* stated “direct oral suction,” nevertheless we can use any similar technique. However, the expert doctors should be warned to testify truthfully as to whether the *Se’foga* (sponge or swab) is as effective as suction by mouth, and besides this we have no need to be concerned — according to my opinion.

20. Maharam Schick: *Yoreh Deah*, No. 244.
21. Responsa of Rabbi Zvi Chayas, No. 60 (excerpt): “. . . and therefore anything that helps to remove danger like *Metzitzah* is acceptable.” This is found at the end of the pamphlet “*Metzitzah*” written in 1960 in London by

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

Dr. Bernard Homa.

22. Horowitz, Eliezer: *Yad Eliezer*, No. 55, Vienna 1870.
23. *Mishna Berurah: Hilkhoh Shabbat* 331:1 and comments in *Biur Halacha*.
24. Briskin, Rabbi Joshua: *Sefer Tov Yehoshua*, Part I, pp. 137 ff. Warsaw: 1895.
25. Levy, Dr. Jacob—*NOAM*, Vol. 9, pp. 285 ff.; 1966.
26. Medini, Chaim—*Sedei Chemed*, Vol. 8, Chap. 3, pp. 134 ff.; 1907.
27. Rosen, J.—*Tsofnath Pa'aneach*, Responsa, Part 2, No. 152.
28. Epstein, Y. M.—*Arukh Hashulkhan, Yoreh Deah, Hilkhoh Milah*, 264:19, 20.
29. Epstein, Y. M.—*Arukh Hashulkhan, Yoreh Deah, Hilkhoh Milah*, 261:5, 265:16, 266:5.
30. Shapira, C. E.—*Ot Chaim V'shalom, Hilkhoh Milah*, 1921, pp. 288 ff.
31. *Da'as Kohen: Yoreh Deah*, 142.
32. Rabbi Isaac Halevy Herzog, in a letter to Dr. B. Homa in 1955 (excerpt):  
... In my humble opinion it is as clear as the midday sun, that *Metzitzah* forms no part whatsoever of the actual precept of *Milah* . . . It has already been generally agreed that *Metzitzah* performed by means of an apparatus such as mentioned, is as effective as *Metzitzah* done direct by mouth. And since, in the opinion of experts, there is potential danger to the child from direct use of the mouth and it is necessary to exercise care, it follows therefore that anyone who insists that *Metzitzah* must be done by mouth only, is in my opinion, mistaken and is leading others astray in a matter where there is a possibility of danger.
33. Jastrow, M.—*Dictionary on the Talmud*, Pardes Press, 1950.
34. Harkavy, A.—*Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, p. 48, 1914.
35. Tractate *Shabbat*, 132a—From where do we learn that saving a life transcends the Sabbath laws? Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria said — “Just as is the case of *Milah* which affects only one of the limbs of man, the *Shabbat* laws are suspended, so in the case of saving life the Sabbath laws are suspended.”
36. Tractate *Yuma*, 85b—Rabbi Elazar said: “Since in the case of *Milah* which affects only one of the 248 human organs, the Sabbath laws are suspended, therefore if there is danger to a person's entire body, it is true that the Sabbath laws are suspended.” Rashi comments on this: “*Milah* is a repair of one of man's organs and therefore the Sabbath laws are suspended; since if *Milah* is not performed one is punishable with ‘*Koreth*’ (Excommunication).”
37. Kohn, S.—*Os Brith*, Krakau: 1903, p. 213.
38. Karo, J.—*Shulkhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, Hilkhoh Milah*, 264:2.
39. Felder, G.—*Yesodei Yeshurun*, Vol. 4, p. 177; 1962. This view, that *Metzitzah* is not part of the requirements of *Milah*, but is necessary solely for health reasons, is maintained by many authorities including the *Chatam Sofer* (see Note 20), Epstein (see Note 29), and Herzog (see Note 33). Dr. S. Kohn (see Note 38), on pp. 173 ff. of his *Os Brith*, has a complete record of these and other similar opinions on the health hazard of direct oral suction.
40. Abraham of Sochatchov: *Avnei Nezer* (see Note 19).