



tidbits for bris milah

Klal
Govoah
In Memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz z"l

Vach Nacht

In many Ashkenazic communities, the night before the Bris is referred to as the *Vach Nact* (night of the vigil). In many communities, children gather to recite *Kerias Shema* and *Hamalach Hagoel* at the baby's side as a means of bringing Divine protection to the child. It is customary to distribute sweets to the children. The *Eliyahu Rabbah* (551:26) mentions the practice of serving a *seudas mitzvah* the night before the bris. Many *chassidim* follow this *minhag* and host a *Vach Nacht Seudah*. *Sefardim* host a *Brit Yitzchak*, where a *minyán* gathers to recite select passages from the *Zohar* and refreshments are served.

There is an additional custom on the night before the Bris for the baby's father to stay up at home and learn Torah (based on *Zohar*, *Lech Lecha*). This is to protect the child from being harmed by the Satan who wishes to stop the performance of the impending mitzvah (*Mateh Moshe*).

Bris Milah

A father has a *mitzvah d'orayso* to circumcise his son. This obligation is fulfilled through the *mohel* who acts as the father's agent. The baby's father stands by the *mohel* during the *milah* signifying that the action is being done on his behalf (some have the custom that the father hands the knife to the *mohel* at the time of the *milah*).

The Bris is done on the eighth day from the birth; the day of birth is counted as day one, even if the birth occurred close to day's end (*shekiya*). One should be cognizant of the exact time of the child's birth; a child born around the time of *bein hashmashos* - from *shekiya* until 72 minutes after *shekiya* - may have a questionable birthdate. This creates a complex scenario, especially when the dates involve *Shabbos* or *Yom Tov* when a *sofek bris* may not be held. A *posek* must be consulted. (Some allow a *sofek bris* to take place on *Yom Tov Sheni*.)

The baby is examined in the days leading up to the bris to ensure it is in good health. An infant who becomes unwell before the *milah* may need to wait an additional 7 full days (i.e. 168 hrs.) following full recovery depending on the scope of the ailment.

The Bris must take place during the daytime (from *neitz* until *shekiya*) and should ideally take place

in the morning (before *chatzos*), as we perform mitzvos at the first opportunity (*z'rizin makdimin lemitzvos*). Even in the case of a bris *shelo b'zmano* (not on the eighth day) one should perform the *milah* as early in the day as possible. In certain circumstances, a bris may be delayed until later in the day (e.g. in order to honor a more prestigious *Sandek* or grandparents who are traveling).

A bris may take place on *Shabbos* or *Yom Tov* only if it is definitely the eighth day (*bris b'zmano*). A child delivered through cesarean section is not circumcised on *Shabbos*. Many *Poskim* rule that a child conceived via *IVF* may be circumcised on *Shabbos*. Some do not perform a *milah she'lo b'zmano* (a bris past the eighth day) on Thursday or Friday either.

Naming

See *Tidbits on Childbirth*

Kibudim

The following is a general list of possible honors at a Bris: *Kvatter*, *Chayka*, *Kisei Shel Eliyahu*, *Mei'al Hakisei*, *Sandek*, *Min Hasandek*, *Berachos*, *Amida L'Brachos*, *Kerias Shem*, *Amida L'Krias Shem*.

Mohel. Once one uses a *mohel* for one child he should continue to use that *mohel* for any future children if feasible.

Sandekaus is the honor of holding the baby during the circumcision and is considered the most significant honor. Ideally, this honor is given to a pious individual. Some advise that the grandparents be given precedence for this honor. One should not bestow the honor to serve as *Sandek* to the same individual for more than one of his children (this honor is compared to the *avodas haketores* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, which was carefully allocated to ensure every *kohen* had an opportunity as it is a major *segulah*). Some say that holding the baby for the *kibbudim* of *Amida L'Brachos* and *Amida L'Krias Shem* are also a form of *sandekaus* (also known as *Sandek M'umad*, standing *Sandek*). Some say that all forms of *sandekaus* are the more prestigious of the various honors while some suggest that *Kisei Shel Eliyahu* is second in prestige to *Sandek*. The *kibbudim* of

Berachos and *Kerias Shem* are active roles and are attributed with prestige as well.

Kvatter is the honor of bringing the child in for the bris. This is generally done by a couple, where a woman hands the baby on a decorated pillow to a man to bring in for the ceremony. This honor is considered a significant *segulah* and is often given to a couple who has not yet merited children of their own. Some say that one who is visibly pregnant should not perform the honor. (Some say the word *kvatter*, stems from *kutar* or *ketores*, to which this honor of *kvatter* is compared to.)

It is advisable to have these honors arranged prior to the ceremony if possible, in order to avoid causing the crowd to wait unnecessarily (*tircha d'tzibbura*) and to enable the father to focus on the great mitzvah before him.

The *minhag* is for the honorees to wear a tallis during their *kibbud*. Although a tallis is usually not worn on *Tisha B'av* morning, some say that certain bris participants may still wear a tallis.

The Bris

Aside from the *Sandek*, all those in attendance should remain standing throughout the ceremony.

The *Kvatterin* hands the baby to the *Kvatter*. The *mohel* announces *Baruch Habah*. The *mohel* recites several *pesukim*. In many communities, some individuals are honored with a "Chayka" to hold the child and bring him one step closer to the ceremony.

The *Kisei shel Eliyahu*, a chair dedicated for *Eliyahu Hanavi*, should be next to the *Sandek's* chair. An individual is honored with *Kisei Shel Eliyahu*, and places the child on the chair. The *mohel* recites *pesukim* associated with *Eliyahu Hanavi*.

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Another person is honored with *Mei'al haKisei*, to take the child from the chair (this is optional). Alternatively the original honoree of *Kisei Shel Eliyahu* or the father picks up the baby).

The father takes the baby and places him on the lap of the *Sandek*, who will hold the child during the actual *milah*. Some cover the child's forehead with the tallis worn by the *sandek*.

Immediately preceding the incision, the mohel recites a berachah of "*Al hamilah*", which is followed immediately by the father's berachah of "*L'hachniso b'vrisei shel Avraham Avinu*". The assembled respond to the father's berachah with "*Amen, K'sheim shenichnas l'bris kein yikaneis l'Torah l'chuppah ul'maasim tovim*".

Sefardim, and some Ashkenazim, have the minhag to recite a *shehecheyanu* at the milah. The common minhag amongst *Ashkenazim* outside of Eretz Yisrael is not to recite a *shehecheyanu*. An Ashkenazi from Eretz Yisrael who finds himself outside of Eretz Yisrael should consult a Rav.

The honoree for *Min Hasandek* takes the baby from the *Sandek* (this kibbud is optional and may be skipped). The next honoree of *Amida L'brachos* holds the baby while the one who was honored with the *Berachos* takes a cup of wine and makes a berachah of "*borei pri hagafen*" followed by the berachah of "*Asher kiddaish yedid m'beten*".

Many have the honoree of *Berachos* conduct the *Kerias Shem* as well. Similarly, some honor one individual with *Amida L'Brachos* and *Amida L'Krias Shem*. The honoree for *Amida L'krias Shem* holds the child while the honoree for *Kerias Shem* says the passage of "*Elokeinu*" and names the child. He then tastes a small amount of wine. When the words "*v'omar lach b'damayich chayi*" are said, the mohel places a drop of wine in the baby's mouth. These words are repeated aloud in unison by the attendees as well. The mohel recites a *Mi Shebeirach* for the well-being of the child. The ceremony commences with *Aleinu* and *Kaddish Yasom*.

Seudas Mitzvah

One should make a *Seudas Mitzvah* in honor of the bris. Some do so at the actual time and place of the bris, while others do so later in the day. On a fast day, the seuda is held at night instead. While some write that ideally one should serve meat, the prevalent minhag is to serve fish. Bread and wine should be served.

Yom Layabasha is sung during the Seudah. *Birkas Hamazon* is recited over a cup of wine, with *Nodeh L'shimchah* added in the *zimun*. Six *Harachamans* are apportioned among honorees to recite.

Other Info

The minhag is to merely *inform* people of the bris and not to formally invite them, as declining an invitation to a *seudas mitzvah* can render one excommunicated (*b'nidui*) (Pischei Teshuvah 265:18).

Tachanun is omitted when a bris will take place in the same location. In some communities, on a taanis, *selichos* are shortened. *Avinu Malkeinu* is recited. Tachanun is also omitted if the father, mohel or Sandek are present, even if the bris will take place elsewhere. Additionally, Av Harachamim is omitted on Shabbos except during the sefirah mourning period. This is because the day of the bris is considered a Yom Tov for these *Baalei Bris*. According to some, if the day is a *Taanis mukdam* (a 'pushed ahead' fast, as may happen on Taanis Esther) or a *Taanis nidcheh* (a delayed fast day, as may happen on the 17th of Tammuz), the *Baalei Bris* also do not fast. They may also shave during the Sefirah mourning period, as well as during the Three Weeks up until the week of Tisha B'av.

The baby is dressed in a nice outfit in honor of the mitzvah. Some say the child's head should be covered with a head covering. The parents, sandek, mohel should wear Shabbos clothing in honor of the mitzvah. They may do so even during the nine days (some extend this to the kvatterin - the women kvatter - as well).

As both the mitzvah of tefillin and the mitzvah of milah are called an "*ois*" (a "sign"), there is a minhag for all in attendance to keep the tefillin on through the ceremony. Some write that on Rosh Chodesh, the father and *Sandek* should put their tefillin back on following *mussaf* prior to the bris.

Some have the minhag to light candles at the milah. Many ensure to have candles at the seuda as well. The number of candles varies by custom.

It is said that while the circumcised child is crying it is an auspicious time for tefillah. Some say Tehillim Chapter 6. Many allow one to daven for personal needs at this time even on the Shabbos (when personal requests are usually not made).

There are three parts to the actual circumcision: *Milah*, the actual cutting, *Periah*, folding back the foreskin, and *Metzitza*, removing blood from the area.

The minhag is to bury the skin of the *Orla* in soil. Some say this is based on the Midrash which states that Billam viewed the Jewish nation countless *orlahs* buried in the sands of the Midbar. Others say that the *orlah* is reminiscent of the *nachash* snake which causes sin, who is cursed to dwell in soil.

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**Ira Zlotowitz | 917.597.2197
iraz@gpacency.com**

**Ahron Dicker | 732.581.5830
adicker@klalgovoah.org**

