

Bris Milah: The Covenant

BRIS MILAH, RITUAL CIRCUMCISION, IS ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL PRECEPTS OF THE JEWISH RELIGION. IT IS REFERRED TO IN THE TORAH AS THE COVENANT OF ABRAHAM, SINCE OUR FOREFATHER ABRAHAM WAS THE FIRST TO



RECEIVE THE COMMANDMENT CONCERNING CIRCUMCISION FROM G-D. “AND HE THAT IS EIGHT DAYS OLD SHALL BE CIRCUMCISED AMONG YOU, EVERY MALE THROUGHOUT YOUR GENERATIONS” (GENESIS 17:12).

MORE THAN ANY OTHER JEWISH RITUAL, BRIS MILAH IS AN EXPRESSION OF JEWISH IDENTITY. ITS FULFILLMENT SYMBOLIZES AN AFFIRMATION OF FAITH IN ABRAHAM’S ANCIENT, AND STILL VIBRANT, COVENANT WITH G-D. THROUGH RITUAL CIRCUMCISION, PARENTS CREATE WITH THEIR PRECIOUS CHILD YET ANOTHER LINK IN THE CONTINUING CHAIN OF OUR PEOPLE THAT HAS PROUDLY SURVIVED THE CHALLENGES TO ITS PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL EXISTENCE OVER THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

The Mohel

Traditionally, the parents engage a mohel to perform the Bris. A mohel is a person who is specially trained in the medical and surgical techniques of circumcision. In addition to being an expert in his field, the mohel is also an expert in the Jewish laws pertaining to Bris Milah. A doctor’s medical circumcision, usually performed in the hospital within the first few days after birth, does not fulfill the requirements of a Bris Milah and is not considered valid according to Jewish law. The Bris must be performed by a Jewish person who understands, upholds and practices the tenets of the Jewish religion and is specially trained to function as a mohel.

The Baby

The Bris of a healthy baby is done on the eighth day of life (counting the day of birth). This is so even if the eighth day falls on Shabbos, Yom Kippur or any other Jewish festival. However, in the case of a baby born by Caesarean section, the Bris is not performed on Shabbos or on a festival, but on the day following. Bris Milah may not be performed before the eighth day or at night.

In the event that a baby is not in perfect health—even if not seriously ill—the Bris is delayed until both the doctor and the mohel are in agreement as to the healthy status of the baby. A common example of this situation is newborn jaundice. However, in the case of serious illness, a delay of one week following full recovery is required.

The Bris Ceremony

The Bris ceremony is a very special occasion and is accompanied by much happiness and

rejoicing. The ceremony usually takes place at home, in a synagogue or at a catering hall.

There are several honors to be conferred during the ceremony, usually bestowed upon the relatives and close friends of the baby’s family. A brief description of the ceremony is as follows: A couple enters with the baby and the baby is placed on a chair designated as the Chair of Elijah. The baby is then placed upon the lap of the Sandek (most often a grandfather) who holds the baby during the circumcision procedure. After the appropriate blessing is recited, the circumcision is performed by the mohel.

Immediately following the Bris, another blessing is said over a cup of wine, and the baby receives his official Hebrew name, which he will proudly carry throughout his life. The newborn child is often named after departed relatives, a symbolic source of continued life for those no longer with us. The ceremony ends with the resounding wish of “Mazel Tov!” followed by the serving of refreshments or a light meal.

A Joyous Beginning

A Bris Milah performed according to Jewish tradition is a wonderful beginning for a newborn child. It is a memorable experience, replete with significance and meaning for all those involved—the first of many milestones and happy occasions to be joyously celebrated during the child’s life, as he grows to be a source of nachas and satisfaction to all those close to him.

Mazel Tov!

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Before, During & After Your Baby’s Bris



Honors Bestowed at the Bris

- Kvater (a couple who enters with baby)
- Kisei Shel Eliyahu (places baby on specially-designated chair)
- Sandek (holds baby during bris ceremony)
- Sandek Me’umad (holds baby during naming ceremony)
- Brachos-Kri’as HaShem (names baby)

THE LAST TWO CAN BE SPLIT INTO TWO HONORS EACH

Things to be Prepared for the Bris

- Firm sleeping pillow
- 4 cloth diapers (or towels)
- 2 Tallis (prayer shawls)
- Kosher sweet grape wine & kiddush cup

FACTS ABOUT THE BRIS

- Ceremony is in English & Hebrew
- Actual circumcision takes 10-15 seconds
- Minor discomfort, if any, lasts 4-6 hours
- Complete healing 2-3 days
- Follow-up visit 1-3 days after Bris
- Ceremony length: 20-30 minutes

Day of Bris—Prior to Bris

- Do not soak or use ointments, creams or lotions on bris area; sponge bath is o.k.
- Last feeding should be within the hour before the bris
- Dress baby in clothing which may be opened from the bottom and wrap baby in receiving blanket

Day of Bris—After Bris

- Apply Bacitracin on gauze and place on top of area at each diaper change
- Baby may lay in any position that seems comfortable (even on stomach)
- If baby is uncomfortable, you may give 1/2-dropperful (.4 ml) of liquid infant Tylenol

Day after the Bris

- Use Bacitracin on gauze over entire bris area at each diaper change for the next 3 days
- The redness will subside in a few days; a soft, light-colored healing scab-tissue may form for several days. This is normal.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me any time at 800-85-MOHEL

Just as

כשם

he has entered the

שנכנס לברית

covenant of Abraham,

בן יצנס

so may he enter into

לתורה לחופה

the world of Torah,

ולמעשים

marriage and a life

טובים

of good deeds



Rabbi Michael Rovinsky

Rabbi Michael Rovinsky is a certified Mohel, recognized by the State of Israel. Practicing since 1988, he has performed over 5000 circumcisions. He was privileged to apprentice as a Mohel under the guidance and training of Rabbi Moshe Rappaport, a leading Mohel on the east coast. Rabbi Rovinsky received his Rabbinic ordinations from the Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Baltimore, Maryland and the Kol Yaakov Torah Center in Monsey, New York. He holds a Bachelors and Masters degree in Talmudic Law from Ner Israel. He also received a Masters in Administrative Sciences from Johns Hopkins University.

He is currently involved in many aspects of Jewish education and communal youth work. Rabbi Rovinsky began his Bris Milah practice in Baltimore, Maryland. Prior to relocating to St. Louis, Missouri, Rabbi Rovinsky resided in Dallas, Texas where he developed and continues to lead the Russian Bris Milah Program and has an extensive Bris Milah practice.

He is also the director of the Association for the Advancement of Bris Milah, an organization which strives to provide every Jewish child an opportunity for a Bris Milah.

Rabbi Rovinsky travels throughout the United States making Bris Milah a heartwarming and meaningful Jewish experience for many families. Rabbi Rovinsky, along with his wife Selina are the proud parents of four children.



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Bris Milah ברית מילה

Ritual Circumcision



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An explanation designed to enhance the appreciation and understanding of this momentous occasion in a baby's life and that of his family