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### Parent's Guide To Ritual Circumcision

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(front cover)

**Dinim U-Tefillot Ve-Seder Birkat Ha-Mazon Le Brit Milah**  
*(Laws, Prayers and Grace after Meals for the Circumcision Ceremony)*  
*Bohemia/Moravia (?), 1758*  
Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary

(back cover)

**Ba'alei Brit Membership Plaque**  
*(This document lists the names of the Chevrah Ba-alei Brit [Members of the Covenant Society] with the scene of a Brit Milah at the top) Rome?, 1855*  
Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary

## *Parent's Guide To Ritual Circumcision*

### **Shalom!**

The brit (or bris) of your son is a heartfelt and joyous experience. It is a simcha, albeit one filled with some anxiety. As it is written: "May your mother and father rejoice; and may the one who bore you thrill with joy." (Proverbs 23:25). On the following pages I will present a brief overview of the tradition, the ceremony, and the circumcision. Care instructions, a glossary, and 'Brit Check List' are also included.

### *The Tradition*

Circumcision is a universal mitzvah. Brit milah may be the only mitzvah purposefully observed by Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox alike, even by Jews with no other connection to the faith. For a Jew, circumcision is an indelible sign of our eternal bond with G-d (through the covenant of Abraham) AND loyalty to our community. Thus, with a ceremony known fondly as a brit, we circumcise our sons before G-d and in the presence of our community.

### *Loyalty to Our Community*

We view brit milah as a common thread that binds our community. Historically, our oppressors understood this and often attempted to prohibit ritual circumcision – resulting in many Jewish martyrs. Baruch Spinoza, a seventeenth century philosopher and skeptic of the covenant of circumcision, oddly enough said it best. "So great importance do I attach to this sign, I am persuaded that it is sufficient by itself to maintain the separate existence of the nation forever."

### *Eternal Bond with G-d*

Brit milah literally means "covenant of circumcision". This covenant is between G-d and the Jewish people. The Torah tells the story of G-d saying to Abraham: "I will establish My Covenant between Me and you and your children after you, throughout all generations, as an everlasting covenant, to be your G-d and your children's after you ... This is My covenant which you shall keep ... every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a sign of a covenant between Me and you. " (Genesis XVII, 7-11).

### **Every Male Among You**

In modern times this is taken to mean every Jewish male among you. Circumcision does not make a male child Jewish; he is Jewish if his mother is Jewish or she had converted (including the mikveh) by the time of his birth (Kiddushin 66b, 68b; Yoreh Deah 268-6). If a baby is not Jewish, he may have a brit as the first step of conversion. In such instances, a rabbi who is knowledgeable in the Jewish laws of conversion is consulted.

### **Who Should Circumcise**

Every Jewish father is obligated to circumcise his own son (Yoreh Deah 260:1), just as Abraham circumcised his own son, Isaac (Genesis XXI, 4). However, most fathers are not versed in the Jewish laws concerning brit milah nor are they trained to circumcise. Thus, we invite a mohel to serve as the father's stand-in. A mohel is someone who has studied the texts and laws of brit milah; the anatomy, physiology, and pathology of the penis (and related organs); and the techniques of circumcision. A mohel is considered so vital to a Jewish community that a scholar is forbidden to live in a community that does not have a mohel (Sanhedrin 17b).

### **When to Have the Brit**

Eight days old is the age at which G-d commanded the Jewish people to circumcise their male children - "And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations..." (Genesis XVII, 12). This mitzvah is so extraordinary that it can supersede the 'Laws of Shabbat and Yom Tovim' that normally prohibit such an operation on Shabbat and holidays (Shabbat 106a, 132a; Sanhedrin 59b). A brit may only take place during daylight hours, the earlier the better since we are eager to fulfill a mitzvah (Yoreh Deah 262:1). Only certain circumstances justify the delay of a brit. Above all, a child whose pediatrician determines that he is not well may not be circumcised<sup>1</sup> - "It is possible to circumcise later, but it is not possible to restore life" (Yad Milah 1: 18; Yoreh Deah 262:2). You should not delay a brit for convenience nor may it take place before the eighth day. Delaying a brit for the sake of the late arrival of a family member is not considered permissible and therefore strongly discouraged. If a brit is delayed for any reason, it may not take place on Shabbat or a Yom Tov (holiday). With a baby born by Cesarian section on Shabbat, the brit milah does not supercede the following Shabbat and is performed on the next day (day 9) - Sunday. The same rulings apply to Yom Tovim (holidays).

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<sup>1</sup>Steinberg A. Brit Mila - Medical-Halachic Aspects; pp. 157-174. "CROSSROADS: Halacha and the Modern World." Zomet; Jerusalem 0 987.

### **Where to Have the Brit**

Traditionally, a brit was held in the synagogue to add beauty and sanctity to the mitzvah. In recent years, most parents prefer that a brit take place at home. The home is generally a warm, familiar environment. The brit should take place in a well-lit room that is large enough to accommodate all who are present. If the eighth day falls on Shabbat or holiday, it is appropriate that the brit take place in a synagogue to help prevent desecration of Shabbat or the Yom Tov. It may either take place immediately following Musaf but before Ein Keloheinu, or it may take place after the completion of morning services. Remember, all supplies and food except for what is needed to care for the baby must be brought to the synagogue before the start of Shabbat (or holiday).

### **Who Comes to the Brit**

For most parents, a brit is a great simcha which they want to share with friends and relatives. A minyan is preferred, although, the baby and someone to perform the circumcision are all that is required. All may attend: male, female, Jew, non-Jew, young, old, anyone you want.

***A note about children:*** Many parents are concerned that a brit may be inappropriate for their children to witness. The fact of the matter is, most children do just fine (oftentimes better than their parents). Being forthright, honest, and upbeat is the best approach.

### **Announcing the Brit**

It is important that you and the mohel establish a time and date BEFORE announcing the brit. Once established, it is proper to inform your friends and relatives of the time and place of the brit, rather than specifically inviting them. In essence, attending a brit is itself a mitzvah, and one should not be put in the position of refusing to perform a mitzvah if they are unable to attend.

## The Ceremony

Brit milah is possibly the oldest ritual in our nearly 4,000 year history: thus, it is rich with many beautiful customs. Presented here are the customs that I routinely follow, although, I am willing to incorporate other customs, especially family traditions.

### **The Ceremony**

The baby is in a back room, family, friends and community are gathered. Just before the ceremony starts, while your son is still in the private room, I will examine him to determine that he has no congenital condition that would preclude the ability to perform the circumcision. I will also cleanse his genital area with an anti-septic scrub and administer local anesthetic. This preparation requires about five minutes. There is always a small chance that at this time I may discover something that leads me to delay the Bris or re-schedule your son for a circumcision in the hospital using a different technique. This happens in less than 1% of all cases. The ceremony starts with a friend or family member lighting the Candles (see below). Then I exclaim 'Kvatter' and one or two appointed guests designated to either accompany mom or transport the baby from mom, now usher (or bring the baby) into the room. As the baby enters the room, everyone stands and greets him with the words, "Baruch Habah!" The baby is brought to the father. The baby is then given to the honoree that sits with (or gently places and supports) the baby on the chair set aside as the Throne of Elijah. The prophet Elijah (Eliyahu HaNavi), Angel of the Covenant is watching over every brit. I recite a blessing that greets Elijah and requests G-d's assistance with the circumcision. The father then takes his son from the Throne of Elijah and personally hands him to me, the mohel. I'll place the baby on a pillow, either on the table or on the Sandek's lap. Then I request that all guests close their eyes, pray for the well-being of the child, and sing 'Eliyahu HaNavi.' The Sandek, places his arms on the baby while I recite the blessing of ritual circumcision and perform the circumcision. The father recites the blessing of the covenant. The baby is swaddled and handed to another honoree for the naming (the naming honoree) followed by a blessing of speedy recovery for both mother and son. We celebrate! (Further explanations to follow plus the Glossary on page 18.)

### **Candles**

Candles are lit before the brit (no blessing is recited). The origin of lit candles is not clear. The Talmud refers to the practice during a time when circumcision was prohibited: a lit candle in a window signaled to the community where and when a brit was to take place (Ketubot Yerushalmi 1:5). A more spiritual origin may be that a lit candle represents a spark of life, a new soul entering the Jewish community. This is surmised from the phrase, "the candle of G-d is the soul of man" (Proverbs 20:27).

### **Kvatter/Kvatterin<sup>2</sup>**

One or two people will accompany mom as she carries the baby into the room. A more common custom is for the mom to give an honor to the Kvatterin to bring the baby to the Kvatter who then brings the baby to the area of the brit milah. Often the honor is given to the grandparents, but it may be given to anyone. It is considered good luck for a couple seeking to have a baby to undertake such an honor; that is, G-d rewards those likewise who partake in a mitzvah (Bamidbar Rabbah 14:2).

### **Baruch Habah!**

As the baby is brought into the room everyone stands and greets him with the words: “Baruch Habah” (May the one who has entered be blessed!) The baby is then set upon the Throne of Elijah and guarded by a friend or family member. The mohel recites the words that greet Elijah, and that request G-d’s assistance with the milah. If more than one brit is to be held at the same time (e.g., in the case of twins). Each must be done separately – each child is honored with the greeting of ‘Baruch Habah’ and a complete complement of blessings (Yoreh Deah 265:15).

### **Throne of Elijah**

We set aside a chair for the prophet Elijah (Eliyahu HaNavi), Angel of the Covenant. This tradition stems from the lore that Elijah comes to every brit to insure the wellbeing of the child (by being seated at the mohel’s right arm), and to report back to G-d that the Jewish people are still fulfilling the mitzvah of milah (Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer 29). To honor the Angel of the Covenant further, some follow the custom of making the Throne even more special by reserving its use for three full days (not using it) as well as decorating the chair to be used with fine materials and pillows. Others use a special tallit.

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<sup>2</sup> Kvatterin (fem). It is a common misconception, due to uncertain etymology, that Kvatter and Kvatterin are godparents – they are not! They are simply bearers of the child.

## **Sandek**

The Sandek is the one honored with sitting beside the brit table and placing his arms around the child during the circumcision. The role of Sandek is considered an extraordinarily spiritual honor, far greater than any other. It is even greater than that of the mohel, Rabbi, or parents. For this reason, the Sandek must be Jewish. Usually, one of the grandfathers is chosen, but you may honor any friend or family member. In some communities, the Rabbi or another particularly righteous person may be honored. Finally, it is customary that the Sandek should wear a tallit which should be partially draped over the child's head.

## **Milah (Ritual Circumcision)**

Milah involves the fulfillment of a mitzvah, a commandment of G-d. It is the act of circumcision itself that fulfills the mitzvah and not the recitation of blessings.<sup>3</sup> Thus, only a Jew may perform milah (Yoreh Deah 264:1). As a sign of reverence for the impending covenant, it is appropriate for both the father and the mohel to don tallitot (tallisim). Immediately before the milah the mohel recites the blessing of the commandment of milah – “Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, who sanctified us by Your commandments and commanded us regarding circumcision.” Once the mohel completes the milah, the father recites the blessing of the covenant of Abraham:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ  
לְהַכְנִיסוֹ בְּבְרִיתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ.

***Baruch atah Adonai elohanu melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvo-tav v'tzivanu l'hakhniso bivrito shel Avraham Avinu.***

“Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, Ruler of the universe, who sanctified us by Your commandments and commanded us to have our sons enter into the covenant of Abraham our father.”

The responsibility of the mitzvah to bring the baby to the brit and to perform the brit is that of the father.

But since the actual mitzvah of brit milah (being circumcised) is that of the child's (and not of the parents), we (the community) remind the parents of their continued responsibility to assist their child in the performance of mitzvot we exclaim:

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<sup>3</sup> Ritual circumcision is not done for reasons of health or hygiene as is a medical circumcision. Any health consequences of a ritual circumcision are fortuitous and coincidental.



כָּשֵׁם שְׁנִכְנַס לְבְרִית, כֵּן יִכְנַס לְתוֹרָה וְלַחֻפָּה וְלַמַּעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים

***K'shaim she'nichnas la'brit, kain yikanais l'torah u'l'chupah u'l'ma'asim tovim. Amen.***

*"Just as he has entered into the covenant, so may he enter into the study of Torah, the marriage canopy, and the performance of good deeds Amen. "*

### **Giving the Name**

Following the milah the child will be given his Jewish name. Up to this point your son has no Jewish name and only the parents need be privy to what it may be. There are many customs concerning the choosing of a name; consult your rabbi (or mohel) if you are in doubt. It is appropriate, though not required, to explain the origin your child's name following the naming. The naming verses can be recited by the mohel or relative. The "naming honoree" or "Sandek Sheni" is the one who holds the baby while he receives his name.

### **A Parents' Blessing**

Many parents want to affirm their commitment to the Covenant of Abraham and to their baby, and may do so with this optional prayer (or one of their choosing):

*"Our G-d and G-d of our ancestors, we thank You for the precious gift of life and the blessing of parenthood. Eternal Creator, we ask Your continued blessing. Grant our child length of days and vigor of body and mind. Endow us with understanding and love, that we may rear our son, [son's name], to manhood filled with love of Torah and the performance of good deeds. May we be privileged to bring him to the wedding canopy. Amen. "*

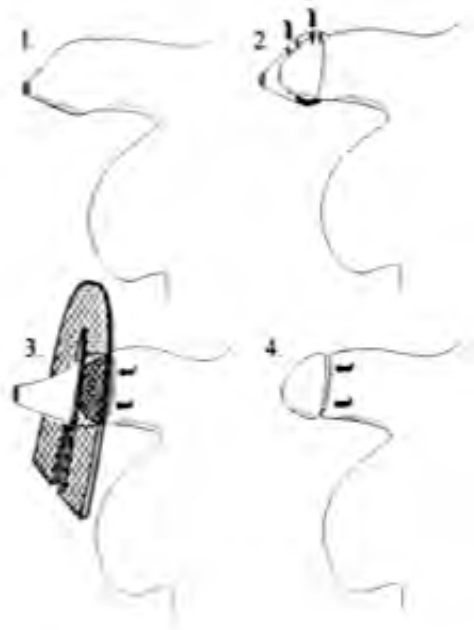
### **Seudat Mitzvah (Festive Meal)**

The Talmud states that because brit milah is a precept that Jews accepted with joy, it is celebrated with joy (Shabbat 130a) song & dance and, most importantly, a festive meal (Yoreh Deah 265:12). This meal can range from the minimal challah and Kosher red grape wine to an elaborate feast. It is traditional to have sweets and other foods that are associated with a simcha. On fast days (e.g., Yom Kippur), we do not have a Seudat mitzvah on that day. The meal can appropriately be postponed to the next day (or that night).

## The Circumcision

The entire circumcision (including bandaging) takes about 2 minutes, rarely longer. To calm the baby, a brown sugar filled gauze pacifier (or similar item) lightly moistened with sweet wine is used.

### Figures 1 - 4. Anatomy of the Circumcision



1. The uncircumcised penis with the foreskin covering the glans (head of penis). This is how it would appear, looking on from the side.
2. The same penis as in Figure 1 but drawn as if the foreskin was transparent. Here, you can see the foreskin in relation to the glans. Notice the adhesions between the inner side of the foreskin and the glans. These are present at birth in almost all babies and must be released before the actual circumcision.
3. This shows the foreskin stretched forward and through the central slit of the moغن. Notice the outline of the glans [shaded] safely behind the moغن. The cut is made along the front surface of the moغن.
4. The same penis following circumcision. Notice that the cut edge of the skin retracts to just behind the back rim of the glans. This is the site of healing.

## Circumcision

This is a simple operation that involves the removal of the foreskin that sheaths the head of the penis (Figures 1 & 2). The techniques used for ritual circumcision differ from those most often used in the medical profession. Most ritual circumcisions are either performed with a shield called a moغن or a special shield-like clamp called the moغن clamp (I personally use the latter). The moغن technique (shield or clamp) is notable for its quickness and safety.

## **Healing**

Healing is usually rapid and can be viewed in several stages. It should be remembered that this is like any other cut and that there are many factors that influence healing, but most importantly, every child heals differently. The cut edge seals initially and bleeding ceases within minutes. Within hours, maybe a day, the area just behind the glans (especially the underside) will become swollen; this inflammation will subside within a week or two. In a day or two there may be an off-white or yellowish, patchy appearance of the glans. These patches are a type of scab and are associated with normal healing. You will also notice that the glans is red and glossy. This is because the skin covering the glans of an uncircumcised penis is a mucous membrane (like the skin inside your cheek). Once exposed, the mucous membrane will toughen (or keratinize) and in time take on a normal appearance (like the skin outside your cheek). The penis should take on a 'normal, healed appearance' in about a month.

## **Complications**

Circumcision is associated with few and infrequent complications, though with any surgical procedure there are occasional problems, like bleeding. In almost all cases bleeding is controlled by direct pressure. There are reported cases of infection, although these are rare amongst ritually circumcised children. Common signs of infection include: a pus-like discharge, a foul smell, excessive swelling or redness, local warmth, a fever, or a rash anywhere in the area of the penis. With any of these signs consult the mohel **without delay**.

## **Appearance**

Aside from direct complications, the most common concern of parents is related to aesthetics. It should be remembered that penises come in all shapes & sizes. While most penises 'look normal' within days of the circumcision, some do not take on a 'completely normal appearance' until after the penis starts to grow. Furthermore, the penis may appear smaller after circumcision - it's not! This appearance is mostly due to the relaxation of skin surrounding the penis, which prior to circumcision holds the penis more erect. On occasion, a poor aesthetic result occurs when too little or too much skin is removed, or more likely when the cut edge of the skin attaches too high or too low along the length of the penis. The latter is sometimes caused by the presence of a hydrocele (see glossary) or penile erections. In nearly all cases the penis will heal properly and in time, take on a normal appearance.

*Even though complications are rare, do not hesitate to consult the mohel (at any time) if you have any questions about the appearance of the penis - remember, early treatment (if any is needed) is always best.*

*In Addition....*

One last comment - each year, with over a million circumcisions performed in North America, there are only a few rare cases where complications were sufficient to require hospitalization or were considered life threatening. In fact, circumcision is regarded as one of the safest routine operations in practice today.

**What about photos?** Both video and still photography are permissible except on days where they are otherwise prohibited; i.e., Shabbat and holidays. Once the baby is brought to the Throne of Elijah, for modesty's sake, no further video or still photography should be taken until the baby is dressed and being named.

**Do other parents feel as nervous as I do?** It is normal to be anxious about your son's brit. All parents experience some level of anxiety. And as strange as it may seem, it is the triumph of these feelings that will make your son's brit a heartfelt experience.

**What about Pidyon Haben?** If both father and mother are Israelites and this is the first ever, vaginal opening of the mother's womb, you will want to have a Pidyon Haben (redemption of the first-born son) when your son is 31 days old. Please consult your rabbi for further information.

**If you want to know more,** I encourage you to talk to your rabbi (or mohel) to find out more about brit milah and about local customs. For further reference, "Bris Milah" / Circumcision - The Covenant of Abraham, is a superb overview of the entire ritual with associated laws, definitions and customs.<sup>4</sup> Many consider this the definitive work. Other sources, "Guide to Ritual Circumcision and Redemption of the First-Born Son"<sup>5</sup> and "Berit Mila in the Reform Context"<sup>6</sup> are well written, easy to read books. The video "Circumcision? Or Bris!, Surgery? Or Simcha!"<sup>7</sup> does a good job of contrasting medical circumcision with brit milah. A wonderful book, The NEW Jewish Baby Book, A Guide for Today's Families<sup>8</sup> is an excellent resource for names, ceremonies and customs.

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*Mazel tov! "May your son grow into a life of Torah,  
chuppah and good deeds; and may he become great."*

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<sup>4</sup> By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn. Artscroll Mesorah Series, New York, 1985

<sup>5</sup> By Rabbi Eugene J. Cohen. ktav Publishing House, Inc., New York, 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Edited by Rabbi Lewis Barth. Berit Mila Board of Reform Judaism, Los Angeles, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> By Rabbi Yehoshua Krohn. Tradition!, New York, 1990, (1-800-222-9269).

<sup>8</sup> By Anita Diamant, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 1993

### **Before the Brit:**

- It is necessary to have finished feeding your son one hour before the brit. One hour is ideal. This avoids painful indigestion from a recent meal and yet is not so long that your baby will be overly hungry.
- For the brit, your son should be dressed in a T-shirt or gown, a disposable diaper, socks, and a receiving blanket (cotton or flannel is preferred).
- It is helpful (though not required) to have your son's penis examined by his physician before the day of the brit. This reduces the chances of a last minute postponement for health reasons.

### **General Care Following Circumcision:**

- Expect your son to be a little irritable for about a day.
- Most babies like to nurse in a quiet environment following the circumcision. A baby who cries for more than a few minutes is usually suffering from air swallowed during the circumcision and needs to be burped.
- Most babies sleep quite well following the circumcision. The best sleeping position should be discussed with your pediatrician.
- Healing is promoted by keeping the area clean and dry. Warm water and a cotton-ball or wash-cloth are preferred for cleaning the area around the penis. Avoid pre-moistened towelettes, alcohol, powders, and lotions, since these may cause irritation.
- Disposable diapers are strongly recommended for the first week since they tend to be less irritating and help keep the area dryer and cleaner.
- Word to the wise: Baby your baby; it is better both before and for about three days following the circumcision to restrict the handling of your baby to just a few people. Also, avoid unnecessary travel - car seats can be irritating to the new circumcision and can delay or perturb healing.

### **Care Following Circumcision - the first 24 hours:**

- Keep your son snugly swaddled (especially his legs). The more he moves his legs the more discomfort he may experience.

1. Wash your hands thoroughly.
2. Squeeze a mound of Vaseline ointment (the size of a quarter) onto the center of a sterile 3 X 3 inch gauze square and set aside.
3. Remove old diaper, clean any mess, and place new disposable diaper.

4. Remove old 3 X 3 inch gauze square only if it is dirty (i.e. covered in feces) by gently peeling from bottom up. Expect to find some light blood stains with the first few changes they should progressively lighten with each change.

5. Inspect the area for fresh blood, then drape the new 3 X 3 inch gauze square over the penis so that the mound of ointment is applied directly over the tip of the penis. Close the diaper.

6. After 24-48 hours no gauze is needed, just ointment for 6 days. But if you find, as many do, that it easier to use gauze with Vaseline, please do so.

**If there is active bleeding:**

You treat bleeding on the penis the same as you would for the tip of a finger.

1. Apply pressure to the penis for 3-5 minutes. Do this by grasping the penis between two or three fingers (over the 3 X 3 inch gauze square).

2. Without removing the 3 X 3 inch gauze square, inspect the area for continued bleeding and repeat 'step 1' if necessary.

3. Leave the 3 x 3 inch gauze square in place and close diaper - removing it may lead to renewed bleeding.

- In all cases of fresh bleeding, contact the mohel for further instructions.

**Boys with stout penises:**

When the length of the penile shaft is no greater than its diameter or when there is a goodly amount of pubic fat, the penis will probably tend to retract inward - which is normal. This characteristic is only a concern during the first month or two since the healing circumcision can adhere to the surrounding skin resulting in a 'concealed penis'. If your son fits this profile, you can reduce the chance of concealed penis by applying a very thin layer of vaseline ointment to the entire penis<sup>9</sup>, once a day, until the penis takes on a healed appearance (about 1 to 2 months). Remember, even if your son fits this profile, the incidence of concealed penis is low.

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<sup>9</sup> To expose a penis that has retracted inward, place gentle downward pressure on either side of the base of the penis. Consult the mohel or child's physician if the penis cannot be fully exposed.

**What you need for your son's Bris:**

**Things you must have in the main room where the ceremony will take place (needed supplies):**

1. A sturdy waist-high table (e.g. bridge or square table – the more stable, the better) with a decorative cloth (see 2.) and a pillow. The Sandek may be sitting here.
2. The decorative tablecloth may be white or pale blue.
3. A small table (if the waist-high table is too small for baby and mohel instruments).
4. Three chairs around this table. One chair (Elijah) should have a pillow on it.
5. On the table should be one Kiddush cup filled two thirds full with a sweet Kosher red grape wine. You do not need to have the wine bottle on the table.
6. Two candle holders with candles and matches (also on the table).
7. Two spare disposable diapers and a box of wipes.
8. A garbage bag (wastebasket with plastic liner) under the table.
9. A bright light shining onto the table preferably suspended above the table or set up beside the table.
10. A large cotton receiving blanket.
11. A bottle of kosher juice, preferably grape, on the table (with two cups).
12. A smaller glass saucer for the sucrose gauze (sugar) balls, which I bring.
13. Two Tallitot (tallesim)– one for the Sandek and a second one for the father.
14. Lots of Kippahs (kippot/yarmulkes) for your guests.
15. Three dozen individually wrapped 3x3 sterile gauze pads. (1 box at the bris).
16. A fresh tube of Bacitracin (the generic triple antibiotic ointment is acceptable).
17. One small box of sterile cotton balls for aftercare – *not at the bris*.
18. A fresh tube of Vaseline ointment (not cream) for aftercare – *not at the bris*.

19. A loaf of Challah for the motzi prior to the meal (on Passover, of course, substitute Matzah).

20. A standard bed pillow with pillowcase, in addition to the pillow on Elijah's Throne (see #4 above – total of 2 pillows). This will be used to cushion the baby during the bris.

21. **Please print pages 19, 20, and 21** from this booklet. Page 19 is the ***Consent to Perform the Brit Milah***. Page 20 has a list of ***people to be honored*** plus a list of the English and Hebrew names of the family. Both of these must be completely filled out prior to the arrival of the Mohel so as to not delay the start of the ceremony. Page 21 is full ***after-care instructions***.

**We will also need a separate room to do the pre-examination of the child. This room must have the following:**

1. A closeable door.
2. A small table with a chair in front of it. This table should allow one person to stand behind it to hold the baby.
3. A bright light shining onto the table.
4. A diaper, diaper wipes, and a receiving blanket on the table.
5. A garbage bag under the table.
6. A soother (pacifier) on the table.

### **General Information**

- The Brit Milah **must** be on eighth day with exceptions listed below. The day of birth is day number one if it is before sundown. If the timing is unclear, consult the mohel.
- The Mitzvah of Brit Milah overrides the Sabbath and Festivals (first and last two days of Passover; both days of Shavuot; both days of Rosh Hashanah; Yom Kippur; first two days of Succot, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah).
- The Brit Milah cannot be on the Sabbath or Festival *if*
  - (a) the Brit Milah was postponed for any reason (see below), or
  - (b) Birth was by C-section, or
  - (c) Baby is being converted.
- Reasons for postponement:
  - (a) A Brit Milah cannot be performed on an ill child until he is fully recovered.
  - (b) A child with clinically significant jaundice. Your pediatrician will decide this.
  - (c) If a child has an illness with a fever, he must be completely cured for up to seven 24-hour periods before his Brit Milah.



(d) If the child required a transfusion, he must wait a full seven days for his Brit Milah.

(e) If the child was in an incubator, he must wait seven full days from the time he was released.

(f) The child should weigh at least 5 1/2 lbs – 6 lbs. Consultation between the doctor and the Mohel is customary and may modify some of the above conditions. For example, if the baby had one degree of fever for a few hours, the doctor may not feel the postponement is necessary.

(g) A Brit Milah may not be delayed for convenience.

- The Brit Milah must be during daylight hours.
- It is customary to have a festive meal for your guests after the ceremony.
- Ashkenazic Jews traditionally name their children after a deceased relative or close friend. Sephardic Jews traditionally name the baby in honor of a living relative.

**Keep in mind the following things:**

1. Don't bottle feed your baby right before the ceremony. Last feeding should be one hour before the Bris is scheduled.

2. **Please apply the prescribed anesthetic cream 60-90 minutes prior to the scheduled start of the ceremony for optimum effectiveness.** One thick stripe of cream should be applied from the tip of the penis down to where it meets the abdominal wall and another thick stripe of cream on the undersurface of the penis from the tip down to where it meets the scrotum and around the base of the penis. Then place a 2-3 inch square of "Saran Wrap" flat over the penis and abdomen (not around the penis alone) and use paper tape to fix it to the abdominal wall, the inner thighs and the scrotum. This will prevent the cream from being removed by the diaper. [I offer extensive pain control methods including Infant Tylenol, a sugar solution (to reduce pain perceptions), EMLA (a topical freezing cream), and a local anesthetic injection.]

3. Give your baby approximately 0.8 milliliter (at the "0.8ml" marker = 80mg) of **Infant's Tylenol** Concentrated drops (20-25mg/kg body weight and the concentration should be "Infant's", **not** "Children's" written on the box or bottle) one hour before the Bris is scheduled to start. Check with your pediatrician to confirm the right dose for your son. **Do not give Advil or any medication instead of Infant Tylenol Concentrated Drops.**

4. If your child has any bleeding or medical problems or significant jaundice discuss this with the pediatrician and the Mohel before giving the Infant Tylenol.

5. Refer to pages 13 & 14 for care for the first twenty-four hour period. For the following 6 days put a moderate amount of Vaseline or an antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin /Neosporin) ointment on a 3x3 inch gauze and then place it directly on the head of the penis to avoid this healing area from sticking to the diaper.

6. You can sponge bath your baby for the first 6-7 days but do not submerge him in water for this period of time until the pediatrician OKs this.

7. If you have any other comments or questions do not hesitate to call. In case of emergency, call me *anytime* on my cell phone 516.446.6129 or beeper 516.235.1001. For non-emergencies including calling to schedule a brit or questions that can wait, please do not call on Shabbat or Yom Tov. Calling after sundown *after* these days is appreciated. Please confirm that no other family member has called another Mohel.

Yours Sincerely,

*Harvey S. Marchbein MD, Mohel*

### Glossary:

**Bris / Brit** Bris is the Ashkenazi (Eastern European) pronunciation of b'ret. In modern or Sephardic Hebrew it is pronounced b'ret Colloquially used to mean ritual circumcision ceremony.

**Challah** Braided egg bread. Matzo may be substituted for challah.

**Chuppah** Marriage canopy.

**Concealed penis** An uncommon complication where the cut edge of the circumcision adheres to the surrounding skin trapping the penis in a retracted state. In most cases, concealed penis can be prevented (see above).

**Congenital** This refers to anatomical abnormalities that are present at birth.

**Hypospadias** Where the urethral opening occurs along the underside of the penis, is a common example (present in 1 out of 300 male births).

**Eliyahu HaNavi** Elijah the Prophet. Song: Eliyahu HaNavi, Eliyahu Hatishbi, Eliyahu, Eliyahu, Eliyahu ha-Giladi. Bimheira V'yameinu, yavo eilenu. Im Mashiach ben David, im Mashiach ben David... (May the Prophet Elijah come soon, in our time. With the Messiah, son of David).

**Fever – Newborn:** Any sustained elevation in axillary (underarm) temperature above 99.4°F (37.4°C) or rectal temperature above 100.4°F (38.0°C).

**Hydrocele** A congenital condition characterized by a fluid filled membrane protruding into the scrotum that waxes with activity and crying, and wanes during periods of rest. The waxing and waning of the scrotal size indirectly tugs on the circumcision and may disrupt healing.

**Israelite** One of the 3 patriarchal divisions of Judaism: Kohen, Levi, and Israelite. Most Jews including all converts are Israelites.

**Jaundice** A condition characterized by a yellowish appearance of the skin. It is a common, if not normal, condition in newborn babies between day 2 and day 11. Elevated bilirubin (a by-product of red blood cells) produces jaundice. Severe jaundice or extreme bilirubin levels may indicate an abnormal condition which would justify the delay of a brit.

**Laws of Shabbat** The Jewish code of laws that discusses what is and is not allowed on Shabbat (e.g., Mishnah Berurah 111) and on the following holidays: first two and last two days of Passover; Shavuot; Rosh Hashanah; Yom Kippur; first two days of Succot; Shemini Atzeret; and Simchat Torah.

**Low Birth Weight** Any full term birth weight less than 5 1/2 pounds (2500 grams)

**Minyan** A quorum of 10 adult Jews. Orthodox and traditional Conservative congregations define this as 10 Jewish males. A minyan is not required for a brit.

**Mitzvah** pl. mitzvot. A commandment from G-d. Colloquially used to mean a good deed.

**Simcha** Joy or a joyous occasion.

**Tallit tallis** pl. tallitot, tallisiim A prayer shawl with fringes.

**\*\*N.B. The next page is the consent form followed by the list of Honorees on the subsequent page (and Aftercare on the page after that). Please fill in the appropriate lines with either printing, signatures or other information as requested. Not filling out the form in its entirety may delay the start of the brit.**

**Consent Form**  
**Re: Bris (Brit Milah – Ritual Circumcision)**

I request to have my son circumcised, including the administration of local anesthesia, by Dr. Harvey S. Marchbein as part of a Brit Milah (Bris). Furthermore, I understand and agree that this circumcision is not intended to establish a patient-physician relationship and that it is part of a religious ceremony and should not be construed as a medical treatment or procedure. In signing this consent form for a circumcision or bris, I am stating that the complications and risks of this procedure have been explained to me including risks of bleeding, infection, removing too much or too little foreskin, and trauma to the head of the penis. Although rare, I understand that more serious complications may arise. I understand all of the above-mentioned risks regarding this procedure. Dr. Marchbein has explained the post-operative management to me and I will contact Dr. Marchbein as needed for management assistance. Although it is impossible for Dr. Marchbein to inform me of every possible complication that may occur, Dr. Marchbein has answered all my questions to my satisfaction.

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Both Parents or Guardian                      Witness's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Parents or Guardian's Name (printed)                      Witness's Name (printed)

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Circumcision Date \_\_\_\_\_

**If different than above:**

Address where bris will be held \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # at this house \_\_\_\_\_

The parent(s)/guardian(s) was given an informed consent for the procedure noted, with relevant risks, benefits and alternatives discussed. All questions were answered.

Signature of Mohel \_\_\_\_\_

Mohel's Name: Harvey S. Marchbein MD, Mohel

**Honors (please record the full English name of your honorees)**

**Light candles (page 6)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Kvatterin/Kvatter (page 7)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Throne of Elijah (page 7)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sandek (page 8)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Naming honoree – holds the baby *after* (page 9)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Will a Rabbi be present?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Complete names of family members**

(A note about Hebrew names: On this form, when I ask for your Hebrew name, I mean your complete Hebrew name. This includes: your father's Hebrew name, your mother's and your own. For example, if your Hebrew is Avraham Moshe, your father's Hebrew name is Dov and your mother's name is Sara, then the Hebrew name you should provide is Avraham Moshe Ben Dov V'Sara. Also, if a father is a Kohen or Levi, please note that next to the name. To make it clear, I ask for each of the names separately. And if you are the mother, substitute "Bat" for "Ben" in the above example).

*In English*                      **Son** \_\_\_\_\_

**Father** \_\_\_\_\_

**Father's Parents** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mother** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mother's Parents** \_\_\_\_\_

*In Hebrew  
(or transliteration)*                      **Son** \_\_\_\_\_

**Father** \_\_\_\_\_

**Father's Parents** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mother** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mother's Parents** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Guidelines for caring for your newborn's circumcision**



Harvey S. Marchbein MD, Mohel



*Mazel tov* on the birth of your new son and his entry into the covenant of Abraham.

The *brit milah* ceremony is both an exciting and a stressful time for most families. Here are a few guidelines to help you care for the circumcision in the first few days after the *brit milah* ceremony.

- 1 . There is a gauze square with Vaseline (or Bacitracin) on the baby's penis. The first time you change him, leave the gauze (if it is soiled with stool, do change it). The second time you change his diaper, throw away the gauze and reapply a new one with Vaseline (or Bacitracin).
- 2 . For the next five to six days, every time you change him, you can either use the gauze with Vaseline or just place some Vaseline (about one teaspoon) around the entire circumference of the cut. Continue this until the area looks healed. Some find the gauze with the Vaseline easier than applying it directly.
- 3 . The local anesthetic will last about one hour. You may give your baby some liquid Tylenol for the first twenty-four hours if he is irritable. The dose is 0.4 ml every six hours. There is a 0.4 ml marker in the dropper.
- 4 . As the circumcision is healing, on a daily basis, **gently** push the skin of the shaft of the penis toward the abdominal wall to expose the entire glans (head of the penis). This will prevent adhesions from reforming between the glans and the skin of the shaft.
- 5 . If you wish to wash the area, use a cotton ball and warm water to gently clean the skin. Do not use alcohol (or alcohol wipes) and do not rub the skin of the penis with any force as this may cause bleeding.

What to watch out for:

1. There may be a small amount of blood on the gauze. This is normal. If there is a flow of blood, pressure for five minutes (watch the clock) will usually stop it. If the bleeding persists, call me or the pediatrician.
- 2 . There will be some redness and swelling at the area of the circumcision for a few days. This is normal. If the swelling extends down the shaft and onto the abdominal wall, you should call. Infection is extremely rare after circumcision.
- 3 . Since part of the circumcision is on a mucous membrane, a yellowish-gray area may form at the site of the cut. This may be similar to what you see at the site of the umbilical cord insertion. This is NOT pus and does not represent infection, but is normal for the healing process.

The circumcision should be entirely healed within one to two weeks. If you have questions, you may call my cell first @ 516.446.6129 or my beeper 516.235.1001.

