

## Brit Milah---The Covenant of Circumcision

Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring to follow which you shall keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.

--Genesis 17:10-11

Jews have performed the mitzvah of brit milah in an unbroken chain for 4,000 years, from the days of Abraham to the present. The Hebrew word brit means covenant, a pledge or obligation. Brit milah is the covenant of circumcision, the surgical removal of the foreskin from the penis, a physical sign of the unique relationship between the Jewish people and God.

Jewish continuity is one of the most compelling reasons Jews continue to perform brit milah, but circumcision is not unique to Jews. People all over the world have practiced it for centuries. In the ancient world of the Hebrews, the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Moabites also circumcised their sons. However, non-Jewish circumcision was usually performed at puberty as a part of a rite of initiation to manhood and as a test of courage and fortitude. For Jews, infant circumcision is an act of consecration, a sign of identity, and the first step in a lifetime dedication to religious commitment.

### **Why the eighth day?**

There are many answers to this question. When researching this question books give many stories in explanation. It was not enough, for example to explain that the brit milah be performed on the eighth day simply because that was Isaac's age at his circumcision. The rabbis went on to say that a child who lives for seven full days gains a measure of strength because he has encountered his first Shabbat. The number eight is associated with things metaphysical. The number seven is connected to the physical world, as in the seven days of the week and the seven stages of life. According to the rabbis, the wisdom of the Torah puts brit milah on the eight day to signify that a bris is the culmination of creation, the act that makes a baby tamim (perfect or complete), in the sense that his circumcision made Abraham a whole Jew. Despite the tradition's reverence for and loyalty to brit milah, it also acknowledges it as a bittersweet, ambivalent rite of passage. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, "Behold, a man loves no one better than his son, and yet he circumcises him! To which Rabbi Nachman bar Shmuel responded, "He rejoices over the mitzvah even though he sees his son's blood being shed."

### **Kibbudim—Honors:**

The mohel, and the sandek (the person who holds the baby) must be present for an official bris to take place. Though Jewish law permits brit milah to be performed by virtually any Jew, the tradition is firm in its preference for a pious men, which is why, until recently, so many rabbis and cantors filled the role. Since the late 1980s the Reform and Conservative movements have recruited, trained, and certified licensed physicians—women as well as men to serve a mohalim for the liberal Jewish community.

For our purposes today you will be witnessing a bris performed by a urologist who is an active part of our Jewish community in Colorado Springs and who performs many of the bris's in the city. Dr. Cohn will be performing the circumcision while participants perform prayer. The sandek for the circumcision will be Grandfather Michael Rutberg and Grammie Barbara and the sandek for the naming ceremony with be Grandfather Gary Pearlman and Grandma Carol Gardner.

Because we are not using a mohel or rabbi, Great Aunt Cindy Benjamin will honor us by reading and helping to conduct the ceremony.

## CHAIN OF EVENTS:

In Dr. Cohn's office:

As the baby is brought in by Leslie and Jim all present in the room respond by saying

*Baruch haba.*

בָּרוּךְ הַבָּא!

“Blessed is the one who comes.”

Leslie and Jim walk to the front of room and Leslie says the Brikat Hagomel:

Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo hei-nu meh-lech  
ha-o-lam, ha-go-mel l'cha-ya-vim to-vot,  
sheh-g'ma-la-ni kol tov.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
הַגּוֹמֵל לְחַיִּיבִים טוֹבוֹת,  
שֶׁמָּלְאָנוּ כָּל טוֹב.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Ruler of all, who does  
Good to the undeserving and who has dealt kindly  
With me.

Everyone responds:

Mi sheh-g'ma-l'cha kol tov,  
hu yig-mol-cha kol tov, she-lah.

מִי שֶׁמָּלְאָךְ כָּל טוֹב,  
הוּא יְגַמְלֶךָ כָּל טוֹב, סְלָה.

May the One who has shown you kindness deal  
Kindly with you forever.

Jim says:

My son, my child, you have been as dear to me as my own breath. May I hold you gently now with the love to keep you close and with the strength to let you grow.

Leslie says:

My son, my child, a piece of my life is you. You have grown to life apart from me, but now I hold you close to my heart and cradle you in my arms with love.

Jim and Leslie together:

We have been blessed with the gift of a new life. We have shared love and pain and joy in bringing our son into life.

By the way we live, we aspire to teach our son to become a caring and loving person. We hope that in seeking to fulfill himself, he will accept his responsibilities to others and to his heritage. We dedicate ourselves to the creation of a Jewish home and to a life of compassion for others, hoping he will learn from example.

*The baby is handed to Grandma Carol who hands him to Grammie who joins her husband and Dr. Cohn. Barbara takes him to Michael. Both hold their grandchild together at the front of the room.*

Grandpa Michael and Grammie say:

You are your parents' dream realized, their hopes fulfilled. You are the latest and best chapter in the unfolding lives of your family.

You are a bridge over which we who welcome you can gaze from this day into future days, from our generation into yours. You are the newest link in the endless chain of our people's history.

All the grandparents say:

Our God and God of all generations, we are grateful for new beginnings, for the bond of new life that links on generation to another. Thankful for the blessing of family, for the love and care that bring meaning and happiness to our lives, we rejoice with our children at the birth of our grandchild.

Cindy says:

If you hold a hand before your eyes, you can hide the tallest mountain. If we get caught up with what we do in our everyday lives, we can forget that miracles fill the world. You remind us of the many wonders that happen all around us.

Everyone in the room:

Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech  
ha-o-lam, sheh-heh-cheh-ya-nu v'ki-y'ma-nu  
v'hi-gi-anu la-z'man ha-zeh.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
שְׁהַתִּינוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִנִּיעֵנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

Blessed are You, O God, who gives us life,  
Who sustains us, and who brings us here to  
Share in this occasion.

Cindy says:

A new son of Israel has come, and with him comes a great promise. In his soul is the potential to bring greatness into our world. He brings blessing to our lives, as he reminds us that the world is not yet complete. We each share in the task of perfecting this world.

Cindy says:

We welcome you to life with love. We rejoice in bringing this child into the brit, the covenant between God and the Jewish people.

Since the time of Abraham and Sarah, we Jews have been called to enter this covenant. As it says in Genesis, "I will establish My covenant between Me and you, to be God to you and to your offspring."

Jim and Leslie say:

We are ready to fulfill the mitzvah of circumcision as the Torah guides us. "Throughout your generations, every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old."

Grandpa Michael and Grammie:

Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech  
ha-o-lam, a-sheh ki-d'sha-nu b'mitz-vo-tav,  
v'tzi-va-nu al ha-mi-lah

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל הַמִּילָה.

Blessed are You, Eternal Presence of the  
Universe, who has sanctified us with Your  
Commandments and commanded us  
Concerning circumcision.

***Circumcision is performed.***

Dr Cohn says a prayer of circumcision

Leslie and Jim say:

Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech  
Ha-o-lam, a-sher ki-d' sha-nu b'mitz-ve-tav,  
V'tzi-va-nu l'hach-ni-so biv-ri-to shel  
Av-ra-ham a-vi-nu v'Sa-rah I-mei-nu.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,  
וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַכְנִיסוֹ בְּבְרִיתוֹ  
שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ וְשָׂרָה אִמֵּינוּ.

Blessed are You, Eternal Presence of the  
Universe, who has sanctified us with Your  
Commandments and commanded us to bring  
Our son into the covenant of Abraham our  
Father and Sarah our mother.

Everyone says:

K'shem sheh-nich-nas la-b'rit, kein yi-ka-nes  
L'to-rah ul-chu-pah ul-ma-a-sim to-vim.

כְּשֵׁם שֶׁנִּכְנַס לְבְרִית, כֵּן יִכָּנֵס לְתוֹרָה  
וּלְחֻפָּה וּלְמַעֲשֵׂים טוֹבִים.

As he has entered the covenant, so may he  
Attain the blessing of the Torah, marriage,  
And a life of good deeds.

*Michael hands the baby to Grammie, Barbara and Grandma Carol clean and diaper the baby who takes  
the baby and stands by Grandpa Gary.*

Grandpa Gary raises the cup of wine and everyone says:

Ba-ruh a-tah Adonai Eh-lo-heinu meh-lech ha-o-lam  
bo-rei pah-re ha-gafin.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
בוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Blessed is the Presence whose sanctity fills our lives  
and ripens fruit on the vine.

A drop of wine is given to the baby by Grandma Carol and the cup is passed around the room for  
everyone to take a sip (or pass).

Cindy says:

May God who blessed our ancestors Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Rachel, and Leah,  
bless this child who is circumcised and bring him speedily to full healing. May his parents, Leslie and  
Jim fulfill the privilege of raising him, educating him, and teaching him wisdom. May his hands and  
heart be faithful.

Reader says:

Blessed is the Eternal ruler of the universe,  
Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Jim says:

As we prepare to give you your name, we wrap you in this talit. (Jim and Leslie swaddle the their baby.)

Jim tells the story of where the name came from.

Grandma Carol and Grandpa Gary say:

Blessed is the Presence whose sanctity fills our lives and ripens fruit on the vine.

You have sanctified your beloved from the womb, establishing your holy covenant throughout the generations. May devotion to the covenant continue to sustain us as a people. Blessed by the Presence whose sanctity fills our lives, we give thanks for the covenant.

God of all life, sustain this child and let him be known in Israel as Yakov Touvia, son of Frayde Lisbeh Bat Gershon Yissachar and Yakov.

All say:

May this family grow together in health and strength, in harmony, wisdom, and love, their home filled with words of Torah and acts of kindness. May we all share in the joy of seeing Yakov Touvia grow into adulthood, and blessing to his family, his people, and all humanity.

Jim and Leslie say to Oliver:

Y'va-rehch'chah Adonai v'yish-m'-reh-cha,  
Ya-eir Adinai pa-nav ei-leh-kha  
vi-chu-neh-ka, Yi-sah Adonai pa-nav ei-leh-kha  
v'ya-seim l'chah sha-lom.

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיְשַׁמְרֶךָ.  
יְאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנְךָ.  
יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ.  
וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

May God bless you and guard you.  
May the light of God's Presence shine on you  
And be gracious to you  
May the Presence of God lift you up and give  
You a life of fulfillment, contentment,  
Wholeness, and peace.

All say:

Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu mehplech  
Ha-o-lam, sheh-heh-cheh-ya-nu v'ki-y'ma-nu  
V'hi-gi-a-nu la-z'man ha-zeh.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְלֶכֶךְ הָעוֹלָם.  
שְׂהַחַיְנוּ וְקַיְמָנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזְמַן הַזֶּה.

Blessed by the Presence whose sanctity fills  
Our lives, we give thanks for life, for health,  
And for this sacred moment.