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מי כליב במי כליב



Meet a Mohel

Rabbi Avraham ("Romi") Hakoheh Cohn was a renowned mohel who for decades served as the head mohel of the circumcision program of F.R.E.E (Friends of Refugees from Eastern Europe).

Rabbi Cohn, over his long career of 24 years as a mohel, is estimated to have performed circumcisions for more than 15,000 adults and 25,000 infants mostly Soviet Jewish immigrants— for which he never took a dime. He also worked in a New York Hospital as a mohel. For many years he would do up to 12 *brissim* a day. As one of New York's foremost Mohelim he represented the American Board of Ritual Circumcision at governmental *Bris Mila* Hearings.

Rabbi Cohn was niftar on his 91st Hebrew birthday, after contracting Covid-19.

Born in 1929 in the city of Pressburg, Czechoslovakia, Avraham "Romi" Cohn grew up as a precocious child in a warm and caring family. His parents were successful in business and well known for their charity and kindness. They often invited guests into their home and hosted local *yeshivah* students who had no place else to go.



All that changed dramatically in 1942, when the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia, determined to kill all of its Jews. Romi's parents managed to smuggle him over the border to Hungary, which the Nazis had not yet invaded. And for a while young Romi was able to attend *Puppa Yeshivah*, a elite *Torah* Yeshiva at the time. But it wasn't long before the Nazis came to Hungary, and that's when Romi returned to his native country, Czechoslovakia, to join the underground. As a young partisan, he risked his life time and time again to help others. He was just 16 years old, yet he was instrumental in saving the lives of 56 families during the Holocaust and was later awarded the Silver Star Medal of Honor in recognition of his valor. The remarkable stories of his courage, his bravery, and his heroic endeavors during those horrific war years are recounted in his book, *The Youngest Partisan (Artscroll/Mesorah)*, telling over the captivating tale of a daring teenager who snuck across borders and fought Nazis in the forests.

When he arrived in the US, Romi Cohn was just 21 years old and did not speak any English. But that didn't stop him from eventually

establishing a successful construction company (he built 3,500 homes in Staten Island) through which he was blessed with assets and wealth. Rabbi Cohn radiated the strength of a forest warrior, although over the years he'd channeled his *kochos* into other areas of community service: he was a wealthy contractor who took upon himself the support of up-and-coming *gedolei Torah* — he became the driver confidant and a diary documenter of the holy *Ribnitzer Rebbe*. He was also the man responsible for salvaging and renovating the burial grounds of the *Chasam Sofer* in Bratislava (known as Pressburg in German). But that was never enough for the man who had spent the war years dodging Nazi bullets, assisting his hapless fellow Jews, and fighting the Nazis in the frozen forests.



הארמור' מוויזנין שליט"א
בסנדקאות כבדית

One way he could give more to his People was by becoming a *mohel* and then a teacher of *mohelim*.

Bringing Jewish babies into a covenant of Jewish eternity, he was one of New York's foremost *mohelim*; he was the author of *Bris Avrohom HaKohain* — a *sefer* on the *halachos* and *minhagim* of *bris milah*;

Into the Covenant After a trip to Eretz Yisroel, where he met the Holy Ribnitzer Rebbe zt"l, Rabbi Cohn returned to America with new-found inspiration. A few weeks later word spread that this *tzaddik* would be relocating to New York.

"People vied for the *zechus* to use the rebbe as a *mohel*, but he needed *milah* tools, so someone contacted me. I joined the *Rebbe* at the *bris* he was performing and shared my *keilim*," said Rabbi Cohn. As an expert *mohel* in his own right, he'd

looked closely at the Ribnitzer's handiwork — and felt there was something wrong: The job was somewhat imperfect. So he decided that the next day he'd pay a visit to the family, ostensibly to check on the baby, but really, to finish the job.

"The next day, I went to the child's home, and they recognized that I'd assisted the *Rebbe* by the *bris* and let me in. I was astounded. The *bris* was perfect. It was extraordinary." From there, Rabbi Cohn had gone straight to the *Rebbe*.

"Nu? Hust gezehnt? Bist tzeffriden? You saw the *bris*? Are you satisfied now?" the *Rebbe* said to him. After that, there were no more questions, just an awe-struck *talmid* and his mystical mentor — they did over 200 *brissim* together.

Rabbi Cohn said he knew *milah* was his calling from the time he was a child in Pressburg, enthralled with the work of a family friend and *mohel* named Reb Yisrael Stern.

"I used to follow him to every *bris* and learned the skill. When I came to America, I continued to keep track of *mohelim* and their work. I'd identify a *mohel* not by his face, but by the way he sharpened his nail." Ten years later, Rabbi Cohn became an active *mohel*, and in the ensuing decades, has trained over a hundred students.

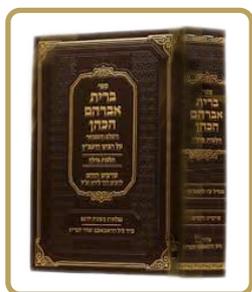
But one thing he'd always been strict about: *Milah* would never be a form of *parnassah*.

"When someone comes to learn *milah* under me, I ask him: Why do you want to learn this?" Rabbi Cohn had shared. "If he tells me, 'I'm a *maggid shiur* and I want to make a bit of money on the side,' I tell him, 'If you want to make more *parnassah*, become a contractor like me. Lots of people come and learn from me how to be a successful contractor, how to build buildings. That's where the money is. But *brissim* you do for free — you don't take money for holy work.' None of my students charge for their work. Some of them will accept it when pressed by the family, but I don't take a penny even if they try to force it on me. Some people will try to push as much as \$2,000 on me, to show how much they value the *mitzvah*, but I tell them, 'not by me.'

"By the *Ribnitzer Rebbe*," Rabbi Cohn had continued, "if someone wanted to pay him he would say, 'Keep the money and do me a favor — don't even tell me *yasher koach*, because your *yasher koach* will reduce some of the magnitude of my *mitzvah*. He told

me that in Moldova, he would often travel all night through the dense forests in order to give a *bris* to a Jewish child in some remote location.

"Each one of them is like my own child," Rabbi Cohn said — a statement that carried special significance, as he himself was never blessed with children.



The sefer that he wrote lives on: *Bris Avrohom HaKohain* is a sefer on the *halachos* and *minhagim* of *bris milah*.

מעשה שהיה כך היה

The Power of a Sandek

Over the past several decades, Rav Sholom Kamenetsky Shlita, *rosh yeshiva* in Philadelphia, has delivered thousands of *shiurim* to thousands of students and has fielded myriad questions, some incredibly difficult, always toiling to provide satisfactory answers. Some questions seem inscrutable, but he's learned to be undaunted. Ultimately, Rav Sholom knows, the answer will come. Because Rav Sholom never likes leaving questions unanswered.

Yet a single question bothered Rav Sholom for his entire lifetime. Until the following event occurred.

When he was born, his father, *Rosh Yeshiva* Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky Shlita, received a phone call from Cincinnati, Ohio, from none other than Rav Eliezer Silver, the famed president of the Union of Orthodox *Rabbis* and *rav* of Knesseth Israel of Cincinnati.

(Born on February 15, 1882, *Niftar* - February 8, 1968 - *Shevat* 9 5728) He helped save many thousands of Jews in the Second World War and held several *Rabbinical* positions in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Ohio. He was born in Obeliai, Lithuania, one of two sons of Rabbi Bunim Tzemach (1844-1917) and Malka Silver. He studied in Daugavpils, with Rabbi Yosef Rosen (the "*Rogatchover Gaon*") and received *Semicha* from Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski in 1906. He immigrated to the United States with his wife in 1907, to escape the anti-Semitism of Czarist Russia. They settled in New York City, However, Rav Silver soon accepted a *Rabbinical*



position at *Keshet Israel* Congregation in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, which he served from 1907 to 1925. His *Torah* scholarship soon drew him into leading Orthodox circles on the national level. In 1912, he was part of a delegation of *rabbis* that asked President William Howard Taft to void a treaty with Russia because of Russia's persecution of Jews. Rav Silver was active in relief efforts in World War I. In 1925 he moved to Springfield, Massachusetts. Around 1931, he accepted an invitation to become *Rabbi* in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he remained until his death.)

He was calling to wish *mazel tov*, along with a strange request: "I'd like to serve as *Sandek*," he said matter-of-factly. Rav Shmuel was startled but was quick to comply. Rav Eliezer Silver was a great *tzaddik*, and it would be an honor to have him serve as *sandek* for his newborn son. The baby was named Sholom and he grew to be a brilliant *talmid chacham*, his success likely influenced by the blessings he received from his *sandek*.

But why? Why did Rav Silver want this *kibbud* so badly?

It was a question that always bothered Rav Sholom, until he, too, received a phone call from Cincinnati. The caller was his *talmid*, Rav Hillel Shepard, *menahel* of the newly founded *Mesivta* of Cincinnati. The *Mesivta* was organizing a grand opening event and they wanted Rav Sholom to be the guest of honor. Rav Sholom immediately agreed — what wouldn't he

But why? Why did Rav Silver want this *kibbud* so badly??

do for his beloved *talmid*? But he had an ulterior motive as well.

When he rose to speak at the event, he shared the story of Rav Silver and his curious insistence on serving as *sandek* at his *bris*.

"Now I'm here, in the city that Rav Silver fought so hard to permeate with *kedushah*, where he battled every challenge and navigated every obstacle in order to build *Torah* and create a haven for *Yiddishkeit* to flourish. The creation of this *mesivta* is a living testimony to his enduring legacy, a legacy that my very own *talmid* was entrusted to uphold. And I'm here to celebrate it with you."

Rav Sholom Kamenetzky doesn't like leaving questions unanswered. Now, he no longer has to.

What's the Halacha?

This question was brought in front of none other than Maran Harav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zatzal-

A Mohel was invited to do a *bris* in a city outside of *Yerushalyim*. The father of the baby offered to pay for the cab ride to get there. In the end, the mohel took a bus to get there. The mohel told this to the father, then the father demanded the money back that he gave him for the cab. The question is being asked: Does the mohel have to return the money that was given to him already?

Stay tuned for the next edition for the answer...

From the last edition of What's the Halacha?

This question was brought in front of Harav Nissim Karelitz Zatzal:

A melamed had a son. *Mazal tov*, and תורה ומועצות he will bring him into the *bris* of Avraham Avinu. He has the option of making the *bris* in the morning which is done to be *inyan* of the *inyan* of מצוות למצוות בקיום. BUT, if he does it in the morning he will have to miss teaching and they will have to hire a substitute. Therefore, maybe he should do the *bris* in the afternoon and not miss teaching his *talmidim* at all and just miss that "inyan."

He Answered:

A Substitute can NOT fulfill the job of the regular Melamed, if so there will be a problem of *Bittul Torah*, Therefore if he can push off the *bris* to the afternoon because *Talmud torah* D'rabbim is yes *Docheh* (pushes off) *Zreizin makdimin*.

A Nice Vort for a Bris

To commemorate our deliverance from *Mitzrayim* every *Yid* is commanded to bring a *Korban Pesach*. This *Korban* is so important that the *Torah* even made special allowances if one is unable to bring the *korban* at the designated time. Unlike any other *mitzvah*, the opportunity to bring a *Pesach Sheini* one month later is provided. The severity of failing to bring the *korban Pesach* is also evident from the punishment dictated by the *Torah*. The *Torah* informs us that the punishment for this transgression is *Kares*, being spiritually cut off before one's time. It is fascinating to note that there is only one other *Mitzvos Aseh* (מצוות עשה) that also carries the punishment of *Kares* if one fails to fulfill it—*Bris Mila*.

The *Shulchan Aruch* when he begins the *Halachos* of *Mila* he writes (ר"ד ס' רס) "מצוות עשה לא לומר את בנו. וגדולה מצוה זו משאר מצוות עשה." The *Shach* commenting on the statement that *mila* is greater than other positive commandments, tells us that the reason is because it is punishable by *Kares* if one grows up and fails to give himself a *Bris Mila*. One may wonder, why is *Mila* singled out? *Korban pesach* also carries the punishment of *Kares* so what is the connection between these two *Mitzvos Aseh*? In order to eat *korban pesach* the *halacha* requires a *Yid* to have a *bris Mila*—(שמות יב:ב) "כל ערל לא יאכל בר" Obviously, *Bris Mila* which enables you to bring the *pesach* seemingly has the greater significance. Why

does this link between *bris* and *korban pesach* exist? What message does it convey?

Bris mila and korban pesach represent the same ideal and value

It is possible that *bris mila* and *korban pesach* represent the same ideal and value. *Bris* signifies it on the individual level and *korban pesach* on the national level. For an individual Jewish male the *bris* represents his covenant with *Hashem* personally while the *korban pesach* represents the individual joining *Am Yisrael* communally. Prior to joining the

communal *Am Yisrael* with his *korban*, every male has the responsibility to personally enter the *Bris shel Avraham Avinu*. This is the *bris* referred to in *Yechezkel* and said aloud at every *Bris Mila*—the intermingling of *דם פסח* and *דם מילה* at the very first *korban pesach* offered in *Mitzrayim*.

This is the *Bracha* to the child who has just fulfilled the first personal aspect of his commitment to being a Jew to be *zocheh* to grow up and become a true *Ben-Torah* and assume his communal responsibility as well.

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