

**It is an opportunity
to join with a family
as they welcome a
new Jewish member
into the covenant**

Inviting to a Bris

If one is invited to *bris*, does *Halacha* require that they attend, what is the source of this halacha? Why are some people careful not to directly invite people to a *bris* ("You are invited to the *Bris*"), but rather inform their friends and community of the *bris* ("The *Bris* will take place on such-and-such a day, at such-and-such an hour").?

The Rema writes (*Yoreh De'ah* 265:12) *ונגנו לקורחת מנין*, *לסעודה מיליה ומקריז פשורות מצוה*, *וככל מי שאינו אוכל בסעודת מיליה* *חווי במנוראה לשומים* (*חומר פסחים קיד*). *ודוקא שנמצאו שם בני אדם מהוננים אבל אם נמצאו בני אדם שאינם מהוננים אין צ"ל לאכול שם*

This may be the source why some rather inform their friends and community of the *bris*. This accomplishes that if the guest is unable to participate in the ceremony, his declining the invitation will not be interpreted as a refusal to take part in the festive meal, thereby sparing him the risk of "excommunication from Heaven" (*Pischei Teshuvah*, 265:18).

However, there are opinions that dispute this ruling, and argue that there is no problem of inviting people to a *bris*, because the statement of the *Rema* applies only to guests who are already at the *bris* — the meal — and refuse to take part. By acting this way, they show contempt for the mitzvah, which cannot be said for somebody who is absent



from the entire affair.

There are also opinions that if there is already a minyan of ten adult Jewish males at the meal, the guest is not obligated to take part, for the *Mitzvah* will be fulfilled without him (see *Otzar Ha-Bris*, p. 163).

For some, the lack of a formal straightforward invitation can be misinterpreted, and liable to make him feel unwanted. In such cases, it is certainly better to invite him in a clear and unmistakable manner.

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 113b) lists seven types of people whose actions lead to them being "excommunicated from Heaven." The Gemara then says that in addition to those seven, "some say" that one who does not join in "feasting with a group celebrating a *mitzvah*" should also be included in this list. *Rashbam* and *Tosafos* both cite a *Bris Milah* or a wedding of a *Bas Kohen* to a *Kohen* as examples of the group of celebratory *mitzvos* that would fall into the category of "feasting with a group celebrating a *mitzvah*." *Tosafos* also points to a *midrash* that states that one who participates in the feast of a *bris* is spared from the judgment of *Gehinnom*. The Rema (*YD* 265:12) quotes as halachah this strong condemnation of one who absents himself from a *bris* meal, but lessens the severity somewhat with the wording "as if excommunicated" - *כמנוראה לשומים*.

Commenting on this Halachah, *Pischei Teshuvah* (*YD* 265:18) cites *Shu't Makom Shmuel* who quotes *Sharvit Zahav* who states that his teachers would object to a *shamash* going from house to house to invite people to a *bris* because of the possibility that someone would not attend and then be considered excommunicated. Rather, he preferred that people should simply be informed when and where the *bris* will take place.

At around the same time, Rabbi Yaakov Culi wrote similarly in Turkey: "If a person is invited to a circumcision feast, he must rush to attend. If he refuses, he is considered as if he were excommunicated from on High.... Furthermore, if



**הרה"ג ר' אשר אריאלי שליט"א
בസנדקאות דמעומד בברית**

a king invites a person to a feast, he cannot refuse to go. The same is true of this feast, where Eliyahu is the host. Some people say not to invite them, since something might come up, preventing them from attending." Rabbi Yaakov Emden similarly wrote (*Migdal Oz*, 9:16:5) that one should not invite an individual to a *bris* if you know he can't come, because of *geneivas da'as* and it can result in his being "as if excommunicated."

In explaining the Gemara's reference to excommunication, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (*Iggros Moshe*, OC 2:95) notes that there is no such consequence for not attending a wedding feast. He then states that although the Gra seems to question why it only applies to a *bris*, the *Rema* maintained that it applies exclusively to a *bris*. Rav Moshe felt that there is an obligation for one to attend a wedding (maybe even uninvited) and bring joy to the bride and groom, whereas he felt that no such obligation exists with regard to a *bris*. The excommunication in the case of a *bris*, Rav Moshe states, is not because of the obligation to attend every *bris* but because you are rejecting participating in a mitzvah that you were personally invited to participate in. Rav Moshe is quoted (*Masores Moshe*, Rabbi Mordechai Tendler) as saying that

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Parents Ask & Your Mohel Answers

Dear Mohel,

My nephew just made a bris that I was present at. Not everyone there knew that the bris was delayed due to an infection that the baby had developed after birth which was treated by antibiotics (I only got this information from my sister, the proud new grandmother). B"n the baby is healthy and doing well. To tell you the truth, I was a bit nervous because the mohel seemed to treat this bris like all the other brissim- it is safe to assume that he was made aware of the situation. It seems that he did not take any precautions- does that make sense?

N.A. Nervous Aunt, Far Rockaway, NY

Your Mohel answers,

As with ALL questions with ANY medical mention, I refer them to my father [Dr. Stuart Shimon Deutsch, M.D. FAAP (Israeli licensed pediatric specialist and U.S. Board certified pediatrician since 1987 practicing now in Lakewood and during the summer in South Fallsburg.]

This is his reply:

"Each case, minor or serious, has to be evaluated independently and assessed based on the history and need for any further evaluation."

Once the baby is discharged, off all antibiotics, is nursing normally, sleeping comfortably and there is no concerns of any recent illness. As long as there was no recommendation for any future specific follow-up related to the preceding hospitalization other than the general statement. Unless you have any questions or concerns then contact your regular doctor, THEN the baby is considered well and you can proceed as regular without any precautions or concerns like any healthy baby."

Your Mohel,
R'Azi Deutsch

To submit questions or concerns to your mohel, Email: your1mohel@gmail.com

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excommunication is the consequence only if one received a personal invitation, but if there was a general invite, such as an announcement after the ceremony that everyone is invited to the *seudah*, it is less of a concern. Nonetheless, he says, it is preferable to simply announce, for example, that the meal will be in the social hall.

Simply having something else important to do may be a sufficient reason to not attend a *bris* even if one was invited. Rabbi Shmuel Halevi Wosner (*Shevet Halevi* 8:217) says that it is obvious to him that if one needs to perform another mitzvah or to learn Torah, he is exempt from this obligation.

He would personally make sure to take a food item from a *bris* to eat at home. Similarly, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (*Yabia Omer* 4:YD:19) maintained that one need not sacrifice *Talmud Torah* to attend a *bris* or wedding. Yemenites never had such a practice and do explicitly invite to a *bris milah*. Rabbi Yosef Kapach explains how the invitation would be spread (*Halichot Teiman* 5747, 164-5) Most understand "not joining in feasting with a group celebrating a mitzvah" to refer to "not eating." But the Chazon Ish is reported (*Ma'aseh Ish*, 5:107) to have explained that the Gemara uses the word "מיסבָּה" which literally means "to sit," and thus all that is required is to remain at the meal, not to eat. Thus, the Chazon Ish often did not eat

anything at a *bris* where he served as the *sandek*. It should be noted that the *Rema* does say "eat" in place of the gemara's lashon of "sit," and that the Gemara's "*mai'saive*" usually refers to reclining at a meal.

To summarize, for hundreds of years, both Ashkenazim and Sephardim had the custom to not directly invite guests to a *bris milah*. Despite the fact that it is not mentioned in the Talmud or early sources, *poskim* encourage following this practice. It is not, however, a prohibition to invite guests to a *bris*. Moreover, if "invitees" might misinterpret the general announcement inviting everyone to

a *bris* as an indication that their presence is not really desired, it may be better to simply invite directly. Furthermore, at the *bris* itself, it is preferable to not directly invite people to the meal in case the participants do not eat.

**Regarding
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Regarding invitees, it is considered meritorious to attend a *bris*. However, if one has someplace important to go—be it to learn Torah, earn a living, or engage in some other mitzvah—he can skip the *simchah*. Attending a *bris* should not be viewed as a burden. On the contrary, it is an opportunity to join with a family as they welcome a new Jewish member into the covenant and to demonstrate that Jews perform *mitzvos*, particularly *bris milah*, with joy and love along with their community.

Secret Segulos



The Rebbe of Shinova used to say that **the meat served at the seudas bris influences the spiritual well-being of the child.**



For the Seuda of the third day of the bris some have the custom to serve tongue(See בראשית י"ה: at this meal, as this seuda comes to rectify the חטא לשון הרע spoken by שם משמו אלילך כי תבוא)



A well-known minhag is to hang Perek קבָּא of Tehillim close to the baby as a protection. Many have the *minhag* to place the *sefer* נועם אלילך by the head of the baby on the *vachtnacht* also as a protection.

מעשה שהיה כך היה

Tears at a Bris

My father, Rav Refael Abuhav z"l, was best known as a cantor (he was the *chazzan* at the Great Synagogue of Tel Aviv for many years) but he was also a much sought-after *mohel*.

That was in part because he performed many *brisim* free of charge, especially for poor families. But Abba would do more than just perform a *bris*, he would look after the families, often supplying them with baby supplies, food, clothing, and even money. For that reason, he had the *zechus* to perform many *brisim* across Israel.

In all the years that he worked as a *mohel*, one story he told us stands out.

One day, my father received a phone call from a man who introduced himself as Gideon. He asked Abba if he could perform the *bris milah* for his newborn son, and my father happily agreed. The *bris* would take place in *Bat Yam*, at 7:30 a.m. on the following day.

Early the next morning, my father davened at the *k'vasikin minyan*, as was his custom, and then took a taxi to the address he was provided. When he arrived, he was surprised to discover that the address was for an apartment building and not a *shul*. Though it's not common to perform a *bris* in a house, it's not completely unheard of either, so he climbed the steps and knocked on the door. A very tall man wearing a t-shirt and shorts answered.

"Excuse me," my father said, a bit confused. "I must have the wrong house."

"Are you the *mohel*?" asked the man. My father nodded.

"In that case, you are in the right place. I'm Gideon, the father of the baby. Please, come in."

Abba walked in and looked around the empty house. "Where will the *brit* take place?" he asked.

Gideon led him into a side room where a newborn was sleeping peacefully.



"Right here," he said. "In the baby's room."

My father was perplexed. Not only would the *bris* take place in a house and not a *shul*, but in an empty house in a side bedroom. There was also no sign of a *minyan* or *seudah*.

Trying to hide his growing unease, my father asked, "Are you expecting more people? Family members?"

"No, no," Gideon said. "There's no need to make a whole party out of this. We didn't invite anyone. What for? We just want to do it quickly and get it over with. How much does the *brit* cost?" the man said, pulling out his wallet. "Nu, how much do I owe you?"

Instead of replying, my father looked around. "Where is the mother of the baby?"

"My wife is in the back, getting ready to leave. She has to go out. Let's just do the *brit* quickly, because I also have to go. I have to be at my job at eight."

Alarmed, Abba stared at the man. This was getting downright bizarre.

"Sir, what do you mean 'do it quickly'? There should be *guests*, a *seudah*, a *minyan*..."

"Look," said Gideon impatiently. "We just want the *bris milah*, nothing more. If you won't do it, that's fine. But if yes, just do it and be done with it."

Abba took a deep breath. "Got it," he said, grasping the situation. "*B'seder*. Don't worry; I will take care of getting people. If you need to leave, you can go."

The man left the house. Abba went downstairs to see if he could gather some passers-by to form a *minyan*, but it was still early in the morning and there weren't many people around. Abba walked back to the apartment and came face to face with Gideon's wife. She was holding a purse in one hand and a baby bottle in the other.

She said, "Listen, I need to leave now, but the housekeeper is supposed to arrive soon. When she comes, you can leave. Here's a bottle in case the baby gets hungry before she arrives." And with that, she handed him the bottle and was out the door.

My father was simply in shock. Though he had performed thousands of *brisim* during his career he had never been in a situation like this, performing a *bris* alone. For a few moments he stood there just shaking his head. Then, he collected himself and began to prepare his instruments.

There was no choice, so Abba had to act as both *sandek* and *mohel*. He said the *prayers* quickly and then performed the circumcision. But at the point when the baby is named, he

suddenly realized that the father had not given him one! What was he supposed to call him?

In a flash, it came to him:

"*Vikarei shemo b'Yisrael*, AVRAHAM BEN GIDEON."

This baby was to be named for the very first person who had performed the *mitzvah* of *bris milah*, Avraham Avinu. Suddenly, his heart constricted and his eyes filled with tears. He began to cry for this poor, unfortunate baby whose parents didn't care enough to be at his *bris*.

Abba closed his eyes and said the concluding prayers. "Zeh hakatan gadol yhiyeh! This small one will be great!" The entire time he sobbed uncontrollably, saying fervently, "*Bezrat Hashem*, may it be His will that this child grows up to be a great *tzaddik* and *yerei Shamayim*!" He cried for the helpless baby who was likely going to be raised without any vestige of his rich heritage. He cried for the parents, who were so abysmally ignorant that they didn't even realize the significance of bringing their son into *briso shel Avraham Avinu*. He prayed fervently for the child's future, trying to imbue him with as much *kedushah* as possible on this holy day.

My father placed the baby on the cot and bandaged, dressed, and swaddled him. Then he lifted little Avraham and held him against his chest, stroking his back until he was calm. Still holding the *rach hanimol*, he sat down and pulled out his little *Tehillim* that he always kept in his bag. He started to chant the holy words. With intense concentration, he prayed for the child, Avraham ben Gideon. Word by word, *perek* by *perek*, he said the *Tehillim* of David *Hamelech*. The tears ran down his cheeks unchecked as he begged *Hashem* to let the boy see the light of *Torah* and *mitzvos*.

He didn't know how long he sat there saying *Tehillim*, engulfed as he was with intense emotion. Soon the baby was sleeping soundly and my father placed him back in the bassinet and began to gather his instruments. From the other room, he heard the door open and close, and saw that the housekeeper had arrived. He could not bear to leave the child alone with a gentile woman so soon after having undergone this most significant occasion of his new life, but he realized there was nothing more he could do. He took one last look at the sleeping newborn, his chest rising and falling. Then he picked up his bag and left.

That evening, Abba came home and told us all about his bizarre day. He described the intense emotions he'd felt being all alone in the house with this baby, and how he could not stop crying. It was clear to all of us that my father had been deeply moved. For many years, he referred back to that day, remembering with utter bewilderment that he had once been the sole participant at a *bris*.

Surprise Visit

Twelve years later, Abba came home one day with barely suppressed excitement. "Don't ask what happened to me today! You will never believe it!"

He told us that a woman came to the offices of the Rabbanut in Tel Aviv, where he worked. She asked to speak to Rav Rafael Abuhav, and was shown into my father's office.

"*Kvod HaRav*," she began, "I have come to ask you for a favor. I have a son who wants to meet you, to talk to you. He is waiting outside. Do you have a few minutes for him?"

"Who is your son?" Abba asked.

She told him his secular name. "You were his *mohel*," she added.

"I don't recall, but it doesn't matter. Of course I will meet with him. Please, let him come in."

A tall, nervous-looking boy entered the office and stood near his mother. Abba smiled and shook his hand, inviting them both to sit down.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

The mother cleared her throat and looked at her son. Then she began to speak.

"*Rabbi*, our family is not religious at all; we don't believe in it. My husband and I have raised our son completely secular. He has always attended public school and has never had any religious instruction. He is now 12-and-a-half years old and we've started talking about his *bar mitzvah*. About half a year ago, he started getting ideas into his head. He wants to have a religious *bar mitzvah*! He wants *tefillin*! He is driving us crazy! We have tried explaining to him that our family doesn't do these things. But from that point on, he lost interest in school, in sports, and stopped participating in family events. We simply don't know what to do with him!"

"A few weeks ago, he asked us about his *mohel*. My husband remembered your name, but my son still wasn't satisfied. He said he wanted to meet you. He didn't

let up, so we looked up your name in the phone book and realized that you work in the office of the Rabbanut. I brought him here to meet you.

"*Rabbi*," she said, her voice cracking, "We love our son and we want him to be happy, but religion is not for us. Please talk to him. I'm hoping you can knock some sense into him."

While the mother was talking, memories of that strange *bris* came flooding back. My father now clearly remembered the woman — she was the one who had left her baby alone with a complete stranger on the day of his *bris*. This meeting was turning out to be perhaps even stranger than his first encounter with this family. He marveled at the story of this young man, and wondered how a boy so young could have such yearnings for *Torah* after being deprived his entire life.

"Well," said my father. "I'm happy to talk with your son. If you can step outside for a bit..."

The mother rose and left the room. Abba now addressed the boy gently and asked what he wanted to talk to him about.

"Tell me the story of my *brit milah*."

"The story of your *brit*?"

"Yes, I want to know how my *brit* went. There are no pictures and my parents said they weren't even there. Only you can tell me."

My father smiled. It was an unusual question but he obliged the boy by telling him about that day. Abba described how he was all alone, and how he had to choose a name for the boy, and how he decided on the name Avraham. He described how choked up he had felt and how he had cried during the entire episode.

The boy was astounded. He never knew he had a religious name. He listened with rapt attention to Abba's tale, hungrily ingesting every word. And then, without warning, the boy burst into tears. His shoulders shook as he sobbed uncontrollably.

My father arranged for Avraham —

as he now began to call himself — to learn with an *avreich* in a local *shul*, paying the young man for his time. He ordered and paid for a *mehudar* pair of *tefillin* from a reputable *sofer* and taught Avraham how to lay them. On the day of Avraham's *bar mitzvah*, almost exactly

13 years from the day Abba first met him as a newborn, he celebrated his *bar mitzvah* in a *shul*, with a small crowd of people. There was a *seudah* with joyous

singing. Avraham's parents eventually resigned themselves to their son's chosen way of life and attended the *bar mitzvah* — looking very much out of place, but happy to participate. And my father was there as well, standing by his side as he entered adulthood, just as he had been there 13 years earlier, as Avraham entered the covenant of Avraham *Avinu*.

Avraham was overjoyed with his newfound life. He loved learning, and seemed drawn to *Yiddishkeit* like a baby drawn to his mother's milk. When he graduated eighth grade he refused to attend public school. He wanted to go to a *yeshivah* and grow in *Torah* learning.

Abba arranged for him to attend a *yeshivah* that was being formed at the time by the *gaon* Rav Nissim Sova. Afterwards, he went to *Be'er Yaakov* and then on to Slabodka. Avraham grew very close to my father and our entire family. Today he is an outstanding *avreich*, *talmid chacham*, and *yerei Shamayim*.

My father often said that the catalyst for Avraham's unusual journey was the tears he shed at his *bris*. Abba always advised parents to allow themselves to cry during their sons' *brisim*. Those tears, he said, plant the seeds for their sons' Jewish futures. Surely, Eliyahu Hanavi, who is present at every *bris*, shed a tear at Avraham's *bris* and returned the boy's holy *neshamah* to his people.

We love our son and we want him to be happy, but religion is not for us

Let's just do the brit quickly, because I also have to go. I have to be at my job at eight.

