

The message of Bris Mila  
is that man must strive,  
improve and refine.

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# מילא במילה



## The Sandek's Role: A Study in Contrasts

Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn

At every *bris mila* one man is honored with the role of *sandek*. This man has been given the highest and most prestigious honor of the *bris mila*, namely, to hold the child during the *bris*.

The function of *sandek* is not merely a technical one of assisting the *mohel* by holding the child in place. Through his participation, the *sandek* bridges the centuries since the commandment of *mila* was given by *Hashem* to Avraham. Cradling the infant on his lap and engulfing him in his *tallis*, the *sandek* casts a shield of *kedusha* that binds the infant irrevocably to the great heritage of his forefathers.

The *Maharil* (cited by the *Rama*, *Yoreh Deah* 265:11) writes that the role of the *sandek* is of such prominence that it is akin to the *kohen* burning the *qimot* on the *moze*. But

why should the *sandek's* seemingly simple task be equated with the *ketores*, a service that the *Torah* terms the "holiest of holies?" And conversely, how is the divine service of incense burning similar to the act of the *bris mila*?

As the rays of the rising sun began to cast their glow over the holy city of Jerusalem, the *kohen* in the *mikdash* inaugurated each new day with the morning *ketores*. The sweet aroma that permeated the *mikdash* signified a new day of *avodah* and *dvaykus* to *Hashem*. (ע"נ פסחים נב.)

At day's end, as the sun dipped westward over Jerusalem, a similar *ketores* was offered. This time the *ketores* was a culmination rather than an inaugural; it was a final act that crowned the *avodah* that had come before it. Indeed, the very first time *ketores* was brought on the *mizbayach*, it was an act of culmination. Moshe had completed construction of the *mishkan* in the *midbar*, all the *kaylim* and the *korbanos* had been brought up to the *mizbayach*, the *menorah* was lit...but still there was a void. The *Shechina* did not descend until the *ketores* was burned. (*Midrash Tanchuma*, *Tetzaveh* 15).

The very first time a *bris mila* was performed, it too was an act of culmination. *Hashem* told Avraham (*Bereishis* 17:1) "התהלך לפני, והיה תמים" Go before me and be perfect. Up to that point Avraham had lived most of his life in acknowledgment and service to *Hashem*. His life of benevolent kindness to mankind was inspirational to all who benefited from it. Yet only with this "final" act of *bris mila* did he merit that *Hashem* called him "תמים," perfect. All that had come before it would be crowned with the act of circumcision- *ברית קודש*.

The *bris* on an infant is the culmination of his creation. First there is the wonder of conception; then the miracle of the formation of the embryo as the mother nurtures the new being within her, and finally a child is born. The child is incomplete. He is not yet *תמים* - perfect. For this too-often-taken-for-granted miracle of birth to be considered perfect, there is one final step, *bris mila*.

The construction of the *mishkan* with all its genius and grandeur did not receive the *Shechinah* until the final act of the *ketores* was brought by Moshe. Similarly the construction of man does not achieve the status of perfection until the act of *mila*, the sign of the *os bris kodesh* is implanted on the body.

Yet, like the morning *ketores*, the *bris* is an inaugural ceremony as well. It is not an end but a beginning- the start of the child's spiritual development and the beginning of his fulfillment of *Hashem's* life-designation for man, the adherence to *Torah* and *mitzvos*.

A philosopher once asked Rabbi Hoshaya. "If *mila* is so favorable in the eye's of the Lord, why isn't every man born circumcised?" Rabbi Hoshaya replied that everything that was created requires development. Plants must be sweetened, wheat must be milled and even man must be perfected. (*Bereishis Rabbah* 11:6)

Thus the message of *bris mila* is that man must strive, improve and refine. At the outset of a Jew's life, the improving process begins. For Avraham, the act of *mila* was a conclusion- the attainment of perfection. To later generations, it was an *אות ברית*, that *Hashem* made with Avraham, that reminds us to strive towards the perfection that Avraham reached.

Like The *kohen* who offers *ketores* in the *קודש קדשים*, the *sandek* presents the child for a *bris mila* as he holds him for the *mohel*. Both the *kohen* and the *sandek* participate in the proceedings that simultaneously reflect back and look forward.

Adapted from *Bris Mila/Circumcision-The Covenant of Abraham* [Artscroll-Mesorah]



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## Mila Mysteries

### Tefillin @ a Bris:

If one is wearing *tefillin* and a *bris* is to take place, he should not remove them until after the *bris*, for just as *tefillin* are referred to as an *אות* so is *bris mila* designated as an *אות*. Therefore, it is appropriate to wear *tefillin* during the performance of a *bris*. (See ש"ך יו"ד ס' רסה ס' ק ב"ד)

The question is raised that this seems to contradict the *Gemara* in *Menachos* (לוי) which says that on *Shabbos* one does not wear *tefillin* as the *Shabbos* itself is an *אות* hence the additional "sign" of *tefillin* is unnecessary. Why, then, does the *Shach* assert that the *bris mila* should be accompanied by the presence of the additional "sign" of *tefillin*?

The answer is, that a Jew requires two signs each day as witnesses of his loyalty to *Hashem*, for in *Torah* law testimony must be substantiated by two witnesses. Thus on weekdays, when the "sign" of the *bris* is ever present on one's body, the additional "sign" of *tefillin* is appropriate. However, on *Shabbos*, when the *אות* of *bris mila* and the *אות* of *Shabbos* the day itself are both present the additional *אות* of *tefillin* is unnecessary. (פרי מגדים או"ח, כט.)

## The Drunk Soviet "Awakens" at a Bris – מעשה שהיה כך היה

Life in the Soviet Union for Yane Krichevsky, the son of *Chassidic* parents, was not easy. His father, not wanting to work on the *Shabbat*, was without a steady job, which forced his family to live without knowing where their next meal will come from. Yane would often eat at the Belenitzskys, who were close family friends. The father, Yisroel Noah Belenitzsky, had an accounting job in a factory. He managed to avoid working on *Shabbat* by remaining late on Thursday and coming early on Sunday morning.

Due to the danger of maintaining a religious lifestyle in Communist Russia, Yane never went to synagogue as a child. But on early mornings, a teacher would come to his home to teach him about Judaism. The teacher's salary was some food that Yane's mother, Tziporah, scratched together. His upbringing left him with only a very basic Jewish education while he graduated the Soviet school system.

After his marriage to a girl from Samarkand, Uzbekistan, Yane learned that life on her side of the Soviet Union was much better. Though they were not able to publicly practice Judaism or teach *Torah*, the authorities there were much more lax in enforcing the laws aimed against those who were doing so underground.

Yane learned to love Judaism. It was not just about doing, but it was about connecting to a higher Creator.

Meanwhile, Yane slowly climbed the ranks in business, and ran numerous fabric factories. His position now gave him the opportunity to employ many of those who did not want to work on the holy *Shabbat*.

In their home, they prepared kosher food for those who were imprisoned for disseminating Judaism. He also assisted other prisoners by convincing top officials to relocate them to safer prisons or labor camps.

As an official manager of numerous profitable factories, Yane was well connected. But it also brought additional surveillance and inquiry on anything that he did. He knew that his Jewish activities were done under the watchful eyes of the

Soviet government. With a lot of bribing and expensive vodka, Yane was able to continue his illegal activities.

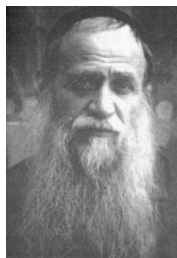
When his second son was born, Yane was immediately contacted by local Soviet officials who warned him, "If you ritually circumcise your son, you will be sent to Siberia for at least ten years."

Yane responded in a rigid tone. He told them that while he would respect their wishes, there is no way he'd surrender his right to make a huge celebration for his family and friends in honor of his son's birth.

The officials agreed and bade him well on the birth of his new baby boy.



Yane Krichevsky



Rabbi Shmaya  
Marinovsky

Yane and his wife Rochel immediately began preparations for the celebration. They invited their family and friends, all from the *chassidic* community. Not to arouse any suspicion, they also invited Mr. Spiegel, a high ranking official in the Uzbekistani government in Tashkent, who happened to be Jewish.

The crowd gathered for the celebration. Yane sat with Spiegel and offered him a huge serving of vodka. After that, it was another attendee's job to drink with Spiegel, and then another. A short while later, Spiegel was drunk, and they were ready to do the ritual circumcision...

The Krichevskys honored Rabbi Shmaya Marinovsky, a highly respected and pious *chassid*, with holding the baby boy, to be the traditional *sandek*. Rabbi Marinovsky's flowing white beard was wet with tears of joy at the privilege of holding the newborn entering the Covenant of Abraham, at great sacrifice to his parents. He knew that if Spiegel would come to his senses, Yane would be sent in exile for many years.

As ten men gathered around the baby, the child was circumcised and named Matisyahu. He was named after the famed Jewish hero from the *Chanukah* story, who stood up to the Greeks in the face of oppression, and was ultimately triumphant.

As the crowd dispersed from around the child and *sandek*, Spiegel suddenly awoke, pointed, and asked, "Who is that holy man?"

Worried that Spiegel had figured out what was going on, they told him that it is the custom for a righteous, elderly man to hold the baby and give him a blessing.

The communist responded, "I want to bend down and give him a kiss on his hands." Rabbi Marinovsky's face became white with fright and feared the worst for Yane, his family, and the entire community.

No one knew what would happen.

Shortly thereafter, Yane went to Mr. Spiegel's office in Tashkent. He wanted to find out whether Mr. Spiegel had reported him to the authorities, and as a result, if anything was brewing against the Jewish community. Yane brought some extra goodies he could use as a bribe. To his shock, there was no sign on Spiegel's door and he was nowhere to be found in the building. In the Soviet Union, the removal of an office sign usually meant that its occupant was arrested.

He immediately began to investigate, worried that if the Soviet authorities found out that this high ranking official attended a ritual circumcision, Yane and his family would surely be arrested soon thereafter.

But, surprisingly, he was told that Spiegel had retired due to health reasons. Yane decided to visit him at his home.

When Yane arrived, he was surprised to learn that Spiegel was greatly moved by the self-sacrifice that others had for their Judaism, and had decided to give up his high ranking and well-paying career and return to his Jewish roots.

Spiegel suddenly awoke, pointed, and asked, "Who is that holy man?"

*evaldig*  
**Gematria's**

The word אקים is an acronym for the words אשר קדש ידיו מבין – who sanctified the beloved one from birth. The first words in the ברכה said after the *bris*. (בעל הטורים)

3 The שם"ה גידין and רמ"ה איברים of all התקשרות says that a *bris* is the מדרגה that one can attain through a *bris*. whose *gematria* is (עם הכולל).

1 משה משה writes that it is impossible for one who does not have a *bris mila* to comprehend the *avodah* that he has to do for *Hashem* and emulate His ways. This is hinted in the *passuk* (Devarim 30:12) מי יעלה-לנו השמימה The first letters of these words spell מילה, the final letters spell the four letter *Shem Hashem*.

2 ואת-בריתי, אקים את-יצחק (Bereishis 17:21).

Your Mohel,

**R' Azi Deutsch**

your1mohel@gmail.com

052-765-9459

Pediatrician  
Approved