

Circumcision Guide

בְּרִית מִיְכָה

A Concise Manual for Christians

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Introduction

[DISCLAIMER: The following is not intended to be a guide to a “kosher” *brit milah* (circumcision) ceremony. Please consult with an ordained Rabbi for more information. If you are a Christian, there are profound questions about whether you should circumcise your child, at least in the Rabbinical sense of the rite. This issue must be settled by the Christian parents through prayer to the Lord Jesus and through consultation with appropriate spiritual advisors.]

Circumcision is performed on the eighth day of the child's life, during the day. The day the child is born counts as the first day, thus if the child is born on a Thursday, he is circumcised on the following Thursday. Keep in mind that a Jewish day begins at sunset, so if the child is born on a Thursday evening, he is circumcised the following Friday. Circumcisions are performed on Shabbat, even though they involve the drawing of blood which is ordinarily forbidden on this day. The commandment to circumcise is found in Genesis 17:10-14 and Leviticus 12:3.

The word *b'rit* means covenant and the word *milah* means to cut. Ritual circumcision is the covenant God established with the Jewish people through the commandment of circumcision. Note that according to Jewish *halakhah*, circumcision performed by a regular physician does not qualify as a valid *brit milah*, regardless of whether a rabbi says a blessing over it, because the removal of the foreskin is considered a religious ritual that must be performed by someone religiously qualified.

What You'll Need

The following is a list of items which you will need to prepare for the ceremony:

1. Kosher sweet red wine.
2. A kiddush cup.
3. A Pillow and pillow case (for the baby on the sandek's knees).
4. Two chairs – one for the sandek and the other for “Elijah.”
5. A small table next to the chairs (for the mohel's instruments, an extra diaper, some Vaseline and some gauze).

It is ideal have a minyan (ten Jewish men over the age of 13 years) present. It is also a common custom to have kosher meal after the ceremony.

Special Guests:

- *Mohel* – The official who performs the rite of circumcision.
- *Sandek* -- The man who holds the baby during the brit milah (i.e., the “godfather”).
- *Sandek Sheini* -- The man who holds the baby during the naming ceremony.
- *Kisei Eliyahu* -- A man to put the baby down on the chair of Elijah before the brit.

The Greeting

Everyone attending the Brit Milah should be present at the location of the ceremony. When the infant is brought into the room, everyone exclaims:

בָּרוּךְ הַבָּא !

“Blessed is he who comes!”

The Mohel then recites the following passage (Numbers 25:10-12):

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
 פִּינְחָס בֶּן־אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן הִשִּׁיב אֶת־חַמְתִּי מֵעַל
 בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת־קִנְאָתִי בְּתוֹכָם וְלֹא־כָלִיתִי
 אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאָתִי
 לְכֵן אֶמַר הַנְּנִי נָתַן לּוֹ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace.”

Elijah's Chair

The seats are now arranged – one for the Sandek, the other for “Elijah.” The baby is first placed on the “Chair of Elijah” by the man designated Kisei Eliyahu, and the Mohel says:

זֶה הַכִּסֵּא שֶׁל אֵלִיָּהוּ הַנָּבִיא, זָכוֹר לְטוֹב.

“This is the throne of Elijah the prophet, who is remembered for good.”



At the Brit Milah, a special chair, called Kisei Eliyahu ha-Navi (Chair of Elijah) is designated for Elijah the Prophet. In some communities a regular chair is used and covered with a special cloth embroidered with the name “Elijah the Prophet.” Normally, the baby is placed on the Chair of Elijah at the beginning of the circumcision ritual, and then on the knees of the sandek.

Mohel's Preliminary Recitation

The baby is usually moved to the sandek's knee, and the Mohel then recites the following verses of Scripture:

לִישׁוּעָתְךָ יְהוָה קִוִּיתִי יְהוָה:

“I wait for your salvation, O LORD.” (Gen. 49:18)

שְׁבַרְתִּי לִישׁוּעָתְךָ יְהוָה וּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ עָשִׂיתִי:

“I hope for your salvation, O LORD, and I do your commandments.” (Psalm 119:166)

אַלְיָהוּ מִלְאָךְ הַבְּרִית, הִנֵּה שְׁלָךְ לְפָנַיךָ, עֲמוּד עַל יְמִינִי וְסִמְכָנִי.

“O Elijah messenger of covenant, behold yours is now before you; stand at my right and assist me” (A Rabbinical statement).

שְׁבַרְתִּי לִישׁוּעָתְךָ יְהוָה:

“I hope for your salvation, O LORD.” (Psalm 119:166)

שֵׁשׁ אֲנֹכִי עַל-אִמְרֹתֶיךָ, כְּמוֹצֵא שָׁלָל רָב:

“I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil.” (Psalm 119:162)

שְׁלוֹם רַב לְאַהֲבֵי תוֹרָתְךָ וְאִין-לָמוּ מְכַשׁוֹל

“Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.” (Psalm 119:165)

אֲשֶׁרִי תִבְחַר וּתְקַרֵּב יִשְׁכַּן חֲצֵרֶיךָ

“Happy is the man You choose and bring near to dwell in Your courts.” (Psalm 65:5a[h])

All present complete this verse by saying:

נִשְׂבְּעָה בְּטוֹב בֵּיתְךָ קֹדֶשׁ הַיְכָלְךָ

“may we be sated with the blessings of Your house, Your holy temple.” (Psalm 65:5b[h])

The Father's Statement of Intent

When the Mohel is ready to perform the circumcision, the baby's father says:

הִנְנִי מוּכָן וּמְזֻמָּן לְקַיֵּם מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה שְׂצִוְנִי
הַבּוֹרֵא יִתְבָּרֵךְ, לְמוֹל אֶת בְּנִי.

“Behold, I am prepared and ready to perform the positive mitzvah that the Creator has commanded me, may He be blessed, to circumcise my son.”

The Mohel then recites:

אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְאַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ,
הַתְּהִלָּךְ לְפָנַי וְהִיָּה תָמִים.
הִנְנִי מוּכָן וּמְזֻמָּן לְקַיֵּם מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה שְׂצִוְנִי
הַבּוֹרֵא יִתְבָּרֵךְ, לְמוֹל.

“Said the Holy One, blessed be He to our father Abraham, Walk before Me and be perfect. Behold, I am prepared and ready to perform the positive mitzvah that the Creator has commanded me, may He be blessed, to circumcise.”

The Circumcision

The baby is now put on the Sandek's knees (atop the pillow).

The Mohel says:

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

“Blessed art Thou, LORD our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding circumcision.”

During the circumcision itself, the father recites:

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

“Blessed art Thou, LORD our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to bring him into the covenant of Abraham our father.”



All present respond with:

אָמֵן. כַּשֶּׁם שֶׁנִּכְנַס לְבְרִית, כֵּן יִכְנַס לְתוֹרָה וּלְחַפָּה וּלְמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים.

“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.”

The Blessings

After the circumcision, the baby is held by a guest. Another guest (or the Mohel) fills the cup of wine and recites the blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
בוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

“Blessed art Thou, LORD our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.”

[A drop of wine may be put into the child’s mouth after the blessing.]



All respond with:

אָמֵן.

Note: Additional blessings may be said at this time. See a Siddur for more information.

Giving of the Name

Keriat hashem

The Mohel says:

[Note: This is abbreviated]

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, קַיִם אֶת הַיְלָד הַזֶּה לְאָבִיו וּלְאִמּוֹ,
 וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל (baby's Hebrew name) בֶּן (baby's father's Hebrew name) .
 הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ:
 הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ:
 (baby's Hebrew name) בֶּן (baby's father's Hebrew name) זֶה הַקָּטָן גָּדוֹל יִהְיֶה.

“Our God and the God of our fathers, preserve this child for his father and for his mother, and may his name be called in Israel (baby’s Hebrew name) son of (father’s Hebrew name). O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever! (Baby’s Hebrew name) son of (father’s Hebrew name), may this little one become great.”



All respond with:

כַּשֶּׁם שָׁנַכְנַס לְבְרִית, כֵּן יִכְנַס לְתוֹרָה וּלְחַפָּה וּלְמַעֲשֵׂים טוֹבִים.

“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.”

Blessing of the Child

The Mohel then blesses the child:

מִי שֶׁבֵרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, הוּא יְבָרֶךְ אֶת הַיָּלֵד
 בֶּן (baby's Hebrew name) הַנִּמּוּל (baby's father's Hebrew name),
 וַיִּשְׁלַח לוֹ רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה, בְּעֵבוּר שְׁנֵיכֶנֶס לְבְרִית.
 וְכִשֶּׁם שְׁנֵיכֶנֶס לְבְרִית, כֵּן יִכְנֶס לְתוֹרָה, וּלְחֻפָּה, וּלְמַעֲשֵׂים טוֹבִים.
 וְנֹאמַר: אָמֵן.

“May He who blessed our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob bless the tender child just circumcised, (baby’s Hebrew name) son of (father’s Hebrew name), and may He send him a complete recovery because he has entered into the covenant. 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. And let us say, Amen.”

All respond with:

אָמֵן.

The Brit Milah concludes with:

- *Prayer by the father for the son*
- *Ribboni Shel Olam*
- *Aleinu*
- *Mourner’s Kaddish*

After this, a festive meal is eaten and everyone wishes the parents a hearty “Mazal Tov!”

מִזְכָּל טוֹב !

Afterword for Christians

Should Christians be Circumcised?

Traditional Judaism regards circumcision as a “rite of passage” into covenant relationship with the LORD, a “giving birth” to a member of Israel, the very family of God. Indeed, according to some of the Jewish sages, being born and circumcised a Jew is sufficient to warrant a place in the world to come. But is this the truth? Does circumcision give a Jew merit before the LORD God of Israel?

The rite of circumcision predates the giving of the Torah to Moses at Sinai, of course, and was given to Abraham as a sign of separation from his pagan past (Gen. 17:10-14). As a literal cut into the reproductive organ of flesh, it was meant to (intimately) put the mark of the LORD at the point of contact with the lower “reproductive” nature. As such, it was inherently symbolic, since no fleshly operation could sever the connection of the *yetser hara* from the loins of man (Gal. 6:8).

The Torah and Prophets confirm this understanding that the physical rite itself was intended to signify a spiritual change within a person. For example, “Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked” (Deut. 10:16). And again, “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings” (Jer. 4:4). Thus it is clear from the Tanakh that “circumcision” was always intended to be sign of inward transformation rather than an external ritual.

Moses himself provides an interesting case study. In Exodus 4:24-26 we read that the LORD sought to “kill” Moses since he failed to circumcise his family. What does this mean? It is evident that no man can see God and live (Exodus 33:20; Deut. 34:10), yet Moses is said to have been able to speak with God *panim el-panim* - “face to face.” In other words, Moses had to die in order to commune with the LORD. His flesh had to be “rolled away” so that he could experience the Presence of the LORD. To seek God’s face is the death sentence of our *basar* - our “flesh” and its ties to the carnal connections with the world.

Moses was unable to lead the children of Israel into the land of promise. Rather it was Joshua the son of Nun - a type of Mashiach - who went over the Jordan. However, before Israel could enter the land of promise, they had to be circumcised *again* at Gilgal, the entrance to Canaan (Josh. 5:2-9). In Hebrew, “Gilgal” means “to roll,” as in rolling off from us “the flesh” or the principle of lust that governs the lower nature. This second circumcision is prophetic of the work of the Mashiach Yeshua done on our behalf.

The Brit Chadashah reaffirms that true circumcision is a matter of inward transformation rather than mere external ritual:

כִּי לֹא־זֶה הוּא יְהוּדִי אֲשֶׁר לְעֵינַיִם וְלֹא זֹאת הִיא
הַמּוּלָּה אֲשֶׁר לְמַרְאֵה בְּבָשָׂר: אֲךָ זֶה יְהוּדִי אֲשֶׁר
בְּתוֹךְ לִבּוֹ הוּא יְהוּדִי וְהַמּוּלָּה מוּלַת הַלֵּבָב הִיא לְפִי
רוּחַ הַדְּבָר וְלֹא לְפִי אוֹת הַכְּתָב אֲשֶׁר תְּהַלְתּוּ לֹא
מִבְּנֵי אָדָם כִּי אִם מֵאֱלֹהִים:

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.” Romans 2:28-29.

Indeed, true inward circumcision is a matter of a heart transformed by the grace of God given through the love of the Mashiach Yeshua:

Therefore remember that at one time you were *Goyim* in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands (Eph. 2:11); [but] in Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of the Messiah, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith by the powerful working of God, who raised the Messiah from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him... (Col 2:11-3).

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50), and those controlled by the sinful nature (*yetzer hara*) cannot please God (Rom. 8:8). Before coming before the LORD in the Mishkan (tabernacle), the worshipper had to face the brazen altar where the smoke of flesh ascended up in sacrifice. No one could approach the LORD apart from the shedding of blood and the giving up of the flesh.

Yeshua the Mashiach offered His flesh and blood upon the cross as the Sacrifice for the life of mankind (John 6:51) We cannot approach the LORD apart from His sacrifice on our behalf. And yet we are identified with His sacrifice - we are to follow Him and count ourselves crucified with Him (Rom. 6:6). This requires an act of faith that effects an inward heart change. We “reckon ourselves” dead indeed to the flesh (Romans 6:11) and thereby put away the deeds of the flesh (Col. 3:5). We die in order to live. Through *teshuvah* (repentance) we turn our back forever on the flesh, take up our cross daily, and follow the Master (Luke 9:23).

Nicodemus was “the teacher of Israel” who came to Yeshua by night to ask about salvation (John 3:1-21). His understanding appears to have been entirely rabbinical, thinking that Yeshua’s concept of salvation had to do with physical birth and ritual circumcision. Yeshua corrected his faulty thinking by pointing to spiritual birth with inward circumcision as the way to the Father. The new birth Yeshua spoke of is a birth of “water *and* of the Spirit.” It is an opening up and coming alive in the realm of the Spirit.

It takes more than flesh to make one a Jew who stands approved in God's sight. What more does it require? It takes walking “in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised” (Rom. 4:12b). Just as God chose Abraham before he was circumcised, so Gentiles who trust as did Abraham “are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). And you are a child of Abraham, if you are trusting in Yeshua as your Savior (Gal. 3:7).

Should a Christian be circumcised, then? Absolutely - and in fact, if you are uncircumcised you are lost and will suffer eternally. But this circumcision is a spiritual act, performed by the “hands of the Messiah” and received through an act of faith in His love. Indeed, in the coming Messianic kingdom, Isaiah foretold the time when only circumcised people would be allowed to enter the new city of Zion (Isa. 52:1-2). This is a picture of our future estate with Yeshua as Mashiach ben David.

But if the question is whether a Christian should be circumcised in the physical sense, as a Rabbinical rite that is intended to symbolize inclusion into Israel (i.e., “conversion” to Judaism), the answer is a resounding “No!” If you have trusted in Yeshua as your Savior you have no need for any further conversion. You are already “grafted in” to the Olive Tree of Israel (Rom. 11:17). Circumcision was not required of the first converts to the way of Yeshua (cf. Acts 15:1-21; Gal 5:2-4). For Jewish believers in the Mashiach who have already been circumcised, there is no need to become “uncircumcised,” but the Brit Chadashah is emphatic that circumcision as a Rabbinical ritual to effect inclusion into Israel is worthless.

In fact, depending on your motivation, the desire to be circumcised can be spiritually damning:

Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, the Messiah will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole Torah. You are severed from Messiah, you who would be justified by the Torah; you have fallen away from grace. (Gal. 5:2-4)

How so? Did not the LORD institute circumcision as an “everlasting covenant” (Gen. 17:3)? Indeed He did, but if someone who is uncircumcised seeks to be “justified” by means of the commandment in the Torah (i.e., ritual acts or works), he is thereby obligated to keep the whole Torah, and the provision for sacrifice through the Mashiach under the terms of the Brit Chadashah will no longer be in effect (Gal. 3:10). We are justified by trusting in the LORD, and not by the deeds of the Torah (Rom. 3:20).

The circumcision made “without hands” is an operation of the Holy Spirit Who writes the inner meaning and truth of the Torah upon our hearts. True circumcision represents the death of the selfish impulse within our hearts (a miracle if ever there was one!) and is merely prefigured by the physical ritual as practiced by Rabbinical Judaism. Even Moses foresaw that day when the outer would become inner, as he wrote:

“The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live” (Deut. 30:6).

God wants us to stop “reproducing in the flesh” and begin to reproduce in the Spirit. Circumcision, then, is a symbol of such inner transformation, a picture of an inner fruitfulness that only the Holy Spirit can work within us. It is a picture of grace, a seal of the Spirit, an identification with the way of the LORD Yeshua, who took up His cross and poured out His heart for us in sacrificial love. Such true circumcision is the end of all confidence “in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3).