



A DAILY BRIS!

What actually happens at a bris, and what is its spiritual significance?

Because I'm A Jew

Why is there so much animosity from many Arabs towards Jews?

People are constantly trying to figure out what the real problem is and fix it, and well, I think I've found the root of the problem in this week's portion. Abraham celebrates Ishmael's Bar Mitzvah by circumcising him. Later Abraham celebrates Isaac's Bar Mitzvah by making a party that put the Steins and the Goldbergs to shame! Even until this very day Jews receive gifts and checks on their Bar Mitzvah—while Arabs get snipped on theirs.

Is it any wonder that they have a grudge?

On a more serious note, circumcision is the very first mitzvah given to Abraham and his descendants. It is one of the most precious mitzvos to the Jewish people. Jews who hardly keep any other mitzvos are careful to have their sons circumcised.

Chabad in Odessa used to bring out a Mohel every few months to perform circumcisions for the many men who wanted to have a Bris, after so many decades of communism.

The newspaper got wind of this and they sent a reporter to interview the men. The reporter approached one older man standing on a long line and asked, "Why are you standing on line?"

"To receive a Bris," the man replied.

"How old are you now?" the reporter asked.

"73" the man replied.

“And why at the age of 73 would you decide to be circumcised? Are you religious?”

“Religious!” the man laughed, “I’m atheist!”

“But if you’re atheist why do you want to be circumcised?” the confused reporter asked.

“I am a Jew,” the man simply answered.

Jews all over the world eagerly attend a Bris—but you may notice that they often stand as far away from the stage as possible. It might be that they are afraid to watch the ceremony. After all, the Mohel is standing with a sharp knife! Or perhaps they simply don’t know or understand what’s going on. So let’s go through it.

Elijah’s Presence

The first thing that happens is that the baby is brought in by the *kvatters*—usually a married couple. The wife hands the baby to her husband and he places it on the seat of Elijah.

How does Elijah land here, you might be wondering? During his career as prophet of the Jewish people, many Jews weren’t keeping the mitzvah of circumcision. Elijah complained to G-d, “The Jewish people have forsaken your covenant!”

As a consequence for accusing the Jewish people, G-d decreed that Elijah would have to visit every circumcision to attest to the fact that Jews do, in fact, keep the mitzvah. We therefore set up a chair for the prophet who, we are sure, will be present at the Bris, and we place the baby in that chair briefly.

The greatest honor is Sandek, holding the baby during the ceremony. The reason it is so great is because at the first Bris that was ever performed, G-d himself was the first Sandek. The Midrash describes his Bris, “Abraham worried lest his hand slip while he performed the circumcision on himself, for he was old. G-d therefore guided his hand.”

Yet there is another incentive to be Sandek. It is written in the holy books that the merit of being a Sandek brings wealth and that’s why many are eager to be Sandek!

The Naming

Once the traumatic part of the ceremony is over and we’ve checked

that everybody has survived (especially the men watching from close up) we move on to the naming. Why is a baby named at the Bris? This too we learn from this week's portion. G-d didn't change Abraham's name from Abram until the Bris. So we, his descendants, also hold off on naming the baby until he is circumcised.

They say that a young couple once banged on their rabbi's door late at night begging to be let in for an emergency meeting. When the Rabbi asked what the emergency was they informed him that they wanted a divorce. Shocked, the rabbi asked if they had any children. They had one little boy. The Rabbi then asked how old the boy was. They said that the very next morning was to be his Bris!

"Why don't you just wait until after the Bris, and then we'll see how you feel?" The rabbi suggested. "What's the rush?"

"But Rabbi," the couple shouted, "The Bris is the reason we want to get divorced!"

"Oh," said the rabbi, "What's the problem with the Bris?"

"Well," said the husband, "I want to name the boy after my father and she wants to name him after hers."

"What was your father's name?" asked the Rabbi.

"My father's name was Meir," the man said.

Turning to the wife the Rabbi asked, "And what was your father's name?"

"My father's name was Meir!" she proudly stated.

The Rabbi couldn't believe what he was hearing! "I don't understand the problem," he said.

The husband explained, "My father was a scholar while my father-in-law was a simpleton, therefore I want my son to be named only for my father."

The Rabbi smiled. He said, "I have the solution. Name the boy Meir and when he grows up you'll find out who he was really named for. If he grows to be a scholar you'll know that he was named for your father, otherwise he must have been named for your father-in-law."

According to Kabbalah, the baby's name is given to the parents as a

minor prophecy. Therefore, we allow the parents to make the decision, and we *try* to convince all the mother-in-laws to stay out...

There is another reference to circumcision in the Torah. In Deuteronomy it says, “and you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart.” Every heart has a spiritual foreskin, a layer that numbs the spiritual sensitivity and disrupts the connection with G-d. This type of foreskin doesn’t discriminate between men and women. All of us have this and we must work to remove this skin and open our hearts to Judaism. Although the actual mitzvah of circumcision is done only once in a lifetime, we go through the experience on this spiritual level every single day.