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ב ר י ת מ י ל ה

THE COVENANT

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עיה"ק ירושלים ת"ו
אלול תשס"ט

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Anyone may copy, photograph or translate from this book, but not for commercial purposes. It is written:

"The Lord was pleased for His righteousness' sake, to make the TORAH great and glorious." (ישעיה מב:כא)

Yet, the following teaching of *Chazal* should be strictly adhered to:

"Whoever reports a saying in the name of its originator, brings redemption to the World." (מגילה טו.)

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My thanks are due to my grandson **Dr. Benji Schreiber** הי"ץ, a physician and practicing *MOHEL*, who asked me to write a few words on the subject of *BRIT MILAH*, which some people may find useful.

I would also like to express my appreciation to my granddaughter **Avital Schreiber-Levy** הי"ץ for designing the beautiful front-cover. All up to her usual exquisite high standard. **כל הכבוד !**

This Divine commandment of circumcision is one of the basic tenets of the Jewish religion. As it is written:

כה אמר י-הוה אם לא בריתי יומם ולילה
חקות שמים וארץ לא שמתי

"Thus saith the Lord: If My COVENANT be not with day and night, then I have not appointed the ordinances of HEAVEN and EARTH."
(ירמיה לג:כה - Jeremiah 33:25)

But for the BLOOD OF THE COVENANT, HEAVEN and EARTH would not endure! (שבת קלז:)

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ה' כסלו תש"ע לפ"ק

This book offers to readers a fascinating look at the Mitzvah of Bris Milah. Its structure encompasses a vast array of detail and the author has succeeded in rendering the most complex ideas into elemental clarity.

I have known the author over a long period of years. He epitomizes the great values of Yiddishkeit, to observe, to perform and to fulfil all the teachings of Hashem in sincerity and love, and to transmit them to the reader.

My prayer to the Almighty is, that he be given good health and Brochos that he may continue his life work to disseminate Torah for many years to come.

Dayan Ch. Ehrentreu

הרב חיים היילפרין
רב בית המדרש "דברי חיים"
בעמח"ס שערי חיים
וחבר ביד"צ התאקה"ח לונדון יצ"ו

כס"ד

ו' לחודש אלול תשס"ט

נהניתי מאוד מדברים הנעימים שכתב הרב המופלג בתו"י מו"ה נחום יצחק מרל שליט"א על עניני ברית, ענינים וחידושים אודות המצוה הגדולה והחשובה אשר נכרתו עליה י"ג בריתות, וראיתי שכתב בטוב טעם ודעת חדשים וגם ישנים, וכמעשהו הראשון בשאר חיבוריו הנפלאים כן מעשהו האחרון, וברכתי עליו ברכת הנהנין, ואברכהו שיזכה להמשיך ללמוד וללמד ולכתוב מתוך נחת והרחבת הדעת מתוך בריות גופא ונהורא מעליא עמו"ש.

הכו"ח לכבוד התורה ולומדיה,

בכבוד ובברכה,


חיים היילפרין

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B I R T H

The *Midrash* gives us an insight as to what happens to the SOUL before it is born. The *TALMUD* gives a similar account with slight variations. (נדה ל:)

The full version is in the *Midrash Tanchuma*; herewith a shortened precis:

R. Yochanan said: What is the meaning of the verse

עשה גדלות עד אין חקר ונפלאות עד אין מספר

"Who doeth great things past finding out; yea, marvellous things without number." (איוב ט:י) (Job 9:10)

All the SOULS from **Adam** onwards were entirely formulated during the first week of Creation, and they all abided in *Gan Eden-PARADISE*, and were present at *Matan Torah*, the giving of the *Torah*.

As soon as a child is about to be formed, it is decided whether it will be male or female, strong or weak, rich or poor, tall or short, handsome or ugly, thin or fat, *et cetera*.

However, whether righteous or evil is not predestined!

HaShem then instructs an **Angel** to bring a specific SOUL and forcibly plants it in the womb, and two other **Angels** are instructed to guard it, lest it flees from there.

These two **Guardian-Angels** now begin the tutelage of the SOUL. A light burns above its head and it looks and sees from one end of the world to the other. As it is written:

בהלו נרו עלי ראשי לאורו אלך חשך

"When His lamp shined above my head, and by His light I walked through darkness." (איוב כט:ג) (Job 29:3)

One **Angel** gives the SOUL a conducted morning-tour through *Gan Eden-PARADISE*, where the **RIGHTEOUS TZADIKIM** sit in great honour with their crowns on their heads, being nourished by the glory of the **ALMIGHTY-SHECHINAH**.

The **Angel** explains that these too started off being an insignificant drop of seed brought to life with a similar SOUL, and through their own will they reached this high level.

The other **Angel** gives the SOUL an evening-tour of **Gehinnom**, showing the suffering of the wicked and how they are being hit with fiery sticks because they did not keep the **Torah** and its laws, and entreats the SOUL from sinking to this level during its stay on earth.

The SOUL is returned to the womb and is taught **Torah**.

When the time comes and the child is born, it forgets all it has learned, and cries bitterly for having lost its protected place, and the comfort of the world it had come from.

(Midrash Tanchuma, Exodus, Pekudei 3) - תנחומא, פ' פקודי סימן ג)

It is now up to the child, under the guidance of its elders, to go on a life-long quest to retrieve what has been lost; and the SOUL is imbued with this potency.

As **R. Yitzchak** also taught:

אם יאמר לך אדם יגעתי ולא מצאתי, אל תאמן.
לא יגעתי ומצאתי, אל תאמן. יגעתי ומצאתי, תאמן.

If a man says to you:

I have laboured and not found, do not believe him.

If he says:

I have not laboured but still have found, do not believe him.

If he says:

I HAVE LABOURED AND I HAVE FOUND, you may believe him!

This is true in respect of gaining enlightenment from the **Torah**, but in respect of business, it entirely depends on the assistance of Heaven.

And even for learning **Torah**, individual effort will only accomplish the attainment of the understanding. However for remembering what one has learned, one depends on the support of Heaven.

(Megillah 6:) - מגילה ו')

SHALOM ZACHAR - שלום זכר

R. Yitzchak citing R. Ammi stated:

כיון שבא זכר בעולם, בא שלום בעולם, שנאמר:
שלחו כר מושל ארץ

"As soon as a MALE comes into the world, PEACE comes into the world, for it is said: "Send ye a GIFT for the ruler of the land."
(ישעיה טז:א - Isaiah 31:1)

The Hebrew for MALE is זכר-zachar. This is composed of the consonants of the words זכה-zeh char-THIS IS A GIFT.
(נדה לא:א - Niddah 31:)

This is also reflected in the *Gimatriya*-NUMERALS OF ITS LETTERS, as follows:

BLESSING ברכה = 227 = זכר MALE

It is an ancient custom that on the very first *SHABBAT-FRIDAY NIGHT* after the birth, relatives and friends come to visit. This gathering is called "*Shalom Zachar*".

Light refreshments are served, and traditionally these include cooked chick-peas and lentils, dried and rolled in spices. In *yiddish* these are called "*Arbes*", from the German word "*Erbse*", meaning "pea".

Actually, these are items that one may give to a mourner's first repast, called "סעודת הבראה-se'udat havra'ah-MEAL OF COMFORT", after the burial. As it has been taught in the name of **Rabbah ben Mari**:

מה עדשה זו אין לה פה, אף אבל אין לו פה ...

"Just as the lentil has no MOUTH, so the mourner has no mouth (for speech). Others say: Just as the lentil is round, so mourning comes round to everyone of this world." (בבא בתרא טז:א - Bava Batra 16:)

The *Gimatriya* of פה = 85 = מילה CIRCUMCISION!

And the newly-born has as yet no "פה", and he is sad that he forgot all the learning the ANGEL taught him, and that he was born against his will into this materialistic world. (אבות ד:כב - Pirkei Avot 4:22)

WACHTNACHT - ליל שמורים - NIGHT WATCH

Some have the custom that in the evening before the *BRIT MILAH* the young couple who are honoured with the *GEVATTERSCHAFT*, go to visit the newly-born and his mother.

Their function at the ceremony will be for the *GEVATTERIN-GODMOTHER* to receive the baby-boy from his mother. She will then hand him to her husband, the *GEVATTER*, who carries him to the *BRIT*.

This job is often given to a young couple who have as yet no children, as it is deemed to be a panacea for this.

Similarly, the *SANDEK-סנדק-GODFATHER*, who will hold the baby for the *BRIT*, may also visit. He is referred to as *BA'AL BRIT-בעל ברית-MASTER OF THE CIRCUMCISION*.

Ideally, the *MOHEL-מוהל-CIRCUMCISOR* should be a Jewish man, who himself is circumcised. As it is written:

המול ימול יליד ביתך

"He that is born in thy house shall surely be circumcised."

(פ' לך לך יז:יג) - Genesis 17:13

This can be read into the double use of the verb, meaning *the circumcised shall circumcise*.

Therefore a woman should not perform the circumcision.

So how are we to understand the Biblical incident of *TZIPPORAH*, wife of *Moshe Rabeinu*, about whom it is written:

ותקח צפרה צר ותכרת את ערלת בנה

"Then *TZIPPORAH* took a flint, and cut off the foreskin of her son."

(פ' שמות ד:כה) - Exodus 4:25

It means that *she caused it to be cut off*, by asking another person, a man, to do it. Or one may say that she only began and *MOSHE* completed the operation.

(עבודה זרה כז.)

Yet it is taught:

הכל כשרים למול
אפילו עבד אשה וקטן וערל ישראל שמתו אחיו מחמת מילה
ויש אומרים דאשה לא תמול וכן נוהגים להדר אחר איש

"All may perform circumcision, even a slave, a woman, a minor, and an uncircumcised Jew whose brothers died because of the circumcision.

Though some say that A WOMAN SHOULD NOT CIRCUMCISE, AND THIS IS THE CUSTOM, that one selects a man."

(שולחן ערוך, יורה דעה, סימן רסד)

Some *MOHALIM* also come in the evening of the *WACHTNACHT* for a last inspection of the baby-boy before doing the *BRIT*.

And thanks to the visitors present they do not have to worry about the interdict of יחוד-*YICHUD-PRIVACY*, which forbids a man to be alone with a strange woman, especially at night.

Together with boys and relatives that have assembled in the house of the newly-born, some *Tehillim* and other prayers are said.

Particularly "*שמע-Shema*" and "*המלאך הגואל אותי-HaMalach hago'el oti*", which can be found in every *Siddur-PRAYER BOOK*, as these are part of the prayers said before retiring to sleep at night.

This ritual relies on the biblical charge which *HaShem* gave to our forebear AVRAHAM, the patriarch and founder of the Jewish people, as it is written:

ויאמר א-להים אל אברהם ואתה את בריתי תשמור
אתה וזרעך אחריך לדורתם

"And *HaShem* said to AVRAHAM: And as for thee, THOU SHALT GUARD MY COVENANT, thou, and thy seed after thee throughout their generations." (פ' לך לך יז:ט) - Genesis 17:9)

For SATAN is always ready to prevent a good deed to be done, especially such a great *Mitzvah* as CIRCUMCISION.

PROPHET ELIYAHU

By Divine direction, the PROPHET ELIYAHU is a guest at every *BRIT* where he finds a special chair reserved. The newly-born is first placed on this chair, before being put on the lap of the *Sandak*, who holds him during the operation.

This has bestowed upon the PROPHET ELIYAHU the title of "*Mal'ach HaBrit*-מלאך הברית-ANGEL OF THE COVENANT". As it is written:

ומלאך הברית אשר אתם חפצים הנה בא אמר ה' צ-באות

"And the MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT, whom ye delight in, behold, he cometh, saith the Lord of hosts."

(מלאכי ג:א - Malachi 3:1)

For the PROPHET ELIYAHU will also come and herald the FINAL REDEMPTION. (מלאכי ג:כג Malachi 3:23)

May it be speedily in our days!

The PROPHET ELIYAHU is identified as PINCHAS BEN ELEAZAR, grandson of the High Priest AHARON.

When ELIYAHU complained to *HaShem* about the Children of Israel, saying:

קנא קנאתי לה' א-להי צ-באות
כי עזבו בריתך בני ישראל

"I have been very jealous for the Lord, the G-d of Hosts, FOR THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL HAVE FORSAKEN THY COVENANT."

(מלכים א, יט:י - First Kings, 19:10)

HaShem answered him: "You seem to be constantly resentful to protect the honour of Heaven. Last time it was because they practiced harlotry. Now you protest that they do not perform circumcision.

Henceforth, you shall attend every *BRIT MILAH* and verify with your own eyes how the Children of Israel keep My COVENANT."

So the SAGES arranged that a special chair be made available for the PROPHET ELIYAHU at every *BRIT MILAH*.

(Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 29)

CIRCUMCISION

The second behest in the *Torah* is that of CIRCUMCISION. As it is written:

זאת בריתי אשר תשמרו ביני וביניכם ובין זרעך אחריו
המול לכם כל זכר

"This is MY COVENANT, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee; every male among you shall be circumcised."
(פ' לך לך יז:י) - Genesis 17:10)

וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו

"And in the eighth DAY the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised."
(פ' תזריע יב:ג) - Leviticus 12:3)

During the day, but not at night. (פסחים ד.)

The duty to circumcise the newly-born rests primarily on the father, and in second place on the *Bet Din*; and finally on the boy himself as he grows older. If by the age of 13 years and one day the boy has deliberately refused to be circumcised, he lays himself open to the Divine punishment of *Karet*-כרת-PREMATURE DEATH.

This is the ONLY positive *Mitzvah* which nowadays carries such a severe punishment if intentionally invalidated.

At the time the *Bet HaMikdash*-TEMPLE was functioning in Yerushalayim, this retribution also applied for not bringing the PASCHAL OFFERING.

Our PATRIARCH AVRAHAM, the founder of the Jewish people, circumcised at the age of 99. (פ' לך לך יז:כד) - Genesis 17:24)

AVRAHAM circumcised his son YITZCHAK on the eighth day after birth. (פ' וירא כא:ד) - Genesis 21:4)

He was the first boy to be circumcised on the eighth day.

ויעש אברהם משתה גדול ביום הגמל את יצחק

"And AVRAHAM made a great feast on the day that YITZCHAK WAS CIRCUMCISED."
(פ' וירא כא:ח) - Genesis 21:8)

The word "הגמל-*higamel*" is usually translated "WAS WEANED", but it can be divided to read "מל-הג-CIRCUMCISED 5+3", i.e. 8th day.

CIRCUMCISION is one of the THREE external signs of a Jew. The other TWO are *SHABBAT*, and the *TEFILLIN* worn on weekdays.

So every day of our life we bear TWO testimonies of our commitment to *HaShem*, as it is written:

לא יקום עד אחד באיש לכל עון ולכל חטאת בכל חטא אשר יחטא
על פי שני עדים או על פי שלשה עדים יקום דבר

"ONE witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth; at the mouth of TWO witnesses, or at the mouth of THREE witnesses, shall a matter be established."
(פ' שפטים יט:טו) - Deuteronomy 19:15)

Therefore, a fully developed healthy child born on *Shabbat*, has his *BRIT* performed the following *Shabbat*; and this is not considered a violation thereof.

On the contrary, the newly arrived soul is strengthened by living through the sanctity of *Shabbat* before his *BRIT MILAH*.

Similarly, if the eighth day falls on *Yom Kippur* or any other festival, the *BRIT* is done on that day.

BUT WHY DOES *HASHEM* CREATE MAN WITH A FORESKIN, WHICH IS DISPENSABLE, AND THEN REQUIRES MAN TO REMOVE IT?

This was asked in a round about way of **R. Akiva** by the wicked Roman Governor of Judea **TINEIUS RUFUS**, who is referred to as **TURNUS RUFUS** in our sources.

Almost two thousand years ago, **TURNUS RUFUS** asked an apparently innocent question:

"What accomplishments are more pleasing, those of the **ALMIGHTY** or of **MAN**?" **R. Akiva** said: "Those of **MAN**."

Said **TURNUS RUFUS**: "Look at **HEAVEN** and **EARTH**, could **MAN** make those?"

R. Akiva answered: "Don't bring things that are beyond the power of **MAN**, but items which are within the scope of human attainment."

Said TURNUS RUFUS: "Why do you circumcise?"

R. Akiva replied: "I knew that you would come to ask this, therefore I told you from the start that the actions of MAN are more congenial than those of *HaShem*."

R. Akiva brought him some ears of corn and some cake, saying: "The corn is made by *HaShem*, but the cake is made by MAN. Isn't this a welcome improvement!"

"But if *HaShem* wants the child circumcised, why does he not create him so!"

R. Akiva retorted: "There are more things that have to be done when a child is born, the umbilical cord also has to be cut.

As to being uncircumcised, *HaShem* gave us these commandments in order to perfect and refine us by them. As it is written:

אמרת ה' צרופה

"The word of the LORD purifies."

(תנחומא, פ' תזריע ה) (Psalms 18:31 - תהלים יח:לא)

(תנחומא, פ' תזריע ה)

Indeed we see that from the very beginning, *HaShem* created MAN with FREE CHOICE and the potential to regulate, develop, enhance and expand the basis which nature offers. As it is written:

ויברך א-להים את יום השביעי ויקדש אתו
כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא א-להים לעשות

"And G-d blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it He rested from all His work which G-d created to cultivate."
(Genesis 2:3 - פ' בראשית ב:ג)

HaShem established the universe and it is up to MAN to plan and invent, ameliorate or worsen the conditions in his sphere of influence. Above all, to choose his way in life, which choice is ratified in heaven. As has been taught:

בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך, בה מוליכין אותו

"Along the path a man wishes to go, so he is being led."
(מכות י:)

PROCEDURE

The operation consists of three parts:

1) *Milah*-מילה-CIRCUMCISION

The child is placed upon a pillow resting upon the lap of the *SANDAK*, who holds the child.

The *MOHEL* removes such garments that are necessary to expose the parts of the child, and instructs the *SANDAK* how he should hold the child's legs.

The *MOHEL* then grasps the prepuce between the thumb and index-finger of his left hand, exerting sufficient traction to draw it from the glans. He then places the metal shield in position just before the glans in order to protect it.

He now takes the knife and with one sweep excises the foreskin. The knife most commonly used nowadays is double-edged, to prevent the use of the blunt side by mistake.

2) *Peri'ah*-פריעה-UNCOVERING

The *MOHEL* now seizes the inner lining of the prepuce, a thin membrane which still covers the GLANS PENIS, with the thumb-nail and index-finger of each hand, and rolls it back over the GLANS and expose the latter completely. The *MOHEL* usually has his thumb-nail suitably trimmed for this purpose.

This completes the *halachic* requirements of the *BRIT MILAH*.

3) *Metzitzah*-מציצה-SUCTION

By this is meant that the *MOHEL* sucks from the wound the blood, for this too is defiled. (אור החיים, פ' תזריע יב,ג, ד"ה: ימול בשר ערלתו.)

Some use a glass cylinder with a compressed mouthpiece into which some sterilized absorbent cotton is placed, to protect both the child and the operator.

Astringent powders are applied, and the wound is dressed for three days, when in most cases it will have healed.

CHOOSING A NAME

A person is drawn after the name, and his character takes on the traits which the name epitomizes. (ברכות ז')

The matter of *NAMES* is taken very seriously, and there are numerous incidents described in the sources to demonstrate this.

R. Meir, for instance, always paid close attention to *NAMES*. Once he, together with **R. Yehuda** and **R. Yossi**, lodged at a place, the owner of which was called **KIDOR**. **R. Meir** immediately distrusted him, saying it is written:

כי דור תהפכת המה

"FOR THEY ARE A GENERATION (KI DOR) given to perverseness."
(Deuteronomy 32:20 - פ' האזינו לב:כ)

But the others deposited their purses with him. The innkeeper subsequently denied having received them. By subterfuge they managed to get their purses back from the innkeeper's wife, who was promptly murdered by her husband because of it. From then on **R. Yehuda** and **R. Yossi** also paid attention to names. (יומא פג')

For every letter of a name is a conduit for beneficial abundance or harmful dearth. (בן יהוידע, תענית יא, ד"ה ואומרים)

One should be careful not to give the child a name of a wicked person. It is written:

זכר צדיק לברכה ושם רשעים ירקב

"The memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing, but the name of the wicked shall rot." (משלי י:ז - Proverbs 10:7)

R. Eleazar said: ROTTENNESS ENTERS THEIR NAMES, NONE NAME THEIR CHILDREN AFTER THEM. (יומא לח')

It is an ancient custom to give the child names after worthy grandfathers, and so it is said, when **YAAKOV** blessed **YOSSEF** and his children:

המלאך הגאל אתי מכל רע יברך את הנערים ויקרא בהם שמי
ושם אבתי אברהם ויצחק וידגו לרב בקרב הארץ

"The ANGEL who hath redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be called in them, and the name of my fathers AVRAHAM and YITZCHAK; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." (פ' ויחי מח:טו) - Genesis 48:15)

The *ashkenazi* custom is to call the child after departed members of the family or rabbis, whilst the *sephardim* also give the name of the living.

When parents give a name to their child, it is not haphazard. They are inspired by DIVINE PROVIDENCE to choose a name which fits that particular soul, and which will affect his life. As it is written:

לכו חזו מפלעות ה' אשר שם שמות בארץ

"Come, behold the works of the Lord, Who hath made DESOLATIONS in the earth." (תהלים מו:ט) - Psalms 46:9)

R. Eleazar said: Read not *shamot*-DESOLATIONS, but *shemot*-NAMES! (ברכות ז:)

The **Change of Name**, or the addition of another name - which in effect is the same thing - for a gravely **sick** person is well known, though not universally approved of.
(אוצר הברית-באר מים חיים, פרק ו:א)

The names of newly-born children should not be disclosed before the *BRIT*, or *Shabbat* for a girl, so that parents should not be influenced to give certain names other than originally envisaged by them.

Also, the name given to a boy at the *BRIT* when he enters the COVENANT, has a greater beneficial influence on the child, than when given uncircumcised. ("תשובות והנהגות" בשם האריז"ל הקדוש)

In fact, the *Gimatriya* of שם-NAME is 340 equal to ספר-BOOK, and those who are well versed in the interpretation of names can infer the happenings of one's life from the name and its numerical value.

(("קוראי שמו" חיי אדם, "שפת אמת" פ' שמות).
("אוצר הברית" פרק ו:א, "עמודי שמים" ד:ב-ג האריז"ל, ילקוט שמעוני)

CEREMONY

The *MOHEL* cries out: "GEVATTER", and this is the signal for him to bring in the baby-boy, and give him to the father. The entire assembly greets him, saying:

ברוך הבא (בשם ה')

BARUCH HABA (BESHEM HASHEM)

BLESSED IS HE WHO ARRIVES (IN THE NAME OF HASHEM)!

Some add:

ברוך הנמול לשמונה

BARUCH HANIMMOL LISHMONAH

BLESSED IS HE WHO IS CIRCUMCISED ON THE EIGHTH.

אשרי תבחר ותקרב ישכן חצריך נשבעה בטוב ביתך קדש היכלך

"Happy is the man whom Thou choosest, and bringest near, that he may dwell in Thy courts; may we be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, the holy place of Thy temple." (תהלים סה:ה) - Psalms 65:5)

There are four different primary versions of the text which the father says at the ceremony: the *Ashkenazi* and *Sephardi*, and that said in *Israel* and the *Diaspora*.

ONLY IN ISRAEL THE FATHER WHILST HOLDING THE BABY-BOY SAYS:

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד

"Hear, O Israel, *HaShem* is our G-od, *HaShem*, the One and Only." (This is repeated by the assembly)

יהוה מלך, יהוה מלך, יהוה מלך לעלם ועד

"*HaShem* reigns, *HaShem* has reigned, *HaShem* shall reign for all eternity." (This is repeated by the assembly)

אנא יהוה הושיעה נא

"Please, *HaShem*, save now!

(This is repeated by the assembly, and the father repeats:)

אנא יהוה הושיעה נא

"Please, *HaShem*, save now!

(This is repeated by the assembly)

אנא יהוה הצליחה נא

"Please, *HaShem* bring success now!

(This is repeated by the assembly, and the father repeats:)

אנא י-הוה הצליחה נא

"Please, *HaShem* bring success now!

(This is repeated by the assembly)

Now, both in ISRAEL and the DIASPORA, the *MOHEL* usually recites the first three verses of *Parshat Pinchas* which outline the reward of the Divine COVENANT OF PEACE given to **Pinchas**, who is also the **Prophet Eliyahu**. (פ' פינחס כה:י-יב) - Numbers 25:19-12)

The *MOHEL* places the baby-boy upon the CHAIR OF ELIYAHU, saying:

זה הכסא של אליהו הנביא זכור לטוב

"This is the THRONE OF ELIYAHU the prophet, who is remembered for the good."

The *MOHEL* says six verses from Scripture, invoking *HaShem's* salvation and blessing, and calling upon the PROPHET ELIYAHU for support; ending with the verse in Psalms:

"Praiseworthy is the one You choose and draw near to dwell in Your courts." (A reference to Israel who are the chosen people)

The assembly completes the verse, by saying:

נשבעה בטוב ביתך קדש היכלך

NISBE'AH BETUV BEITECHA KEDOSH HEICHALECHA.

"MAY WE BE SATISFIED BY THE GOODNESS OF YOUR HOUSE, YOUR HOLY TEMPLE." (תהלים סה:ה) - Psalms 65:5)

At this point, the father appoints the *MOHEL* as his agent.

The *MOHEL* now gives the baby-boy to the *SANDAK* and intones the blessing "על המילה-REGARDING THE CIRCUMCISION" and does the circumcision. The father immediately says his blessing:

ברוך אתה י-הוה א-להינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להכניסו בביתו של אברהם אבינו

BARUCH ATA A-DONAI ELOHEINU MELECH HA'OLAM ASHER KIDESHANU BEMITZVOTAV VETZIVANU LEHACHNISO BIVRITO SHEL AVRAHAM AVINU.

"BLESSED ARE YOU, *HASHEM* OUR G-OD, KING OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO HAS SANCTIFIED US WITH HIS COMMANDMENTS, AND HAS COMMANDED US TO BRING HIM INTO THE COVENANT OF AVRAHAM, OUR FOREFATHER."

ONLY IN ISRAEL THE FATHER NOW SAYS THE BLESSING:
"שהחינו- *SHEHECHEYANU*-WHO HAS KEPT US ALIVE".

Now, both in ISRAEL and the DIASPORA, all assembled respond loudly and joyfully:

אמן. כשם שנכנס לברית, כן יכנס לתורה ולחפה ולמעשים טובים!

AMEN. KSHEM SHENICHNAS LABRIT, KEN YIKANES LATORAH ULECHUPAH ULEMAASIM TOVIM.

AMEN. "JUST AS HE HAS ENTERED INTO THE COVENANT, SO MAY HE ENTER INTO THE TORAH, THE MARRIAGE CANOPY, AND GOOD DEEDS."

There is a good reason why people crowd around this chair and that of the *SANDAK*, it is not just sheer curiosity. For when *HaShem* compensated *PINCHAS*, it is written:

תחת אשר קנא לא-להיו
ויכפר על בני ישראל

"Because he was jealous for his G-d, AND HE MADE ATONEMENT FOR THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL." (פ' פינחס כה:יג) (Numbers 25:13)

The Talmud expounds on this verse, saying: This atonement is worthy of being an everlasting atonement. (סנהדרין פב:)

And whoever attends a *BRIT* reaps the benefit, and his sins are forgiven. (בני יששכר, מאמרי תשרי, מאמר ד:ז)

The baby-boy is given to one of the prominent guests to hold whilst he and the assembly are standing, and two blessings are recited. These may be divided between two people:

- a) One blessing over a cup of wine, and another for the well-being of those who entered the COVENANT.
- b) The giving of the name.

During this invocation, when the reader comes to the following words:

1) Reader: ואעבר עליך ואראך מתבוססת בדמיו
he pauses, and the whole assembly complete the verse and recite aloud:

ואמר לך בדמיו חיי, ואמר לך בדמיו חיי

*VA'OMAR LACH BEDAMYICH CHAYI,
VA'OMR LACH BEDAMAYICH CHAYI.*

"AND I SAID TO YOU: IN YOUR BLOOD, LIVE! AND I SAID TO YOU, IN YOUR BLOOD LIVE!" (יחזקאל טז:6 - Ezekiel 16:6)

The reader dips his finger into the cup of wine and gives a drop to the baby-boy. He repeats what the assembly have said.

The PROPHET EZEKIEL refers in the above verse to two kinds of blood, that of the *BRIT MILAH* and the blood of the PASCHAL LAMB offering. In the merit of these two actions we were liberated from the bondage of Egypt, and these will bring about our Final Redemption.

(פרקי דרבי אליעזר, פרק כט) - Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 29)

The reader continues.

2) Reader: כאשר צוה אתו א-להים
(פ' וירא כא:ד) - Genesis 21:4)

he pauses, and the whole assembly recite aloud:

הודו לי-הוה כי טוב, כי לעולם חסדו
הודו לי-הוה כי טוב, כי לעולם חסדו

*HODU LA'A-DONAI KI TOV, KI LE'OLAM CHASDO
HODU LA'A-DONAI KI TOV, KI LE'OLAM CHASDO*

Give thanks to *HaShem* for He is good, His kindness endures forever.

Give thanks to *HaShem* for He is good, His kindness endures forever. (תהלים קיח:א) - Psalms 118:1)

זהה הקטן גדול יהיה *"May this little one become great"*.

The assembly responds:

כשם שנכנס לברית, כן יכנס לתורה ולחפה ולמעשים טובים!

*KSHEM SHENICHNAS LABRIT, KEN YIKANES LATORAH ULECHUPAH
ULEMAASIM TOVIM.*

**"JUST AS HE HAS ENTERED INTO THE COVENANT, SO MAY HE
ENTER INTO THE TORAH, THE MARRIAGE CANOPY, AND GOOD
DEEDS."**

The one who recited the blessings drinks some wine.

The *MOHEL* then makes a "מי שברך" for the good health of the child.

Some add further prayers that in the merit of having entered the baby-boy in the COVENANT, that his heart may be open to the holy *Torah*, that he may learn and teach, observe and perform its commandments, and be granted a long healthy happy life of wealth and honour.

The ceremony finishes with the recital of "עלינו לשבח לאדון הכל", which is found in every PRAYER BOOK, as it is said at the end of every set prayer.

This is usually followed by a "סעודת מצוה-*SE'UDAT MITZVAH-MEAL AT RELIGIOUS RITUAL*", when some relevant words of *Torah* are spoken, and specific songs are sung.

Ashkenazim sing the liturgical poem composed by the 12th century Rabbi YEHUDA HALEVI, which begins with the words:

יום ליבשה נהפכו מצולים...

Sephardim sing in honour of the prophet ELIYAHU:

אערך מהלל ניבי, לפני א-להי אבי, לכבוד חמדת לבבי, אליהו הנביא

Also, a poem that has the initials of "אברהם חזק":

אתה אהובי, צורי משגבי, כי אתה נתת, שמחה בלבי, בך אשען...

A poem that has the initials of "יחזה":

ילד הילד יהיה בסימן טוב...
ברוכים אתם קהל אמוני...

And a poem that has the initials of "יהושע":

יהי שלום בחילנו, ושלוה בישראל, בסימן טוב...

If a *minyán* is present, a special introduction to "ברכת המזון-BIRKAT HAMAZON-GRACE AFTER MEALS" is said, beginning with the words:

נודה לשמך בתוך אמוני, ברוכים אתם לי-הוה

*We give thanks to Your Name among my faithful,
blessed are you to HaShem.*

This is followed by four distinctive rhymes, each stanza beginning with "ברשות-BIRSHUT-WITH PERMISSION". Each rhyme being answered by the assembly with the above phrase.

Also, towards the end of "GRACE AFTER MEALS", six special fitting rhymes are introduced, after the words "בעיני א-להים ואדם".

These begin with the word "הרחמן-HARACHAMAN-THE COMPASSIONATE ONE", and relate to the participants of the *BRIT*.

That the PARENTS may educate the baby-boy successfully, and the *SANDAK* here called "בעל הברית-MASTER OF THE CIRCUMCISION" be recompensed from heaven; that the young baby-boy and the *MOHEL* be blessed.

That in the merit of the *BRIT MILAH*, *HaShem* send us the *MASHIACH*, heralded by the righteous priest ELIYAHU, with whom *HaShem* made a COVENANT for life and peace.

ESSENCE

HaShem first gave the COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION to AVRAHAM, saying:

היתהלך לפני והיה **תמים**

"Walk before Me and be **unblemished**."

(Genesis 17:1 - פ' לך לך יז:א)

Elsewhere it is written:

תמים תהיה עם ה' א-להיך

"Thou shalt be **whole-hearted** with the Lord thy G-d."

(Deuteronomy 18:13 - פ' שפטים יח:ג)

In both sentences the word "**TAMIM**-תמים" is used. This is telling us that one cannot get near to **HaShem** unless one has entered the COVENANT. (תנחומא, פ' לך לך, סימן כ)

About *Moshe Rabeinu* it says:

ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה

"And there hath not risen a prophet since in Israel like unto MOSHE."

(Deuteronomy 34:10 - פ' וזאת הברכה לד:י)

בישראל לא קם, אבל באומות העולם קם. ומנו? בלעם

"In Israel none arose, but among the nations one did arise. And who was he? BILAM-BALAAM." (Sifrei-ספרי)

So as not to give the nations a pretext for not accepting the *Torah* and being immoral. (RASHI, Numbers 22:5 - רש"י, פ' בלק כב:ה)

Yet whenever BILAM received a DIVINE VISION it is written:

אשר מחזה ש-די יחזה נפל וגלוי עינים

"Who sees the vision of the Almighty, fallen down, yet with opened eyes." (Numbers 24:4 - פ' בלק כד:ד)

The bolded end-letters backwards read "**Milah**-מילה". From this we deduce that when **HASHEM** revealed to him, he had no strength to stand and he would fall on his face, because he was **UNCIRCUMCISED**, and it was loathsome that he stand upright before the LORD.

(RASHI-BAAI HaTURIM - רש"י-בעל הטורים, שם)

Circumcision inhibits the desire to sin. (סוף אור החיים, פ' תזריע יב:ג.)

Having done our part, *HaShem* will assist us to curb also our evil inclinations, as it is written:

ומל י-הוה א-להיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך

"And the Lord thy G-d will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed." (Deuteronomy 30:6 - פ' נצבים ל:ו)

The bolded letters read "אלול-ELUL", the month in which we prepare for the DIVINE JUDGEMENT on *Rosh HaShanah*.

When *HaShem* gave us the *Torah*, it is written:

ושמרתם את בריתי והייתם לי סגלה מכל העמים

"And keep My COVENANT, then ye shall be Mine own treasure from among all peoples." (Exodus 19:5 - פ' יתרו יט:ה)

The bolded end-letters read "מילה-CIRCUMCISION".

This is a necessary prerequisite to learning *Torah*, as it is written:

כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוך היום לא נפלאה היא ממך ולא רחקה היא לא בשמים היא לאמר מי יעלה לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו

"For this directive which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say: WHO SHALL GO UP FOR US TO HEAVEN, AND BRING IT UNTO US." (Deuteronomy 30:11-12 - נצבים ל:יא-יב)

The bolded initials read "מילה-CIRCUMCISION".

The end-letters of the phrase: "מי יעלה לנו השמימה" read י-הוה, which is *HaShem's* name of mercy, which the circumcision evokes; thereby relegating "לנו = 86 = א-להים", the DIVINE ATTRIBUTE OF JUDGEMENT, to stay in heaven.

כי המצוה הזאת אשר 611+480=1091=1+501+413+146+30 תלמוד תורה

LEARNING TORAH = FOR THIS DIRECTIVE WHICH
(הרוקח, שם)

There is a close link between the *BRIT* and *TORAH*, as emerges from one of the verses said at the ceremony:

שש אנכי על אמרתך כמוצא שלל רב
 "I rejoice at Thy word, as one that findeth great spoil."
 (תהלים קיט:קטב) - Psalms 119:162)

661 = אמרתך THY WORD (i.e. *Thy Torah*)
 Adding the digits 6+6+1 = 13, and the word "ברית-BRIT" appears 13
 times in the chapter when *HaShem* gave this *Mitzvah* to AVRAHAM.
 (פ' לך לך יז) - Genesis 17)

ברית 613 = 1+ 612 תרי"ג
 Performing the *BRIT* complements the total of 613 *Mitzvot*, and
 acknowledges the 13 DIVINE ATTRIBUTES OF MERCY of *HaShem*,
 Who is אחד-ECHAD-ONE = 13!

R. Yehuda explained the verse:

ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששן ויקר
 "The Jews had LIGHT and GLADNESS, and JOY and HONOUR."
 (אסתר ח:טו)

light = TORAH
 gladness = A FEAST DAY
 joy = CIRCUMCISION
 honour = TEFILLIN-phylacteries (מגילה טז:)

These all come into play on the day of the circumcision, when it is
 customary for the FATHER and the SANDAK to wear *tefillin*.

"שמחה-SASSON V'SIMCHAH-JOY & GLADNESS" are not
 synonymous. *SIMCHAH* expresses the happiness of the event which has
 already come, whereas *SASSON* relates to the anticipation of joyful
 happenings. (בני יששכר, חדש תשרי, צלא דמהימנותא, מאמר י:כג)

So that the circumcision is the beginning of a lifelong expectation of
 happy events!

It is taught:

ובכל מלין אפילו בצור ובזכוכית ובכל דבר הכורת...
 ומצוה מן המובחר למול בברזל

"One may circumcise with everything that cuts, even with a flint and
 glass; yet it is a superior *MITZVAH* to circumcise with metal."
 (טור יורה דעה, סימן רסד)

שמעתי טעם על פי המדרש שכך הובטח לברזל ביום שנבקע הכובע
בראשו של גלית לפני דוד

"I heard a reason for this in accordance with the *Midrash* that this was promised to the metal, on the day that the helmet on the head of GOLIATH was penetrated before DAVID." (פרישה, שם)

Who does not know the story of the Philistine giant of Gath, man of war from his youth, clad with a coat of mail, taunting the armies of Israel.

For forty days this uncircumcised Philistine drew near morning and evening mocking *HaShem* and the Jewish soldiers. (שמואל א, יז:טז)

R. Yochanan said:

כדי לבטלן מקריאת שמע שחרית וערבית

In order to prevent them from saying the "*Shema*" morning and evening. (סוטה מב:)

DAVID rejected all armour, but placed his trust in *HaShem*.

ויבחר לו חמשה חלקי אבנים מן הנחל וישם אתם בכלי הרעים
אשר לו ובילקוט וקלעו בידו ויגש אל הפלשתי

"And he chose him FIVE smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in his satchel; and his sling was in his hand; and he drew near to the Philistine."
(שמואל א, יז:מ)

The FIVE stones and the SLING were intentionally counted to be corresponding to the SIX words:

שמע ישראל יהוה א-להינו יהוה אחד

"HEAR, O ISRAEL, *HASHEM* IS OUR G-D, *HASHEM*, THE ONE AND ONLY." (זוהר, פינחס דף קנז. ועקב רבע.)

DAVID repeatedly referred to GOLIATH as "הפלשתי הערל הזה-THIS UNCIRCUMCISED PHILISTINE". (שמואל א, יז:כו, לו)

And when DAVID went to fight him, he told him with measured words:

ואנכי בא אליך
בשם י-הוה צ-באות א-להי מערכות ישראל אשר חרפת

"But I come to thee IN THE NAME OF THE LORD OF HOSTS THE G-D OF THE ARMIES OF ISRAEL, whom thou hast taunted."
(שמואל א, יז:מה)

Again DAVID chose SIX words conforming to the SIX words of *SHEMA*.

The strength of such נפש מסירות *MESIRUT NEFESH-SELF SACRIFICE* is given at the time of the *BRIT MILAH*.

Such faith and moral fortitude overcomes the arrogance of the uncircumcised.

Since the ANGEL in charge of metal allowed DAVID's stone to pierce the brass helmet of GOLIATH and enter his head, suitable reward is due.

HaShem therefore compensated the metal that it is a special *Mitzvah* to perform the circumcision with it.
(שבילי פינחס, פ' לך לך, מאמר טו:ז)

After his *BRIT*, the boy is equipped to start his life as a Jew.

He is accompanied by the blessing of the prophet:

ופדויי י-הוה ישבון ובאו ציון ברנה ושמחת עולם על ראשם
ששון ושמחה ישיגו ונסו יגון ואנחה

"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

(ישעיה לה:י)

M A Z A L T O V !

TEXT
(ASHKENAZI-DIASPORA)

ברוך הבא:

היהוה אלהי ברוכה:

היהוה ברוך קודם ליום קדוה, אשר אצטר מבשר, והקדש לפניך עד
כי יבנה פולחן גבולותי ויבנה יום, ואלו יום קדש לפניך לדורותי:
היהוה יהי שמחה זה המעשר והקדש אשר על כבודך אשר לפניך ללפני היום:

זה הבשר אשר אצטר וכו' לפני:

לשעבודך קדוה ה', שעבודי לשעבודך ה'. והשעבוד אשר אני:
באשר תפריח רוחך לפניך להקדש. עמדי עליהיני וקסמדי: שעבודי לשעבודך
ה': יש אבי שעבודך, בשרא של רבי: שלום רב לאיברי חזקתך
ואין לבי בקשול: אשרי הברך והקרב לשון העובדך.
והקרב עמי: בלשונך בשרב ברוך קדש ויברך:

יהוה שמחה זה המעשר והקדש אשר על כבודך אשר לפניך ללפני היום:

ברוך אשר ה' אלהינו קדש השלם אשר קדשנו בשעבודנו ונתנו ערבותנו:
היום זה המעשר זה המעשר והקדש אשר על כבודך אשר לפניך ללפני היום:

ברוך אשר ה' אלהינו קדש השלם אשר קדשנו בשעבודנו ונתנו ערבותנו:

והשעבוד אשר אני: בשלום עשיתי לך רוח: כי יום לאור ה' אשר לקדשנו שמים:

היום שמחה לפניך ששמים שמים ויהוה יהוה זה המעשר והקדש:

ברוך אשר ה' אלהינו קדש השלם אשר קדשנו בשעבודנו ונתנו ערבותנו:

היום שמחה לפניך ששמים שמים ויהוה יהוה זה המעשר והקדש:
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אשר קדשנו בשעבודנו ונתנו ערבותנו:

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born April 1924 in Leipzig. Attended the *Talmud Torah Boarding School* in BURGPREPPACH from 1934-1938. Joined the *Schneider Yeshiva* in FRANKFURT a/MAIN. Came with the *Kinder-Transport* to LONDON in 1939, and rejoined the Yeshiva there till 1942. He was part of a small group who learned regularly under R. Arye Zeev Gurvicz ר"צ at *Springfield Synagogue*, LONDON.

Worked in manufacturing optical establishment and studied ophthalmic optics. Married in 1946. During the years 1944-1953 attained *Fellowship British Optical Association, Honours Diploma, Orthoptics Certificate & Diploma Contact*

Lens Practitioner, and is now a FOUNDATION FELLOW of the BRITISH COLLEGE OF OPHTHALMIC OPTICIANS. Became an active member of the *North Hendon Adath Yisroel Synagogue* and served on the Committee and as HONORARY OFFICER for over a quarter of a century, and was Chairman of the Building Committee of the New Synagogue during 1963-1965. In recognition was appointed HONORARY LIFE PRESIDENT by the *Governors and Trustees of the Jewish Secondary Schools Movement* and was awarded the DEED OF CHOVER by the Presiding Rabbi of the *Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations*.

Was also active in the *Poale Agudat Yisrael Movement* and served as its Chairman. Made ALIYA in 1977. Worked for some years as a *Consulting Optometrist* at *Shaare Zedek Hospital* and is now retired.

During the years from 1993 onwards published a set of six books called "THE COAT OF THE UNICORN", two volumes "BREADCRUMBS IN WINE" on the *Chumash*, and two volumes "REFLECTIONS UNDER THE MOON"; see www.nathanmerel.com.

