

The Brit Milah

Mazal tov! The opportunity to bring your son into the covenant of Israel is an amazing one. Our goal as Rabbinic staff at HIR is to help the brit run as smoothly as possible, to infuse it with the meaning and feeling that you want, and to have all of your family and guests feel included and participate to the extent possible. Don't hesitate to ask about anything.

This document focuses on the ceremony itself. For more information about planning the brit (date, time, preparation) and other resources (mohels, rental arrangements), please see the Bayit's Brit Preparation Letter [here](#).

Please note: if your son is not halakhically Jewish by birth, and the circumcision is towards a conversion (milah l'shem giyur), many of the customs can be practiced in the same way as a brit for a halakhically Jewish baby boy, and some liturgy and customs are done differently. Please feel free to reach out to a rabbinic team member to discuss.

The basic blessings of the brit date back to Talmudic times and are explicitly written in the Talmud, so the words themselves are very old and traditional. The rest of the liturgy developed over time. The Artscroll Siddur has a good layout of the process and the prayers on pp. 208-214.

The brit is so steeped in Jewish history and law and custom and carries different resonances for different people. You may feel anything from great joy and exhilaration to a real discomfort and aversion to the process, and some combination of feelings is to be expected. Try just to take those feelings in and be present for the experience.

Some things to think about in general about the brit:

- *Whom do you want to honor?*
- *Whom do you want to invite up to be close to you and close to the proceedings?*
- *How can we help make this meaningful and inclusive?*
 - *Songs/melodies*
 - *Opportunity for blessings and reflections*
 - *Explanations of the ritual and customs*
- *Would you like to speak about the name? When?*

We can say a few words of welcome to everyone at the beginning. If the baby has older siblings, we typically give them a shout-out to make them feel a special part of the day.

The brit starts with bringing the baby in. We often do this in song, in the prayer that this child grow up always surrounded by song, and that he really bring joy and happiness into the world (usually we sing "Hamal'akh Hago'el", but it can be anything). Once the baby is brought in, the congregation says (after the mohel), ברוך הבא (barukh ha-ba) - welcome!

The baby being brought in can be passed through as many or as few hands as you want (the recipients of this honor are called kvatters) – this is a nice way to honor friends and family (and we can announce their names if you want us to. Some have the custom to give this honor to those who are hoping to have children. This should be done with the utmost sensitivity and care, of

course). The mohel will be reciting some prayers as indicated in the siddur.

Kvatters:

Name	Relationship

The baby is brought to the front of the room where the brit takes place, and the last person in the kvatter chain is honored with placing the baby on כסא של אליהו (Kisei shel Eliyahu), the Chair of Eliyahu.

Kisei Shel Eliyahu:

Name	Relationship

Before the mohel announces the chair with a short prayer, we can say an explanatory word about the chair and the role of Eliyahu at the brit. We can also sing the slow "Eliyahu Hanavi" here, or a different melody about redemption if you want.

The person who placed the baby on the Chair now hands the baby to the mohel (this honor of handing from the Chair to the mohel can be a separate honor as well if you want, called "Min Hakisei" (From the Chair). If you have a lot of people you want to honor, add this one; if not, it is easier to have it just be the person who put the baby on the Chair), who then prepares the baby and gives him to the sandek, passing through the father's hands, usually. The sandek is the honoree who holds the baby on his/her (this is almost exclusively done by a man in Orthodox communities today - if you want to have a woman, let us know) lap during the brit (we do not usually have the sandek sit on the Kisei shel Eliyahu but rather on a regular chair. Each mohel has their own custom in this regard). The sandek is often a grandfather but can be anyone and is a distinguished honor. We are happy to announce the name and relationship and introduce the sandek. It is important that the sandek not be squeamish and be able to follow the mohel's instructions clearly.

Sandek:

Name	Relationship

We usually pause here for a moment to reflect on the blessings of intergenerationality, and to ask people to be focused and quiet and offer tefillot for the baby and family and beyond. We also acknowledge the mohel here.

The father appoints the mohel as his agent to perform the brit (mohel will guide you through that), and the mohel recites a preparatory line of intentionality and focus. Then the mohel, before the actual circumcision, recites the blessing:

Blessed are You, LORD, our God, King of the Universe, who Sanctified this friend (Avraham/Yitzhak) from the womb, and placed a law in his flesh, and sealed his descendants with the symbol of this sacred covenant. So, in this merit, Living God, our Portion and our Rock, command that this friendship of our flesh be saved from destruction, for the sake the covenant you placed in our flesh. Blessed are You, LORD, who enacts the covenant.

At this time, we will say a few introductory words about the significance of naming if you want. We strongly encourage the mother to be up on the bimah with the baby at this time.

Honored with Naming:

Name	Relationship

The rabbi (or other honoree) will recite this naming formula and prayer (please have the name written out. We request that you provide the baby's name with both parents' names). If a member of the rabbinic staff does this, we traditionally sing the opening and closing lines (and the congregation recites the bolded lines aloud):

אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ. קַיִם אֶת הַיָּלֵד הַזֶּה לְאָבִיו וְלְאִמּוֹ. וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל (פְּלוּנִי בֶן פְּלוּנִי) יִשְׁמַח הָאֵב
 בְּיוֹצֵא חַלְצִיו. וְתִגַּל אִמּוֹ בְּפָרִי בִטְנָהּ. כִּפְתּוּב. יִשְׁמַח אָבִירָ וְאִמָּהּ וְתִגַּל יוֹלְדֶתָהּ: וְנֹאמֵר. וְאֶעְבּוֹר עֲלֶיךָ וְאֶרְאֶה
 מִתְּבוֹסֶסֶת בְּדַמֶּיךָ. וְאֹמֵר לְךָ בְּדַמֶּיךָ חַיִּי. וְאֹמֵר לְךָ בְּדַמֶּיךָ חַיִּי. וְנֹאמֵר. זָכַר לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ. דְּבַר צִוְיָהּ לְאֶלֶף דּוֹר:
 אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת אֶת אֲבָרָהֶם וְשִׁבּוּעֵתוֹ לְיִשְׁחָק: וַיַּעֲמִידָהּ לְיַעֲקֹב לְחֵק. לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרִית עוֹלָם: וְנֹאמֵר. וַיִּמַּל אֲבָרָהֶם אֶת
 יֶצְחָק בְּנוֹ בֶּן שְׁמוֹנֵת יָמִים. כִּאֲשֶׁר צִוְיָהּ אֱ-לֹהִים: הוֹדוּ לַיְדוּד כִּי טוֹב. כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶד: הוֹדוּ לַיְדוּד כִּי טוֹב.
 כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶד: (פְּלוּנִי בֶן פְּלוּנִי יִזְכִּיר שֵׁם הַיָּלֵד) זֶה הַקָּטָן גְּדוֹל יְהִיָּה. כָּשֵׁם שֶׁנִּכְנַס לְבְרִית. כֵּן יִכְנַס לְתוֹרָה
 וְלַחֲפָה וְלַמַּעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים:

God and God of our ancestors, sustain this child to his father and mother, and let his name be called in Israel _____ son of _____ (we can say father and mother's name here. Minimally the father's name is used). May the father rejoice in the offspring of his loins, and may the mother rejoice in the fruit of her womb, as it is written, "Your father and mother will rejoice and the one who bore you will delight" (Proverbs 23:25). And it is said, "And I (God) passed by you and found you wallowing in your blood, and I said to you, 'In your blood you shall live', and I said to you, 'In your blood you shall live'" (Ezekiel 16:6). And it is said, "God remembers God's covenant eternally, a matter commanded for a thousand generations – that which God established as a pact with Avraham, and God's oath to Yitzhak, and God founded it as a statute for Yaakov, for Yisrael as an eternal covenant" (Psalms 105:8-10). And it is said, "And Avraham circumcised his son Yitzhak at eight days as God commanded him" (Genesis 21:4). Give thanks to God for God is good, God's lovingkindness is forever; Give thanks to God for God is good, God's lovingkindness is forever (Psalms 118:1). _____ son of _____, this small one shall become grown. Just as he was brought into the covenant, so may he enter Torah, the wedding canopy, and good deeds.

The grape juice/wine is then drunk. After this the mohel will recite a few more prayers (found in the Artscroll pp. 212-214).

Upon his concluding, the mother is invited – if she wishes – to say the Birkat Hagomel, the blessing of Thanksgiving, on surviving the travails and dangers of childbirth. She recites:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְדוּד אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. הַגּוֹמֵל לְחַיִּיבִים טוֹבוֹת. שֶׁגָּמְלָנִי כֹל טוֹב:

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who repays the indebted with goodness, for you have repaid me with all good.

And the congregation responds:

אָמֵן. מִי שֶׁגָּמְלָךְ כֹּל טוֹב. הוּא יְגַמְלֶךְ כֹּל טוֹב סְלָה:

Amen. May the One who repaid you with all good continue to repay you with all good. Selah!

We invite both parents to recite the blessing over good news which affects more than just the hearer, but others as well:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַטּוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב:

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, Who is good and does good.

At this time, if you want, the parents and other family and close friends (you can decide who) are invited to bless the baby. You can place your hands on or near the baby's head and recite the traditional Friday night blessing for a son:

May God make you like Efraim and Menashe.

יְשִׁימָךְ אֱ-לֹקִים כְּאַפְרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה:

May the Lord bless you and guard you.

בְּרַכְךָ יְיָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ:

May the Lord's face be lit towards you and show you favor.

יָאֵר יְיָ פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחֲנֶךָ:

May the Lord's face be lifted to you and grant you peace.

שָׁא יְיָ פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:

This is the formal end of the rituals and liturgy of the brit. It is a good time to offer personal thanks and speak about the name you've chosen for your son.

The se'udah (festive meal) follows. It can also be a time for blessings, speeches, singing and celebration. There are two special additions to the Birkat Hamazon (bentching). The Zimmun (invitation) has an extended form with a series of lines of thanksgiving, found in the Arstscroll Siddur p. 216. Then, towards the end of Birkat Hamazon, a series of prayers for blessings upon the different participants in the brit is recited. These lines, called the haRaḥamans, can be recited by any Jewish adult present at the meal. They are found in the Arstscroll Siddur p. 216-8. The Birkat Hamazon is recited over a cup of wine, and ends with the blessing over the wine:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן:

Blessed are You, LORD, our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Leading bentching:

Name	Relationship

Reciting Harahamans at end of bentching:

Name	Relationship