YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH PROJECT (VBM)

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**Laws of Conversion and Circumcision**

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**The *Berakhot* on the *Brit Mila* (2)**

[Last week](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/berakhot-brit-mila-1), we began our discussion of the blessings said over the circumcision of a child. The Talmud (*Shabbat* 137b) teaches that there are three blessings recited at a *brit mila*: *al ha-mila*, *le-hakhniso le-verito shel Avraham Avinu*, and *koret ha-brit*.

This week, we will discuss the third blessing, *koret ha-brit*, whether the *Shehechiyanu* blessing should be said at a *brit mila*, and other questions related to the blessings.

***Birkat Koret Ha-Brit***

After the *mohel* performs the *mila* and the *peri'a* and places the foreskin in sand or dirt, someone is honored to hold the child during the recitation of the "*koret ha-brit*" blessing, followed by the naming. This "*kibud*" is referred to as "*amida le-verakhot*."

Although the Talmud does not instruct that the blessing should be reciting over a cup of wine, this practice is mentioned by the Geonim (Shaarei Tzedek 3:5:9) and the *Rishonim*. As we shall see, the custom to say the *borei peri ha-gafen* blessing before *koret ha-brit* has aroused numerous halakhic dilemmas.

*Koret ha-brit* is clearly not a *birkat ha-mitzva*, as is indicated by its *nosach* and the fact that the *berakha*, as described by the *gemara*, is not recited by the father or the *mohel*. The Rashba (*Shabbat* 137b, s.v. *avi ha-ben*) describes the blessing as “praise and thanksgiving for allowing him the merit to enter his son into the covenant of Avraham.”

Interestingly, the Shakh (Yoreh De’ah 265:5) explains that this blessing is a prayer for the safety and welfare of the child. Therefore, the phrase “as a reward for this, the living God, our Portion, commanded to deliver the beloved of our flesh from destruction,” should be said in future tense (*tzaveh*) – “should command” – and not in past tense (*tziva*) – “commanded.” The Sefer Ha-Ittur (*Hilkhot Mila* 53b) cites two views regarding the proper text of this blessing. It is customary to say the phrase in accordance with the interpretation of the Shakh (*tzaveh*), in both Ashkenazic (Arukh Ha-Shulchan, Yoreh De’ah 265:17) and Sephardic communities (Yalkut Yosef, Kitzur Shulchan Arukh, p. 896).

After the conclusion of the blessing, a prayer for the child (found in early *Rishonim* including the Ittur, Shibolei Ha-Leket, Machzor Vitrei, and Ohr Zaru'a) is recited, during which the child is named.

Since the *borei peri ha-gafen* blessing is recited over the wine, someone must taste the wine. The Tur (YD 265) cites the Ittur, who mentions three practices regarding tasting the wine. While some *siddurim* apparently instructed the person who said the *ha-gefen* blessing to drink the wine immediately after concluding the *koret ha-brit* blessing, some were accustomed to give the child a sip of wine after the blessing, in order that the prayer for the child should not constitute an interruption. Others assume that the prayer for the child is not a *hefsek*; therefore, the wine may be tasted after the conclusion of the prayer. Although the common practice is to drink the wine after the prayer for the child, some sip the wine after the blessing, refill the cup, and then recite the prayer.

The *Acharonim* disagree as to how much wine the person reciting the blessing should drink. The Mordekhai (*Eiruvin* 496) writes that the person who says the blessing should drink a cheekful (*melo lugmav*) of wine. Rashi (Teshuvot 53) disagrees, as do numerous Acharonim (see Taz 265:10, Gra ibid. 28).

The Shulchan Arukh (YD 265:1) cites a custom to recite a blessing over a "*hadas*.” This custom, attributed to the Ari *z"l*, is also cited by the Beit Lechem Yehuda and the Birkei Yosef (ibid. 3). The Mishna Berura (OC 559:27) notes that this is not the custom of Asheknazim.

***Birkat Shehichiyanu***

In addition to the blessings described above, the *Rishonim* debate whether the *Shehechiyanu* blessing should be recited at a *brit mila*. Tosafot (*Sukka* 46a, s.v. *ha-oseh*) asks why the Talmud explicitly mentions that the *Shehechiyanu* blessing is said upon performed certain *mitzvot* – such as making a *sukka*, *lulav*, *pidyon ha-ben* (*Pesachim* 121b), and *keriat ha-Megilla* (*Megilla* 21b) – but not on others – such as making *tzitzit* and *tefillin*, *Hallel*, and, apparently, a *brit mila*. A full discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this *shiur*.

The *Rishonim* offer numerous reasons why the *Shehechiyanu* blessing should not be recited at a *brit mila*.

The Ran (*Sukka* 22b, s.v. *ve-katvu*), for example, explains that *brit mila*, like *tefillin*, is not a *mitzva* that is performed “from time to time” or at a specific time, and therefore *Shehechiyanu* should not be recited. Tosafot (*Bechorot* 49a, s.v. *le-achar*) explains that while *Shehechiyanu* is said at a *pidyon ha-ben* because it is such an uncommon mitzva, since *mila* is so common, *Shehechiyanu* is not said. Interestingly, Tosafot seemingly refer to how often the community participates in a *brit mila*, not the specific father.

The Raavia (see Hagahot Maimoniot, *Hilkhot Mila* 3:3) suggests that since we are concerned that the child may not survive (i.e., a *nefel*), it is not appropriate to say the *Shehchiyanu* blessing.

Some *Rishonim* suggest that the *Shehechiyanu* blessing is only said when the performance of the *mitzva* is accompanied by “*simcha*.” For example, Tosafot (*Eruvin* 40b, s.v. *dilma*; see also Raavia, *Shabbat* 289, and Hagahot Maimoniot, ibid.) cite the Ra”sh of Shantz, who held that that *Shehechiyanu* is not recited at a *brit mila* due to the *tza’ara de-yenuka*, the pain caused to the child.

Other *Rishonim* disagree and insist that the *Shehchiyanu* blessing is, in fact, recited at a *brit mila*. The Raavia (*Shabbat* 289), for example, writes that when the *mitzva* is performed by an agent – i.e., a *mohel* – the *Shehechiyanu* blessing is not said. However, if the father himself performs the circumcision, or if one circumcises himself, he should say *Shehechiyanu*. He explains that since most people are not trained to perform the circumcision, this *berakha* has fallen out of practice.

The Rambam (*Hilkhot Mila* 3) also writes that the father says the *Shehechiyanu* blessing, but implies that he recites the *berakha* even if he does not actually perform the circumcision. Elsewhere (*Hilkhot Berakhot* 11:9), the Rambam explains:

The *Shehechiyanu* blessing is recited [before] fulfilling every *mitzva* that we are obligated to fulfill only at a specific time, such as *shofar*, *sukka*, *lulav*, reading the *Megilla*, and [lighting] Chanuka candles. [It is also recited before fulfilling] every *mitzva* that involves the acquisition of property, such as *tzitzit*, *tefillin*, and a guardrail. [It is also recited before fulfilling] every *mitzva* that we are obligated to fulfill infrequently, for this resembles a *mitzva* that we are obligated to fulfill only at a specific time, such as circumcising one's son and redeeming him.

The Rambam maintains that one says the *Shehechiyanu* blessing upon circumcising one’s son, as it is a mitzva which is performed infrequently.

The Shulchan Arukh (Yoreh De’ah 265:7; see also Bi’ur Ha-Gra 265:36) cites the Rambam and relates that it is customary in the Land of Israel to recite the *Shehechiyyanu* blessing at a *brit mila*. This is indeed the current practice of all communities in Israel. Although Sephardic communities around the world also say *Shehechiyanu* at a *brit mila,* Ashkenazim outside of Israel generally follow the opinion of the Shakh (265:17), who insists that *Shehechiyanu* is not said at a *brit mila.*

The *Shehechiyanu* blessing is said by the father immediately after the *le-hakhniso* blessing. The Chatam Sofer (2:298) discusses whether the *mohel* may say the *Shehechiyanu* blessing when the father is absent.

***Kisuy Ha-Erva* and Excrement During the Blessings**

The Torah, when describing the laws of the wartime, presents special instructions regarding the military camp. God is present in the camp, and standards of hygiene and modesty must therefore be of a higher standard:

You shall have a place also outside of the camp where you shall go forth abroad. And you shall have a paddle among thy weapons; and it shall be, when you sit down abroad, you shall dig therewith, and shall turn back and cover that which comes from you. For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you; therefore, your camp shall be holy, that he should see no nakedness in you, and turn away from you… (*Devarim* 23:13-15)

Jewish soldiers are to take care of their bodily needs outside of the camp, and to cover their excrement. In addition, since God travels in their camp, they are warned to maintain their modest behavior, lest He withdraw His presence.

The rabbis understand that these standards apply not only to the military camp, but also to one's own spiritual environs. Accordingly, the *gemara* derives from the verse, "that He should see no nakedness in you" that one should not recite *keri’at Shema* (or other *devarim she-bekedusha*) while naked or in a form of nakedness (see *Berakhot* 25b).  Furthermore, the *gemara* learns from the words, "your camp shall be holy" that one should not recite *keri’at Shema* in the presence of excrement (*Berakhot* 25a), in a bathhouse or bathroom (*Shabbat* 150a), or near an unpleasant odor (Sifrei).

The *Rishonim* disagree as to whether these laws are relevant to the *brit* *mila* ceremony, where the ceremony is performed on a child’s *erva* and where there is a possibility of there being excrement.

Some *Rishonim* write that the *mohel* should cover the child while saying the blessings (Rabbeinu Yona, *Berkahot* 17a, s.v. *ha*; Yere’im, cited by Kolbo 73). The Kol Bo (73) cites Rabbeinu Peretz (Hagahot Semak 158; see also Ittur 52:4), who writes that we are not concerned about *erva* of a boy under the age of nine. Furthermore, the Rosh (*Berkahot* 3:52) adds that since one’s intention is to perform a positive act (*le-tekunei ha-mila ka’atei*), it is still considered to be a “holy camp.”

Interestingly, while the Rambam (*Hilkhot Keri’at Shema* 3:16) writes that one may not say the *keri’at shema* in the proximity of a child’s *erva*, the Bach (Yoreh De’ah 265) notes that in *Hilkhot Mila* (3:5) the Rambam only mentions covering an adult man’s *erva* (*adam gadol*). Furthermore, in his *teshuvot* (Teshuvot Ha-Rambam 332), the Rambam writes that it is not customary to cover the nakedness of the child while saying the blessings.

The Shulchan Arukh (Yoreh De’ah 265:18) rules that it is unnecessary to cover the *erva* of a child while saying the blessing. Some *Acharonim* (see Bach, ibid.) cite the Raavia (*Shabbat* 289), who writes that it is a *midat* *chaissidut* to cover the child during the blessing, unless it causes the *mohel* unnecessary pressure (*bahul*).

The Kolbo (ibid.) cites Rabbeinu Peretz, who writes that if a child is soiled, he should be cleaned before reciting the blessings. The Rema (ibid.) cites this ruling, but the Gra (39) notes that this is a stringency (*chumra* *be-alma*), as the halakha teaches that there is no need to distance oneself from the excrement of such a small child, certainly when he is covered.

Next week, we will discuss the festive meal held in honor of the *brit* *mila*.