

Good Shabbos Everyone. We will focus this week on one of the definitive moments in the life of Avrohom Avinu (our forefather) and in the history of the Jewish people. As the Torah states "and Avrohom was 99 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin." (Bereishis 17:24) Bris milah (circumcision) is a symbol of the covenant Hashem made with Avrohom. By observing bris mila, Avrohom and his descendants through Yitzchok and Yakov are guaranteed the inheritance of Eretz Yisroel.

Just as Hashem commanded Avrohom to circumcise himself, we too are commanded by the Torah to perform circumcision on the eighth day, as it states in this week's parsha, "and you shall circumcise the flesh of your orlah; and this shall serve as the token of the covenant between Me and you." (17:11)

Bris Milah is such an important mitzvah that one is permitted in certain ways to violate Shabbos to perform a circumcision, as long as the bris is performed on the proper day, i.e., the eighth day. (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 331:4) (In other words, if the bris is delayed due to the poor health of the baby, the bris may not be performed on Shabbos or Yom Tov) In fact, according to Halacha (Jewish Law) the obligation of the father to circumcise his son is the greatest positive mitzvah in the entire Torah. (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 260:1)

Because of the importance of this mitzvah, Jewish parents over the centuries have made great sacrifices to be able to circumcise their children. In Soviet Russia, the evil Communists forbade Jews from performing bris performed on his newborn son. The punishment for having an infant son circumcised in Russia was immediate layoff from work with the possibility of subsequent criminal charges, trials and perhaps even a jail sentence. For this reason, the great majority of Jewish boys born in Soviet Russia were never circumcised.

Although a bris should be performed on the eighth day of a child's life, many times parents waited three weeks, three months or even six months before they could accomplish what for them was a risky mitzvah.

The young Russian Jewish boy from the Shlayder family was almost a year old and had not yet been circumcised. Finally, the mohel was called, the guests gathered in a basement, and the child was brought there to have a bris. The bris was performed, the proper blessings were recited and everyone wished each other "mazel tov." The child was then brought back to the room where his mother was waiting for him.

Suddenly there was a piercing scream... a wail.. and a cry. There was a thud, as though someone had fallen to the floor. Pandemonium broke out as people ran to the room where the mother lay.

After they revived her, she told an incredible story. The young mother had feared that her son might never have a bris; she thought she may be scared off by the authorities, and not have the bris at all. She was determined not to let that happen to herself and she undertook something that would keep the bris paramount in her mind at all times. She vowed not to kiss her baby son until he had his bris. For almost a year she suffered the pent-up emotions that only a mother can feel. Finally, after the bris, she had taken her son into her aching arms and kissed him fervently. Overcome with emotion, she had fainted.

From this story we see the self sacrifice that one mother was willing to make to ensure that this ever important mitzvah was performed. (The Maggid Speaks, Rabbi Paysach Krohn, p.190-1.)

Just as the Torah tells us of the greatness of the mitzvah of bris milah, the Torah also warns us of the spiritual dangers of not having a proper circumcision. A Jewish man without a proper circumcision is still a Jew, however, as it states in this week's portion "...any uncircumcised male, who does not circumcise the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people, he has broken My covenant." (17:14)

We tend to take the issue of bris for granted, because it is well known that nearly everyone, Jew and Gentile alike is circumcised in the hospital these days. However, in most cases, being circumcised by a doctor in a hospital achieves only a cosmetic circumcision. A Jewish male not circumcised by a kosher mohel according to proper Jewish law, is not part of the covenant of Avrohom.

One who is in doubt as to whether he had a kosher bris must contact a competent halachic (Jewish Legal) authority to determine his status. For those who are in doubt as to the status of their bris, these words should serve as a call to action. Thankfully, the mistake of not having a kosher circumcision is not permanent. A qualified mohel can perform corrective circumcision in mere seconds.

Bris milah is one of the three "Oisios" - signs of Jewishness which are mentioned in Torah. (The other two signs are Shabbos and Tefillin). The Chofetz Chayim once explained through a parable that bris milah is one of the signs that Hashem looks for in a Jew to see if that Jew is in business. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**