

Berit Mila

Bringing your Son into the Covenant of the Jewish People

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Congratulations on your new baby boy, and in your decision to enter him into the covenant of the Jewish people! Berit literally means covenant; the covenant that was made between Abraham and his children and God. Mila means circumcision. A Berit Mila is the ceremony of identity, providing physical identity through the circumcision and spiritual identity using the appropriate blessings of bestowing a Jewish name to your son. This ceremony links Jews with over four thousand years of tradition.

The 3 parts to the Berit Mila:

1. The Mila (Circumcision)
2. The Baby Naming
3. The Food!

Honorees include:

Sandak(iem) – often a Grandfather; the person(s) who holds the baby for the circumcision. The thought is that you would like your son to absorb the good qualities of this person. If there are two grandfathers, they may share this honor. One person must be Jewish. I generally use a circumcision chair and have the Sandak(iem) stand beside and comfort the infant.

K'vater / K'vatterin – a man and/or woman who are to be the religious Godparents of your son. They are charged with the responsibility of making sure your son has a Jewish education. These persons should be Jewish.

Another participant may say the Kiddush. Siblings, or a cousin, can say *Hamotzi*, the blessing over bread, at the end of the ceremony.

Items needed for the Ceremony:

- One nice chair (Chair of Elijah the prophet)
- A table for the circumcision: large enough to hold the baby, Kiddush cup, challah and other optional items. This is the table we perform the circumcision on.
- Kiddush Cup
- Kosher sweet red wine or grape juice
- Pre-poured wine or grape juice for guests
- A Challah
- Tallit (optional) – a family Tallit would be welcome.
- Kippot – (optional) you may wish to provide these for guests.
- A table cloth (optional)
- Any pictures or articles of clothing you may wish to display.

Before the Berit Mila: I would recommend that you decrease the temperature in your home 2 hours before the ceremony – very few systems can compensate for more than 30 people in a room. It will keep your guests comfortable during the Bris.

The baby should be fed and burped before the actual start of the ceremony. If he is still hungry, try to just give him a “nosh”. He may wear a pull up gown, shirt top or an open “onesie”. No pants please.

If the bris is going to be held at another home or facility, please arrive at least one hour prior to the event. The baby does best if he is relaxed and is finished eating one hour before circumcision. All you need to bring with you for the baby are diapers, wipes, Vaseline and a receiving blanket. You should also bring items for the ceremony (Kiddush cup, wine, challah, candles, etc.).

Items required for post-circumcision care:

Diapers and baby wipes

A large jar or tube of Vaseline or A&D ointment

Acetaminophen 160 mg per 5 ml solution (you will give ¼ tsp every 4 hours as needed).

The Naming Ceremony:

A baby’s Hebrew name is the name he will use when in synagogue when called to the torah and in identifying his children. It may have no relation to his “English” name. Hebrew names are often taken from relatives who have died (Ashkenazi tradition), or living relatives (Sephardim tradition), and whose good attributes you wish your son to have. You can sometimes find your relatives Hebrew names on Marriage, Berit, or Bar-Mitzvah Certificates.

Parents, family members, or friends may wish to write down some words about the people for whom the child is being named. Who they were, where they lived, what they did. Perhaps a story about the person that shows the attributes you wish your child to inherit. This can be read during the naming ceremony.

The Meal:

While there are no requirements for types of food but overt *traif* (pork or shellfish) should be avoided.

Mazel tov on your baby son! I’m honored to be part of this important milestone, and wish you and your growing family much health and happiness for many, many years.

Sincerely,

Bruce J. Birk, M.D. and certified mohel