

Brit Milah & Namings: **Frequently Asked Questions**

What is a Brit Milah?

Brit Milah, the covenant of circumcision, was originally made with Abraham and has been upheld by Jews for centuries. The circumcision is an outward sign of the eternal covenant with God and the Jewish people. The commandment is binding upon the father and the child. If a father does not have his son circumcised, the son is obligated to have himself circumcised as an adult.

The brit milah takes place 8 days after the birth of a son. The day the child was born is counted as the first day. Keep in mind that the Jewish day begins at sunset, so if a child is born after sunset the day of birth is considered the next day. An example, if a son is born at 9:00 p.m. on a Tuesday night, for purposes of counting we begin on Wednesday and the bris is held the following Wednesday. Circumcisions are performed on Shabbat. The Bible does not give any reason why the 8th day was chosen; however, modern medicine has revealed that an infant's blood clotting mechanism stabilizes on the 8th day. Of course, if there is a question of health, the brit is postponed.

The circumcision is performed by a mohel. A circumcision done in the hospital is not considered a brit milah unless it is done with the intention of fulfilling this particular mitzvah and the proper blessings are recited at the time.

Can you perform a Brit Milah in a hospital?

In some cases, I do recite the prayers with the family in the hospital in order to make a circumcision a Brit Milah. That said, there is ample good reason to include family and friends in the warmth of a home.

Can we name our child after a living relative?

Custom, not law offers the answer to this common question. According to Sephardic Jewish custom, it is appropriate to name after the living. According to Ashkenazic custom, it is inappropriate to do so.

When should we celebrate our daughter's naming?

Unlike the Brit Milah for a boy which the Torah states should occur eight days after birth, the Brit Bat, or Naming Ceremony for a Daughter can be celebrated at any time. I generally suggest that the ceremony is scheduled one to two months after birth.

How long does the ceremony last?

The service generally lasts 20 minutes and may be followed by a light breakfast or luncheon.

How is the Brit Bat Naming Ceremony done?

The service is generally held in the home, with a gathering of friends and family. The service can be personalized with songs and readings chosen by the parents. We share

stories about the meaning of the baby's name and the person for whom the baby is named, as well as ways in which we pray the baby will be like him or her.

Can we honor non-Jewish family members or friends?

Having worked expensively with inter-faith families, I welcome non-Jewish family members to participate in the Brit Milah and Naming Ceremonies. There are many appropriate and beautiful readings which can be included and in addition, non-Jewish family members are welcome to add their own personal tributes.

Should we provide kippot (yarmulkes) for all of the male guests?

Male Jews wear kippot to acknowledge God's presence above them, and as symbolic of their obligations to God. It is customary for one to wear kippot during all Jewish life-cycle events (including baby namings, bar mitzvahs and funerals). It is therefore appropriate to make kippot available for both Jewish and non-Jewish male guests.

Should we include candle lighting in the service?

According to Jewish law, once Shabbat candles have been lit on Friday night, we refrain from lighting others until the sun has set on Saturday. While I personally do not object to candle lightings in parties, I do not believe that they belong to the Shabbat prayer service.

Is it true that a cantor can perform all life-cycle ceremonies (birth, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, weddings, funerals)?

Yes. Jewish law permits any knowledgeable Jew to perform these rites. I frequently perform life cycle services for congregants as well as for other members of the community. While I sometimes co-officiate with rabbis, I more frequently lead services alone.

[If you have any questions which are not addressed in this document, please contact me for clarification.](#)