YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH PROJECT (VBM)

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**Laws of Conversion and Circumcision**

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***Se'udat Brit Mila***

**The Festive Meal Held in Honor of the Circumcision**

It is customary to hold a festive meal to celebrate the performance of the *brit mila*. This week, we will discuss the source and nature of this practice, as well as the custom of not explicitly inviting guests to the meal.

**Source**

A number of sources indicate that a *se'udat mitzva* is held in honor of the child's circumcision. For example, the Talmud (*Ketubot* 8a) discusses whether the blessing of "*she-hasimcha be-me'ono*" should be said at the *se'udat mila*.

The *midrash* (Midrash Tehillim 112; see also Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer 29) teaches:

When Yitzchak was born, [when] he was eight days old, he [Avraham] brought him to be circumcised, as it is said, "And Avraham circumcised his son Yitzchak when he was eight days old" (*Bereishit* 21:4). From here you may learn that everyone who brings his son for circumcision is considered as though he were a high priest bringing his meal offering and his drink offering upon the top of the altar. Hence, the sages said: A man is bound to make festivities and a banquet on that day when he has the merit of having his son circumcised, like Avraham our father, who circumcised his son, as it is said, "and Avraham held a great feast on the day that Yitzchak was weaned (*higamal*)."

Although the verse is clearly referring to a meal held after the child has been weaned from his mother, the *midrash* understands that this may be understood as referring to the meal held for a *brit mila*. Tosafot (*Shabbat* 130a, s.v. *sas*) explains that the word "*higamal*" should be understood as alluding to the letters *heh* and *gimmel* – which together equal eight – “*mal*” – circumcision – thus referring to the eighth day after the *brit mila*.

Some *Acharonim* cite a different Talmudic passage (*Nidda* 31b):

R. Shimon b. Yochai was asked by his disciples: … And why did the Torah ordain circumcision on the eighth day? In order that the guests do not enjoy themselves, while his father and mother are sad.

Rashi explains that the guests "are eating and drinking at the festive meal while his father and mother are sad," as the mother is still prohibited due to *tume'at leida* (the impurity rendered after birth for seven days after the birth of a male child). R. Yaakov Emden (*Hagahot, Nidda* 31b) explains that this is an "additional" source for the festive meal held on the day of the circumcision.

Interestingly, Rabbenu Bachayei (*Bereishit* 17:13) explains that just as a sacrifice is following by a festive meal – the eating of the *shelamim* – the *brit mila* is similarly followed by a *se'udat mitzva*.

The Shaarei Teshuva (OC 551:32) cites the Ohr Ne'elam (9), who asserts, based on Rashi (above) that the *se’udat mitzva* held in honor of a *brit mila* is a Biblical obligation. The Shaarei Teshuva disagrees, however, and insists that the obligation is rabbinic. Many authorities, including the Shulchan Arukh (YD 265:12), refer to this meal as a "*minhag*" (custom).

**The Nature and Requirements of the *Se'udat Brit Mila***

The meal held in honor of the *brit mila* is considered a *se'udat mitzva*. The Rema (ibid. 12) writes that it is customary to hold the meal in the presence of a *minyan*.

The Chokhmat Adam (149:24) relates that the Vilna Gaon would rebuke those who are financially capable of serving a meal but offer cake and coffee instead. Some sources indicate that bread should be served at this meal (Raavia 3:751; see also Divrei Yatziv 2:163:2), and some insist that the meal should include meat (Magen Avraham, OC 249:6). Other relate that it is customary to eat dairy food at a morning *brit mila* (*Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot* 2:485).

The Arukh Ha-Shulchan (YD 265:37) relates that in his time, it was uncommon to hold a meal due to widespread poverty; rather, people would each fruit and cake. To this day, in many communities, it is customary not to spend large amounts for the *se'udat mitzva*, in order not to cause hardship to those who cannot afford a large meal.

**Inviting to a *Brit Mila***

It is customary to "inform" people of the festive meal held for a *brit mila*, instead of formally "inviting" them. What is the origin of this custom?

The Talmud (*Pesachim* 113b) teaches that "there are seven people are considered to be ostracized by Heaven." In addition to these seven – which includes one who does not teach his children Torah, one who does not wear *tefillin* on his head and arm, and one who does not wear *tzitzit* or place a *mezuza* on his doorway – the *gemara* adds "one who does not sit with a group that is partaking of a feast in celebration of a *mitzva* (*chabura shel mitzva*)." Rabbeinu Chananel identifies this "*chabura shel mitzva*" as "*Kiddush*." Rashbam (s.v. *bechaburat*; see also Tosafot, *Pesachim* 114a, s.v. *ve-ein*) explains that the *gemara* refers to a celebration held in honor of a *brit mila* or the marriage of a *Kohen* to the daughter of a *Kohen*. The Rema (YD 265:12) cites this in the laws of the *brit mila*. He adds, based on Tosafot (ibid.), that this applies only if there are "upright" people at the meal (*anashim mehuganim*).

Regarding this issue, the Pitchei Teshuva (ibid. 265:18) cites the Makom Shmuel, who quotes R. David ben Aryeh Leib of Lida (c. 1650 – 1696). In his Sharvit Zahav, R. David relates that his teachers would criticize the practice of local *shamashim* to go house to house inviting people to a *brit mila*, lest those who do not attend will be considered to be "ostracized by Heaven." Rather, it is customary to "inform" people of the *brit mila*. This concern appears in other sources, such as the Me'am Lo'ez (*Bereishit* 17:9) and R. Yaakov Emden's Migdal Oz (9:16:5).

What is the scope of this custom? As mentioned above, the Rashbam mentions the festive meal held in honor of a *brit mila* and the wedding of a *Kohen* and a *bat Kohen*. Tosafot (ibid.) includes the wedding meal (*se'udat nisu'im*) of a Torah scholar, and the Levush (*Minhagim* 34) cites this as well.

However, the *Acharonim* note that there is no custom to "inform" people of a wedding. R. Moshe Feinstein (Iggerot Moshe, OC 2:65) notes that Rema only applies the Talmud's concern of being "ostracized by the Heaven" to a *brit mila*. He explains that while all are obligated to attend a wedding in order to rejoice with the bride and groom, only the father of the child is obligated to celebrate the circumcision of his son. However, those who are invited to the circumcision and do not participate are belittling the *mitzva* of *brit mila*, for which they deserve being "ostracized by Heaven."

Alternatively, R. Moshe Shternbuch, in his Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot (2:649), suggests that the *gemara* only criticizes one who refrains from attending a festive meal because he feels it is beneath his dignity. However, if he chooses not to attend because he is involved in another matter, he is not "ostracized." This may be a concern at a *brit mila*, which does not take much time. In contrast, it is understandable why a person would be unable to attend a wedding, due to its length, and there is no concern that if he does not attend it is due to his ego.

The *Acharonim* offer numerous justifications for the invitees not to attend a *brit mila*.

For example, R. Moshe Teitelbaum, in his comments to the Shulchan Arukh (ibid.), notes that the *gemara* criticizes one who "does not sit" – in other words, one who attends the festive meal but does not partake of the meal. The Talmud never meant to criticize one who does not intend to attend the *brit mila* at all.

Alternatively, the Arukh Ha-Shulchan notes that in his day, this concern was not common, as there are often "unworthy" people attending festive meals. The Mishna Berura (Bi'ur Halacha 170, s.v. *lo)* explains that Tosafot's concern relates to a regular, non-festive meal, however, at a *se'udat mitzva*, the presence of an upright person may positively influence the other guests.

Sefer Noheg KeTzon Yosef (*Hilkhot Mila*) suggests that if the father or mother personally invite a person, he is indeed obligated to partake. Similarly, some suggest that if the father or mother invited a person more than once, he should attend.

R. Yisrael David Harfenes (Va-Yevarekh David, YD 113) writes that the Talmud criticizes one who belittles the *se'udat mitzva* of the *brit mila*. However, one who cannot attend the circumcision because it is too difficult does not violate the Talmud's teaching.

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This is the final shiur of our series on the laws of *brit* *mila*. We will dedicate next year to the study of the laws of conversion (*giyur*).