

## Celebrating Life

### Birth

The birth of a baby is always a joyous event and provides an opportunity to celebrate and give thanks to G-d.

Jewish people usually do not hold baby showers before the baby was born. In fact, mostly Jewish parents did not even purchase things for the baby or discuss baby names until the baby is born. The reason given for this custom is pure superstition: drawing attention to the baby also draws the evil eye, bad luck, to the baby.

When the baby is born however every one likes to congratulate and bring gifts. In Judaism there are different celebrations for boys and girls. Read about those celebration below.

#### *Simchat Bat*

The birth of a baby provides an opportunity to celebrate and give thanks to G-d for giving life to the new born boy or girl. As opposed to a *Brith*,circumcision, of a boy there are no explicit rituals for a girl. Instead, we find the custom of *Simchat Bat*, joy of a daughter, the celebration of a birth of a daughter. In Sephardi communities this celebration is called *Zevud habat*, and translated: G-d gave me a good present

*Simchat bat* is the term for the ritual for naming infant Jewish girls. Since there is not yet a fixed format for the Simchat Bat many couples choose to create their own ceremony. These rituals of Simchat Bat usually are parallel to the Brith ceremony for Jewish boys, albeit without the circumcision. In most Ashkenazi congregations a baby girl is named the first Sabbath after she is born, but it's acceptable to name her at any Torah reading that is preformed Monday and Thursday mornings as well as holidays and the Sabbath. A special prayer is also said at this time for the well being of the mother and daughter. A celebration including a Seudat Mitzvah, festive meal

follows. Last but not least, as with the Brith friends and family prepare gifts at the Simchat Bat.

#### *Brith Mila*

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*Brith Milah*, Circumcision is the first commandment given by God to Abraham and is central to Judaism. When a boy is 8 days old he is circumcised. It is a sign of G-d's covenant with the Jewish people and originates from the story of Abraham in Genesis 17:9-14:

This is My covenant that you shall observe between Me and you and your children after you, to circumcise your every male. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall become the sign of a covenant between Me and you.

The ceremony can be performed in Synagogue but is now more likely to take place at home or in a hospital.

The circumcision ceremony is usually performed by a *Mohel*, an expert trained in the ritual and medical technique and in the presence of a quorum of ten adult Jewish men, a *Minyan*, including the father.

While according to Jewish law it is technically the responsibility of a father to circumcise his own sons and the mohel is merely his agent in this procedure. Sometimes you can see a father perform the circumcision on his own son regarding it a special *Mitzvah*.

The mother, godparents, and relatives are invited attend. The baby is taken from his mother by a female godparent, who passes the infant on a cushion to his father. The baby is placed in a chair that symbolizes the presence of the prophet Elijah, who emphasized the importance of maintaining God's covenant to the Jews. He is then passed to the Sandak, Godfather,

who holds the baby on his cushion during the circumcision; this honor often goes to the grandfather. Prayers are recited and, after the circumcision, the father will say the blessing that acknowledges the child's entry into the covenant. The Mohel then takes the child and blesses him, and gives him the name chosen by his parents, while putting some wine to the baby's lips. At the end of the ceremony the baby is passed back to his mother for feeding and comforting if necessary. A family celebration follows that includes a festive meal the *Seudat Mitzvah*. After the meal, *birkayt hamazon* is usually recited with special blessings for the child.

### ***Pidyon Ben***

The ritual of Redemption of the Son – *Pidyon Haben* - is based in the Jewish concept that first and best things belong to God. In Numbers 8:17, God declares: Every firstborn among the Israelites, man as well as beast, is mine. In order to release the father from this obligation the firstborn son has to be redeemed by a Cohen. In a ceremony 30 days after birth the Cohen asks the father which he would rather have, the child or five silver coins which he must pay. The father states that he prefers the child to the money then he recites a blessing and hands over five silver coins. The Cohen holds the coins over the child and declares that the redemption price is received and accepted in place in the child. He then blesses the child and returns him to the custody of his family.

### **Baby Name Giving**

After a child is born, and often even a long time before, the decision of giving him or her name has to fall. The naming of a child has a spiritual meaning and is a special moment in the life of the man or women they will become. Naming a baby is a statement of his or her character and uniqueness and will mark their path in life.

On the first Sabbath after a child is born, the baby's father is called forward at the synagogue to recite the aliyah and request blessings for the health of mother and child.

When the newborn is a girl she is named at this time whereas Jewish boys are only named on their *Brit Milah* or ceremony that happens eight days following their birth as part of the rite of circumcision.

It often today happens that the naming of Jewish girls take place at the special ceremony, *Simchat Bat* as at Ashkenazi Jews or *Zeved habat* as it is called at Sephardic community, that should be equivalent of the boys *Brith*.

Many parents choose to give their child both a secular and a Hebrew name for use in religious rituals, such as the calling up to the aliyah and the *ketubah* and add another secular name for purposes of civil birth records and daily use. In Israel as we usually choose just a Hebrew name many of the given ones are names that have a sound that is similar to English or American names and will simplify pronouncing them abroad.

While Ashkenazi Jews have the custom of naming a child after a relative who has passed away to keep the name and memory alive, as they feel that in a metaphysical way this name giving forms a bond between the soul of the new born baby and the deceased relative, Sephardi Jews name children after relatives who are still alive. This source of this tradition of name giving is the Talmud. Thus you will find in a larger family quite a few with the same name which can be confusing at times.