

Fascinating INSIGHTS

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Saturday Circumcision

In the year 1947 in Cairo, Egypt, R' Ovadia Yosef wrote:¹ “Here, in Egypt, the mohel is allowed to perform bris milah only by being certified by the health department. The Jewish population in Cairo is around 50,000 and at times there are several brisos (circumcisions) on Shabbos throughout the city.² The mohel in Cairo, who was the only one certified by the health department, drives in his car from bris to bris and

¹ Yabia Omer, volume 10, Yoreh Deah 25.

² R' Ovadia Yosef resisted pressure put on him to study to qualify as a mohel when he was younger. Although the course of study was short, this skill would leave him running from one bris to the next. What would become of his Torah? In later years he expressed his satisfaction with this decision.

therefore violates Shabbos publicly.” R' Ovadia was asked by some G-d fearing community members if they could employ this man as a mohel for their babies even though he didn't observe Shabbos or if they were obligated to travel to Alexandria, which was more than three hours away, where there were mohelim that were Shabbos observant. R' Ovadia ruled that the circumcisions he performed were valid. However, he advised his students to travel to Alexandria where the bris would be performed by a fully observant Jew. “And for the bris of my son, Avraham, who was born in Egypt in 1949, I asked R' Maatuk Dhab³ of the Alexandria rabbinate and he traveled to my house in Cairo from Alexandria and circumcised my son.”⁴ R' Ovadia then wrote, “I gathered my courage and spoke to this mohel who drove in order to circumcise. I spoke to him very gently and explained that he shouldn't drive. I later heard that after I spoke to him, instead of driving himself if he needed to get to a distant circumcision on Shabbos, he hired a non-Jew to drive. I didn't reprimand him for this.”

If a mohel was invited to perform a bris milah on Shabbos at a place where he may see Chillul Shabbos, what should he do? R' Moshe Feinstein⁵ writes that even though it is forbidden to go to a place where they are transgressing Torah prohibitions, nevertheless since the mitzva of milah in its proper time is an obligation placed upon every Jew, the mohel is obligated to go and perform the bris—especially if there is no other mohel.

The Shulchan Aruch tells us that one is allowed to perform the needs for bris milah on Shabbos.⁶ If it is known that because of the bris there will be Shabbos desecration, such as people driving to the bris, pictures being taken at the bris, and the like, what should be done? The opinion of the Shevet Halevi⁷ is that although it is permitted on Shabbos to perform the bris of a child of those who desecrate Shabbos, it is still better to postpone it to Sunday. If this may cause an improper mohel to perform the bris, the Minchas Yitzchak⁸ writes that the mohel is obligated to do it on Shabbos, since either way there will be Shabbos desecration, while

³ R' Maatuk Dhab³ once asked R' Ovadia Yosef a question that gives us a glimpse into the life of Jews living amongst the Arabs. He asked R' Ovadia if it was permissible to do circumcisions with milah and priah for Arabs as a paid job. R' Ovadia replied that it is permissible to do it for Arabs and Christians even for free but one who refuses to do so תבוא עליו ברכה (Yabia Omer, volume 2, Yoreh Deah 19).

⁴ The evening before the bris, R' Maatuk arrived after a three-hour trip from Alexandria, only to diagnose the baby with a light case of jaundice. Together with R' Ovadia, he arranged to postpone the bris. When the baby was healthy, he returned from Alexandria to perform the bris.

⁵ Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah, 1, 156.

⁶ Orach Chaim 331:1.

⁷ 1:205,331. See 4:134-5. 9:210.

⁸ 3:35.

deferring will only add to the already sub-optimal situation that the mitzva will not be done properly.

Another interesting question regarding a bris milah on Shabbos concerns a child whose 8th day does not fall out on Shabbos. For example, let's say the child was born on Friday, yet they performed his bris nine days later on Shabbos. According to halacha, a bris may only be performed on Shabbos if and only if Shabbos is the 8th day from the child's birth. In the example we cited, such a case is called a milah shelo b'zmanah ("circumcision not in its correct time").⁹ But the question arises what happens if it was nonetheless illegally performed on Shabbos? Is such a bris valid post facto or would the child need "another" bris in the form of drawing blood (hatafas dam bris), just as halacha calls for in a case where a non-Jew performed the milah?¹⁰ In a lengthy responsum about this question, R' Akiva Eiger concludes the bris milah is still valid, and it is not even considered a mitzva habaa b'aveira ("mitzva which came through a sin").¹¹

Moving Music

1) R' Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz would explain that each of the instruments mentioned in the final chapter of tehillim with which to praise Hashem—shofar, harp, flute among others—arouses a different emotional response: one arouses tears while another arouses happiness and another encourages deep reflection. Taken as a whole, the message is that one must serve Hashem with every emotion.¹²

2) The chapters of tehillim were intended to be sung with musical accompaniment. In fact, each chapter had its own designated instruments and melody so that they would elicit the desired thought, comprehension and emotions that Dovid Hamelech sought to evoke with that particular passage. The Redak¹³ writes "it was with instrumental accompaniment that the songs, melodies and praises were said, each one according to its tune, which was known to them. It was a great wisdom and it was to arouse the wise soul.

Building on the Redak's words R' Matisyahu Solomon¹⁴ cites the words of a certain old man: "One can never fully understand a chapter of tehillim with clarity until one knows this wisdom, and understands and recognizes the distinct sounds of the musical instruments and how each specific instrument fits a specific paragraph unlike any other. For it is the musical instruments and the tune that give the requisite flavor and understanding to comprehend the matters with their desired depth."

⁹ Orach Chaim 331:4.

¹⁰ Yoreh Deah, 264:1, Rema.

¹¹ Shu"t R' Akiva Eiger, Mahadura Kamma, 174.

¹² See R' Shmshon Rafael Hirsch, Tehillim 150.

¹³ Tehillim 4:1.

¹⁴ Matnas Chaim, Moadim, p. 154.

Ms.communication

Hashem tells Avraham שמע בקלה, heed Sarah's voice.¹⁵ Shouldn't it say שמע לקלה, listen to her voice, since that is the proper grammar?

The Pasuk says ונשאלה את פיה, they asked Rivka her decision concerning Yitzchok.¹⁶ The word פיה ("her mouth") seems unnecessary?

It is known that women speak indirectly. This comes from the צניעות ("modesty") of women as כל כבודה בתי מלך פנימה.¹⁷ This is because צניעות is keeping things hidden just as is the idea of speaking indirectly.

Nevertheless, men must learn to break this barrier and understand what their wives are saying.¹⁸ For this reason, it doesn't say שמע לקלה, listen to her voice rather שמע בקלה, in her voice. That means to what she implies. In the same vein, we can grasp why it says ונשאלה את פיה—to discern what she is truly saying.

We see this in the episode where Sarah told Avraham to take Hagar as a wife in order to have children. He complied with Sarah's request. However, he didn't discern her true desire which was that he daven for her that she may conceive which would avoid the need to take her maidservant, Hagar, as a second wife.¹⁹

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the books, Fascinating Insights and Incredible Insights in addition to being the host of The Fascinating Insights Podcast. His writings, some of which have been translated into Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

¹⁵ Breishis 21:12.

¹⁶ Breishis 24:57.

¹⁷ Tehillim 45:14.

¹⁸ Talking about miscommunications, here is a hilarious true story. There was an elder anglo who moved to Israel after securing a job. However, soon after he was laid off along with many others. To stabilize his finances, he went to the bank for a loan. He began by telling the clerk, אני הולך להפטר, which he thought meant that he was being laid off from his job. The clerk was in shock and pained by this comment, as it means that he was about to pass away. Unbeknown to what he just said, the man continued אז אני צריך לסדר לוויה which he thought meant that he wanted to arrange taking out a loan. The clerk was visibly alarmed and went to speak to her supervisor who spoke fluent English. The man explained he was about to be fired and therefore wanted to discuss taking out a loan. The supervisor explained to the clerk that the man wanted to take out a loan—הוא רוצה לסדר הלוואה. The supervisor then told the man that he told the clerk that he was about to die and wanted to arrange a funeral. They each had a good laugh!

¹⁹ Breishis Rabba 71:7, Eitz Yosef, s.v. אברהם.