

Brit Milah

It is important for Jews to be fruitful and multiply, in other words to have children. Male children have an important social and religious status.

God said to Abraham: "From now on you must circumcise every baby boy when he is eight days old. This will show there is a Covenant between you and me. Each one must be circumcised, and this will be a physical sign to show that my Covenant with you is everlasting

In the Jewish faith one rite of passage that connects the Jews to the Covenant is the Brit Milah or circumcision.

The Covenant comes from the time of the figure of Abraham (about 2000 BCE). He and his descendants entered into a promise to worship one God in exchange for the Promised Land, a Covenant developed by

the figure of Moses when he received the Ten Commandments as part of the Exodus from Egypt towards the promised land.

A male baby is born Jewish whether or not he is circumcised. There are welcoming parties. However, going through Brit Milah is a sign on the skin of being a *faithful* Jew. According to Leviticus 12:3, the ceremony happens on the eighth day of life. It usually happens in the home (or hospital, sometimes) in the presence of at least ten men (a minyan). It can happen in a synagogue.

The mother gives the baby to a female godparent. She carries the baby on a cushion to a male godparent (her husband or brother). Then the father takes him. The baby is first put on a special chair called the throne of Elijah. Elijah is the person who defended and judged the Jews' loyalty to the Covenant. Then the baby is given to the sandek, who rests the baby in his lap. A special man called a mohel (circumciser) carries out the swift task of removing the foreskin. The father says, "Blessed are You O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with his commandments, and has commanded us to bring our son into the Covenant of Abraham our father." Wine is then blessed by the mohel and he names the baby. The sandek sips and drops of wine touch the baby's lips. The mother who returns drinks some wine. The baby goes back to its mother.

Now why is the foreskin removed? Many Jews have argued about this. One view is that the operation makes the imperfect condition more perfect, just as God needs humankind's effort in making the world good. Another view is that this mark of Israel is made where men create new generations of Jews.

On the Sabbath after their birth, Jewish girls are named in the synagogue after her father reads the Torah. A celebration follows there or at home.

1. In bullet points list the order of events of the Brit Milah.
2. How is the Brit Milah connected to the Covenant from Abraham?
3. Write a poem in a decorated card to welcome a Jewish baby into the world.