


Jewish Literacy # 16

Life Cycle Events

*Brit Milah, B'nai Mitzvah, Marriage
(& Inter-Marriage), Divorce, Funerals*

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About Life Cycles



- A time for contact with Torah, covenant with God
- A time when even the least observant will focus on minor details
 - In the words of Rabbi Harold Schulweiss, “hatched, matched and dispatched”
- A time when we step back from the canvas to compare and appreciate our lives and the lives of our families

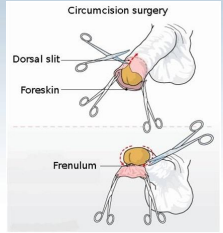

See Handbook pp 380-384 for Life Cycle Checklist

Birth

- Jewish attitudes towards children – at least a boy and a girl
- *Brit Milah* (or *Bris*) - “covenant of circumcision” (Gen: 17:10) [Lotker p 111, Handbook p 222]
 - 8th day, even on Shabbat or Yom Kippur, only delayed if baby’s health is jeopardized.
 - Symbol of entering into the covenant - does not make the boy Jewish
 - *Mohel* may lead service or rabbi may lead
 - Child held by a *Sandek*, the child’s father says a blessing for bringing him into the covenant of Abraham our father, attendees pray for a life of Torah, marriage and good deeds. A Hebrew name is bestowed.
 - Chair of Elijah: Sign of Messianic hope and as a lesson to Elijah who despaired of Jewish survival
 - Male converts to Judaism need to be circumcised or have a ritual drop of blood drawn if already circumcised. This is not mandatory in Reform
- For girls, the Reform Movement has instituted a similar baby naming ceremony. [Handbook, p 226]

Brit (Bris) Milah Covenant of Circumcision

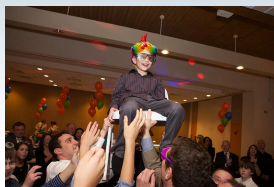
Birth

- Jewish Names
 - *Moshe ben Chonon v'Kroisha* or *Batya bat Moshe v'Sarah*
 - Tradition of naming after a dead relative (and not after a living one) Eastern European (*Ashkenazi*) only. Reason: superstition that the Angel of Death might call the child rather than the adult. Often there is a beautiful link between the child and the departed relative.
 - Naming will traditionally take place at the *Brit Milah*, at a home ceremony or at a Friday night ceremony
- *Pidyon Haben*: Redemption of the first issue of the womb if male on the 31st day of life. [Handbook p 229]
 - Father makes a payment to a *Cohen* to redeem his son.
 - Origin in Numbers 3:11; 5 shekels in Num. 3:47
 - If the father or the mother is a *Cohen* or *Levite*, no ceremony necessary.
 - Not common in Reform families since males and females treated the same and *Cohanim* are not given special roles.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

- Son or daughter of commandment, literally meaning “son/daughter of commandment” [or “*Mitzvah* Man/Woman” or “responsible man/woman”]
 - Not a verb, I don’t “*bar mitzvah*” anyone
 - Note “*Bar*” is Aramaic
 - Marks the age one is responsible for observance of Jewish law.
 - Ironic that (alas) often this is the end of Jewish study and practice.
 - Boys at 13, girls at 12
 - In Reform, both at 13
- Theoretically takes place at specified age, no ceremony required
- Today, the *Shabbat* service celebrates the fact that the child can be called to bless and read the Torah and Haftarah, lead the congregation in prayer.
- Ceremony dates to 14th century for men and 1922 (Judith Kaplan – 1st *Bat Mitzvah* - died in 1996) for women.
- All too often, having a son or daughter “bar mitzvahed” is the only reason families join a synagogue.
- Adult *B'nai Mitzvah* classes.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah



Confirmation

- Introduced in 19th century Reform extending to girls – now adopted by some Conservative and Reconstructionist congregations
- Group rather than individual
- 15-16 year olds
- Linked to *Shavuot* holiday (receiving of Torah)



Marriage

- Two parts to the ceremony
 - *Kiddushin* or holiness or sanctification. Engagement/Betrothal. Exchange of rings “By means of this ring. You are sanctified to me, according to the law of Moses and Israel.”
 - *Nisuin*: the marriage including the *Sheva Berachot* the 7 blessings followed by a brief period of isolation (*yichud*).
 - Fulfills the three Talmudic requirements of marriage gift, contract and co-habitation (any one of which suffices).
- Symbols
 - *Chupah* -- of home – often made with a tallit
 - Ring: of continuity – also an exchange of clear value
 - Sharing a cup of wine – sharing a single destiny
 - *Ketubah* an Aramaic pre-nuptial agreement and divorce settlement. Protects the economic rights of wives.
 - Breaking a glass – reminder that the Temple is in ruins – originally probably to scare away spirits.

Marriage

Marriage

- Not performed on *Shabbat* (since it is a legal act) and also traditionally not on some other periods of time – especially holidays and times of mourning.
- Interfaith marriage
 - Forbidden in Conservative and Orthodox movements
 - Matter of personal conscience of the Rabbi in Reform
 - About 2/3rds of Reform rabbis will conduct – I will after talking with bride and groom.
 - But CCAR is opposed
 - Many rabbis require a commitment to establish a Jewish home and to have the non-Jewish partner study Judaism
 - A very small number of rabbis will co-officiate with non-Jewish clergy.
- The interfaith couple
 - May have problems in Conservative and Orthodox
 - Generally welcomed in Reform – special programming
 - The question of raising the children
- Divorce
 - Traditionally the husband grants wife a *get* (Jewish divorce) [see Handbook, p 302]. Woman may be unable to marry in a Conservative or Orthodox setting without a *get*. Problem of *agunah* (“chained” women).
 - Reform accepts civil divorce as religiously binding.

Jewish Mourning Practices

- Jews often concerned with Jewish law when “hatched, matched, dispatched”
- Death to Funeral – *Aninut* – mourner called an *Onen*
 - Honor the deceased
 - Body regarded as the creation of God and the dwelling place of the soul
 - Ritual cleansing and care
 - Closest relatives exempt from positive mitzvot
 - Quick burial – within a day if possible (Deu. 21:23)
 - this is why no flowers (used in cultures where burial delayed)
 - Visitors don’t visit
 - Body traditionally not left unattended - Shomer
 - Embalming not traditional – not supposed to remove blood

Jewish Mourning Practices

- **Funeral**
 - Simple shrouds only (see Reichman Brothers story)
 - Simple wooden coffin – no metal (war, inconsistent with “rest in peace”)
 - Viewing discouraged except for ID
 - Earth from Israel placed in grave (to prepare for trip?)
 - Even better, burial in Israel/Jerusalem/Mt. of Olives
 - Tearing the garments
 - Ribbon, over left for parents, over right for others (siblings, spouse, children)
 - Jacob tore his garment upon seeing Joseph’s blood coat (also Job 1:20)
 - *Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, dayan ha-emet*
 - Helping to bury the deceased
 - *Minyan* for *kaddish*
 - *Cohanim* don’t attend except at the edge of cemetery for close family

Mourners’ Kaddish

וְיִגְדַל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא. בְּעֻלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כְרִיעֻתָּהּ, וְיִמְלִיד מַלְכוּתָּהּ בְּחַיִּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּעָלְמָא וּבְכוּן קָרִיב, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.

הָא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלְמָא וְלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמָא.

וְיִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרַמֵּם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְקַדַּךְ וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלַּל שְׁמֵהּ דְקֻדְשָׁא בְרִיךְ הוּא, לְעָלְמָא מִן כָּל בְּרִיקְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא תְּשַׁבְּחָתָא וְנִתְמַטָּא, דְאִמְרִינוּ בְּעֻלְמָא, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.

עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.

Yitgadal v'yitkadesh sh'mei raba. B'alma di v'ra chriutei, v'yamlich malchutei, b'chayeychon uv'chayei d'chol beil Yisrael, baagala uviz'man kariv. V'imru: Amen.

Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach l'alum ul'almei almaya.

Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpaar v'yitromam v'yitnasei, v'yit'hadar v'yitaleh v'yit'halal sh'mei d'kud'sha b'r'ich hu, l'eila min kol birchata v'shirata, tushb'chala v'nechemata, daamiran b'alma. V'imru: Amen.

Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya, v'chayim aleinu v'al kol Yisrael. V'imru: Amen.

Oseh shalom bimromav, Hu yaaseh shalom aleinu, v'al kol Yisrael. V'imru: Amen.

Exalted and hallowed be God's great name in the world which God created, according to plan. May God's majesty be revealed in the days of our lifetime and the life of all Israel – speedily, imminently, to which we say Amen.

Blessed be God's great name to all eternity.

Blessed, praised, honored, exalted, extolled, glorified, adored, and lauded be the name of the Holy Blessed One, beyond all earthly words and songs of blessing, praise, and comfort. To which we say Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and all Israel, to which we say Amen.

May the One who creates harmony on high, bring peace to us and to all Israel. To which we say Amen.

Jewish Funeral Images

After the Funeral - Shivah

- Pitcher of water at the Shivah home for ritual cleansing. Mitzvah blessing ending in “*Baruch... vi-tzvanu al n'yeelat yadayim.*”
- Shivah
 - 7 days (Joseph mourned for Jacob) after funeral
 - Halted by a holiday
 - First 3 days most intense
 - The Zohar gives a mystical reason: "For seven days the soul goes to and fro between the house and the grave, mourning for the body" (Zohar, *Va-Yehi*, 226a).
 - Sit on low stools (or floor like Job)
 - Cover mirrors (vanity, prayer, spirits)
 - Don't shave or get haircut
 - Don't go out except for *Shabbat* (don't mourn on *Shabbat*)
 - Thus, prayer *minyan* must come to you
 - Don't greet mourner or initiate conversation; simply approach and sit
 - **RULE:** Always go or call. Go on some of the later days.
 - **SUGGESTION:** Sit the whole 7 days
- Kaddish prayer
 - Because we don't feel like praising God
 - Because God is diminished by the loss

Shivah Images



Gravestone Inscriptions



פ"נ = פדה נטמן

Here Lies



פ"נ. ת.נ.צ.ב.ה. It is customary, but not obligatory, to put these letters on the bottom of a monument. These letters are an acronym for the Hebrew words (תזרוח ב'צרוח החיים) *tzrurah b'tzror hachaim*, "May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life." This paraphrases the words that Abigail told King David ([I Samuel 25:29](#)): "But my lord's soul shall be bound in the bond of life with the L-rd your G-d."

The Reichman Funeral

One of the Reichman brothers passed away this summer, leaving 1 billion dollars. He left two wills, directing that one be opened immediately and the second be opened after the *Shloshim* (30 days of mourning after burial).

Among the instructions left in the first will was a request he be buried with a certain pair of socks that he owned. The Reichman children immediately brought the socks to the *Chevra Kadisha* (Jewish burial society), requesting that their father be buried in them.

Of course, the *Chevra Kadisha* refused, reminding the family that it's against the *Halacha* (Jewish law). They pleaded, explaining that their father was a very pious and learned man, and he obviously had a very good reason to make this request. The *Chevra Kadisha* remained firm in their refusal.

The family frantically summoned the *Chevra Kadisha* to *Beit Din* (Rabbinic court), where the Rabbi gently explained to them, "Although your father left that request when he was on this world, now that he's in the world of truth, he surely understands that it is in his best interests to be buried without the socks. Mr. Reichman was buried without his socks."

30 days later, the second will was opened, and it read something like this:

"My dear children. By now you must have buried me without my socks. I wanted you to truly understand that a man can have 1 billion dollars, but in the end, he can't even take along one pair of socks!"

[<http://katinchozer.blogspot.com/2010/04/one-pair-of-socks.html>]

After Shivah

- **Shloshim:** 30 days after burial
 - Avoid social gatherings, entertainment
 - Also halted by holiday
- **Shanah**
 - Children observe 11 months
- **Yahrzeit** (Yiddish word)
 - Anniversary of date of death rather than birthday celebrated
 - A 24-hour memorial candle is lit for that day, as a symbol of the verse "the soul of man is the lamp of God" (Prov. 20:27).
- **Unveiling**
 - A matter of custom not law
 - Allows time for grave to settle