



*Excerpted from Living the Halachic Process by Rabbi Daniel Mann - Eretz Hemdah, with their permission [www.erezhemdah.org]*

## A Brit Mila Meal

**Question:** Is there an obligation to eat at a brit mila?

**Answer:** This question can be divided into two parts. One is whether there is a mitzva to have a seuda (meal) in honor of a brit mila. The other issue is whether invited guests are required to take part in such a seuda.

The Shulchan Aruch<sup>1</sup> states: “It is the practice to make a seuda on the day of the mila.” The Rama adds: “And it is the practice to have a minyan for the seuda of a mila, and it is called a seudat mitzva.” One source in support of this practice of making a seuda is Pirkei D’Rabi Eliezer,<sup>2</sup> which derives it from the brit that Avraham performed for Yitzchak. The Torah writes that Avraham made a “big party” on the day that “HIGAMEL ET YITZCHAK”.<sup>3</sup> Although the simple translation of HIGAMEL is that he was weaned, Pirkei

D’Rabi Eliezer apparently interprets that the reference is to the day of the brit mila. The Orchot Chayim<sup>4</sup> understands that this derivation is based on interpreting the word HIGAMEL as HEI-GIMEL MAL. The numerical values of the first two letters (HEI & GIMEL) are 5 and 3, which together add up to 8, and MAL means “he circumcised”. Thus, the day that HIGAMEL is understood to mean the eighth day, on which Yitzchak was circumcised; his brit mila was the event that prompted the party.

Another source is the gemara in Ketuvot,<sup>5</sup> which seems to assume that there is a special meal at a brit mila, comparable to that of sheva b’rachot, as implied by the fact that it needs to point out the difference between the bentching at the two. Specifically, the gemara states that before Birkat HaMazon of sheva b’rachot, one says SHEHASIMCHA BIM-ONO (that the joy is in His abode), whereas this is not recited before Birkat HaMazon at a brit mila, due to the pain of the child.

One of the ramifications of the fact that the meal for a brit mila is considered a seudat mitzva is that it allows invitees to this meal to eat meat and drink wine even during the Nine Days.<sup>6</sup> However, the Rama cautions that one should not artificially include people in this meal

<sup>1</sup> Yoreh Deah 265:12.

<sup>2</sup> 29.

<sup>3</sup> Bereishit 21:8.

<sup>4</sup> Mila 9.

<sup>5</sup> 8a.

<sup>6</sup> Rama, Orach Chayim 551:10.

who are not naturally part of the festivities.

There is a well-known, but apparently somewhat misapplied, concept relating to the invitees to a brit mila. The gemara<sup>7</sup> lists people with the dubious distinction of being *menudim lashamayim* (roughly, shunned in Heaven) as a result of what they do (or refrain from doing) improperly. One such person is he who “does not recline (i.e., set himself to eat) with a group of a mitzva.” Tosafot<sup>8</sup> says that this refers to one who does not eat in the seuda of a brit mila. Tosafot adds that participation in such a seuda saves one from being sent to *gehinom* (purgatory). Based on this idea, the practice developed of not explicitly inviting people to a brit mila,<sup>9</sup> so that people will not be in the situation in which they should be attending and yet refrain from doing so. Rav Moshe Feinstein<sup>10</sup> explains that the issue is not the obligation to take part in the mitzva itself; after all, we do not find regarding the many other mitzvot that one can attend that one who chooses not to attend them is *menudeh lashamayim*. Rather, what is inappropriate is the lack of honor that one shows toward a great mitzva when he is invited to its celebration but nevertheless does not attend. It is related in the name of Rav Feinstein that one discharges the minimum obligation by eating anything

at the meal or smaller reception. One need not eat bread (which the core participants are supposed to do<sup>11</sup>), nor stay for the meal itself.

It is of note that many people are aware of the minhag not to invite regarding a brit, but they apparently do not follow it correctly. Many people simply inform about rather than invite to the brit mila, but once people come to the mila itself, they invite all assembled to the meal, even though they know that many will not be staying. As we have seen, the sources regarding turning down an invitation refer to not attending the meal, rather than to not attending the performance of the mila. Moreover, some people who merely “inform” others about the meal make it very clear that they want, and even expect, those others to come. Although they avoid using the word “inviting”, it would appear that the spirit of the invitation (i.e., clearly transmitting the expectation that they attend) is the actual issue; there is nothing intrinsic about the word “invite”.



<sup>7</sup>. *Pesachim* 113b.

<sup>8</sup>. *Pesachim* 114a.

<sup>9</sup>. *Pitchei Teshuva*, *Yoreh Deah* 265:18.

<sup>10</sup>. *Igrot Moshe*, *Orach Chayim* II:95.

<sup>11</sup>. See *Sefer HaBrit* 165:161.