

Parshas Lech Lecha

"זאת בריתי אשר תשמרו ביני וביניכם ובין זרעך אחריו המול לכם כל זכר, ונמלתם את בשר ערלתכם והיה לאות ברית ביני וביניכם" (בראשית י"ז, י"א)

Mazel Tov! The Freidman's had a baby boy. The preparations for the bris start right away. One day Mrs. Freidman asks her husband why the baby has to go through so much pain by the bris, why can't they use anesthesia to make it less painful. There are two types of anesthesia, local anesthesia and general anesthesia. Is it permitted to use anesthesia for a bris milah?

הרדמה מקומית - local anesthesia

This question is discussed in the responsa of the Tzitz Eliezer (volume 20 siman 73) "Your question regarding that which is discussed in the medical books of an ointment of anesthesia which was tested and proven to be effective on many babies that had a surgery on the place of the milah that they had less pain and cried less than those who did not use any anesthesia. Is it permitted to use this before the bris to cause less pain to the baby, and even maybe one is obligated to do so since this in no way affects the actual circumcision"?

There are three approaches to this question 1) Milah has to be painful 2) It is prohibited to use new methods which have never been used before 3) The anesthesia may be harmful.

Milah has to be with pain

Hagaon Rav Meir Arik in his sefer Imrei Yosher says that it should not be used even for an adult convert. "Chazal already knew about anesthesia as the gemara in Baba Kama says it is possible to cut off ones arm without any pain, and since this practice was never done for a bris milah it must be that chazal were of the opinion that the milah has to be through pain.

The Tzitz Eliezer as well as Rav Moshe Shternbuch Shlit"a in his sefer Teshuvos V'hanhagos (volume 5 yoreh deah Siman 289) speak about how important and special the cries of the baby are during the actual milah "The gates of mercy are opened and it is a special time for the teffilos of the tzibbur.

It is prohibited to use new methods which have never been used before

The Chasam Sofer in many places writes החדש אסור מן התורה בכל מקום –

any new practices and customs that did not exist in previous generations, from a torah perspective are assur to do. Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt"l as well says that one should not make any changes to a mitzvah even if there may be nothing.

The anesthesia may be harmful

Reb Moshe Feinstein zt"l (Igros Moshe yoreh deah 4 siman 40) writes the reason we don't use anesthesia is because it is not healthy for a baby or an adult. However since the adults request it we allow them to have it. For a baby however we do whatever is healthier for them. This is the sole reason why anesthesia is not used. The Eretz Tzvi and Rav Ovadia Yosef zt"l are also of the opinion that anesthesia may be used for an adult. The Shevet Halevy adds that it may also be used for a child that was not given his bris on the eighth day. The sefer **זאת בריתי** brings from frum doctors that it should only be used if the baby is at least six months. It may also be used when cutting to fix the milah (שבט הלוי, ציץ שבת הלוי, איליעזר).

הרדמה כללית – general anesthesia

According to the poskim that prohibit local anesthesia because it needs to be done with pain, then for sure sleeping anesthesia is not allowed. The fact

that anesthesia may harm the child applies to general anesthesia as well. The sefer **כורת הברית** writes Mohalim are careful not to give a bris milah when the baby is sleeping so he should not get epilepsy chas v'shalom.

The Sridie Aish (volume 2 siman 62) is of the opinion that there is a difference between an adult and a child. An adult himself is obligated in the mitzvah of milah. Since according to many rishonim the halacha is "מצות צריכות" a person must have the proper intention when doing a mitzvah, it is impossible to have this kavannah when you are asleep.

As for a קטן even though he himself is not obligated in milah never the less it is also preferable for him as well not to use it since he is like a rock when he is sleeping and you don't make a treaty with a rock. However says the Sridie Aish that since this is only his own reasoning, if one wants to be lenient he has on whom to rely. Rav Ovadia Yosef rules that it may even be used for a gadol.¹

¹ Sources: ספר מילה שלמה, שו"ת ציץ איליעזר ח"כ סימן ע"ג, ספר פסקי תשובות הלכות מילה סימן רס"ד סעיף ט"ז, שו"ת אגרות משה יורה דעה ח"ד סימן מ' אות ב