

FROM AGES EIGHT TO EIGHTY

EIGHTY IS THE OLDEST AGE, AT LEAST THUS FAR, ASSOCIATED WITH THE ORGANIZATION BRIS YOSEF YITZCHOK. * IT IS ONE OF THE FEW ORGANIZATIONS THE REBBE ALLOWED TO BE NAMED FOR HIS FATHER-IN-LAW, THE REBBE RAYATZ. * BEIS MOSHIACH SPEAKS WITH DIRECTOR YARON AMIT ABOUT THE 16,000 BRISSIN THE ORGANIZATION HAS MADE IN THE LAST 12 YEARS. * PART 1 OF 2

Rabbi Chaim Rubín of Bris Yosef Yitzchok went to Alma Atta in Kazakhstan. The local *shliach*, Rabbi Yeshaya Cohen, gave a dynamic lecture about the importance of the *mitzva* of *bris mila*, and when he finished, an older man, Mr. L., approached him and asked who the *mohel* was and how reliable he was. “Who needs a *bris*? Your grandchild?” asked Rabbi Cohen. Mr. L. answered, “I do. You just told us that the Torah says that whoever is uncircumcised is ‘*v’nichrisa ha’nefesh m’Yisrael*’ (his soul is cut off from Israel). I want to be part of the Jewish people.”

On Sunday morning Mr. L. was lying on the operating table, waiting “to become part of the Jewish people.” Although they had questioned him the night before about any medical problems he might have and Mr. L. did claim to be in good health, the *mohel*, Rabbi Rubín, was nervous. At the age of 68 it was likely that this candidate for the procedure *did* have some medical condition. They had reiterated that to avoid complications he had to disclose all medical conditions, but Mr. L. insisted that he was perfectly fine.

Now, before the *bris*, since Mr. L.

noticed that the *mohel* was nervous, he asked the *mohel* to come over to the operating table. Rabbi Rubín thought Mr. L. wanted to confide in him about some medical issue, but Mr. L. had something else in mind. He gripped the *mohel*, lifted him up and held him in the air. “Now you see how healthy I am!” Mr. L. declared. *Baruch Hashem*, the *bris* proceeded with no untoward effects.

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Until 5749 (1989), Bris Yosef Yitzchok director R’ Yaron Amit [see *Beis Moshich* issue #130, article entitled “Bris Yosef Yitzchok,” for more background on Yaron Amit] was involved in various *tz’daka* and *chesed* activities in Eretz Yisroel, which is why he was asked to raise money for seven new immigrants from the Soviet Union who wanted a *bris*. In those days, Yaron would

regularly visit Keveer Yosef every Thursday night, and he decided to use this opportunity to raise the money.

When he told other visitors there that there were new immigrants who couldn’t have a *bris* because of lack of funds, hearts and pockets opened up and he obtained the required amount (this is not a small sum - a *bris* for an adult costs 1,700 shekel)! Within a few days he heard that the seven men had their *brissin*.

A week went by and Yaron was approached again. Again it was about new immigrants needing *brissin*. Encouraged by his initial success, Yaron happily agreed to raise the money. Using the same approach - the same place and the same time - he raised the money. When more and more requests came in, Yaron began to realize that there was a need to organize *brissin* in a serious way.

At first his work involved making connections with individual *mohalim* and doctors who agreed to participate in this great *mitzva*. He also found a well-known doctor who agreed to have the *brissin* done in his clinic. When the number of immigrants increased, Yaron



The Bris Yosef Yitzchok logo

is Jewish, which is done through the rabbinat. Free transportation is provided from the candidate's home to one of the clinics where *brissin* are done. Namely, to Kupat Cholim in the Siach Jarach neighborhood in Yerushalayim, where two operating rooms are set aside for this purpose, and at Misgav LaDach hospital, where there are four rooms. At each clinic, the staff in charge of *brissin* prepares the candidates and explains what will happen from both a medical and spiritual standpoint. *Brissin* are performed by either Torah-observant doctors trained as *mohalim*, or by *mohalim* for babies who are trained to perform *brissin* on adults. Once the *bris* is done, Jewish names are bestowed and *mitzvas t'fillin* is done, often for the very first time. Even after the newly-circumcised return home, Bris Yosef Yitzchok keeps in touch. Doctors and *mohalim* across the country affiliated with Bris Yosef Yitzchok care for the newly circumcised when necessary during the days following the *bris*.

Even before the fall of Communism and the dismantling of the Soviet Union, when the government still forbade *brissin*, the *mohel* R' Menachem Mendel Friedson was sent to the Soviet Union to make *brissin* secretly. Over a number of years he performed thousands of *brissin* on Jews who were prevented from having a *bris* when they were born. Today, the demand for *brissin* throughout the C.I.S. is enormous, and Bris Yosef Yitzchok sets up clinics with special operating rooms for *brissin*. With the help of philanthropists, *shluchim*, and other organizations, there are more than ten such clinics today in the C.I.S., Eretz Yisroel, and other countries.

In the C.I.S. there are three large centers in cities where there are always *mohalim*. In Moscow, Rabbi

decided to leave all his previous involvements and dedicate his life to this *mitzva*. Thus Bris Yosef Yitzchok was born. The organization got off the ground, and today it has thirty *mohalim* who travel the world in order to circumcise babies and adults.

Brissin in Eretz Yisroel are arranged and funded by the chief rabbinat and the government office for religious matters. Yet somebody has to raise public awareness in those who still do not have a *bris*, and this role is admirably fulfilled by Bris Yosef Yitzchok.

The organization does massive advertising through paid ads in eleven Russian language newspapers, the radio, and stickers, which have brief explanations about *bris mila* and how to reach Bris Yosef Yitzchok. The stickers and flyers are distributed mainly by *Anash* who go on *mitzvaim*, primarily in those neighborhoods with a high concentration of new immigrants.

When the organization is first contacted by a prospective candidate for a *bris*, the first step is checking out whether the candidate

Shaya Shpit, the chief *mohel* of the C.I.S., will travel wherever he is needed. The clinic in Moscow has an attractive, well-equipped operating room, located in the new Chabad Center in the Marina Roscha Synagogue. The second clinic is in Charkov, Ukraine, in the urology hospital rated best in the Ukraine. The third location is Azerbaijan, where the *mohel* is R' Elika Gelfand, a local resident who became a *baal t'shuva* and learned *mila* and *sh'chita* in Eretz Yisroel. Jews also go to this clinic from the surrounding republics such as Georgia and the entire Caucasus region.

In order to get a general picture of the organization's work, we spoke to the director, Yaron Amit, and three *mohalim* who work for Bris Yosef Yitzchok: Ran Nachmani, who circumcises babies in Eretz Yisroel; Elika Gelfand, the *mohel* of Baku, the capitol of Azerbaijan; and the "flying *mohel*," Rabbi Chaim Rubin, who lives in Eretz Yisroel but travels abroad often, mostly to the C.I.S., in order to do *brissin*.

Connected with the *mitzva* of *mila* is the giving of a Jewish name. In the beginning, the organization itself had no name...

Yaron Amit: When the *mosad* had gotten off the ground and many people began calling and were helped by its services, we needed to name it. We knew we would use "Yosef" because the organization began at Keiver Yosef, where we raised the first money. Also, in Kabbala and Chassidus, Yosef is associated with *yesod*, which is connected with the *bris*. As a Chabad Chassid, though, I wanted a Lubavitcher name, one associated with the Rebbeim. It was easy picking the name "Yosef Yitzchok" for three *tzaddikim*: Yosef HaTzaddik, Yitzchok Avinu - the first Jew to have a *bris* at eight days

- and the Rebbe Rayatz, whose work on behalf of Russian Jewry is well known. After choosing the name we submitted it to the Rebbe for approval and received his *bracha*.

Were there any special instructions from the Rebbe regarding the organization?

We mainly received *brachos*, whether directly when I went for "dollars," or in answers I got through the secretaries, which gave us much encouragement and were an important impetus for our work. We also got general answers which we tried to work by. For example, in Teives 5751 we got the following

Most of the mohalim are volunteers. They take a brief vacation from their work and travel for a week or two to do brissin wherever necessary.

answer in response to a report we submitted which said we had performed 1,000 *brissin*: "Thank you, and may it be an ongoing and developing project. The time is auspicious. As in the empowerment of Chazal and their blessing - whoever adds is added to - and especially Hashem's *bracha*, whose addition is more plentiful than... The time is auspicious - the end of Kislev - the third month, like the third summer month, which has the special days of 9, 10, 19 and Chanuka and their continuation..."

Amit himself learned *mila* and does *brissin* around the world. He dedicates many hours a day to

circumcising adults in Yerushalayim.

Some of the *mohalim* are not doctors, and the operating table is sometimes a simple table in a *shul*. Doesn't this compromise health standards?

The *mohalim* prepare through study for months. They learn *mila* not only from the *halachic* standpoint but also from a medical standpoint. As far as your question, even the table in the hospital is not sterile; it is simply covered with a sterile paper cover. The instruments, the bandages, the syringes, and the gloves are all sterilized. We are just as particular - everything is sterile and clean. When the *mohalim* travel to places without a clinic and operating rooms, we equip them with individual sterile material for each person being circumcised. At the end of each *bris*, all instruments are placed in a sterilizer.

If the person being circumcised has medical problems, we get instructions from his doctor. In certain instances, the *bris* is done under the supervision of an expert doctor. In hemophilia cases, the person is hospitalized for a few days and is kept under observation.

Since some people are afraid to undergo a *bris*, we must point out that the pain is less than that endured with dental work. In other types of operations there may be problems, such as fainting due to the anesthesia. We use a local anesthetic with adults, and in those cases where we use general anesthesia with children, it is all done under the supervision of an anesthesiologist.

Where do you do *brissin*?

All over. We've been to Vladivostok on the Sea of Japan, and

4 MONTHS - 1000 BRISSIN - 30 LOCATIONS

From Tammuz 5760 until Tishrei 5761, the *mohalim* of Bris Yosef Yitzchok circumcised over 1,000 Jews in 30 locations around the world. The *mohalim* worked from sunrise until sunset in order to circumcise as many people as possible. Their main work was concentrated in the summer camps in the C.I.S. run by Chabad and other organizations. The *hanhalos* and counselors of the camps joined in the campaign and they all enjoyed tremendous success.

In the camp in Dnepropetrovsk, for example, 38 children were circumcised in two days; in Charkov, 34 in two days; in Moscow, 28. With Hashem's help, the *mohalim* rose to the occasion.

If they were not successful, it wasn't because of the qualifications of the *mohalim*, but because of other reasons. R' Chaim Rubin and R' Yishai Dahan flew from Moscow to Vladivostok, a city on the Japanese Sea east of Siberia, near the border between China and Korea. This is a nine-hour flight, but unfortunately the *mohalim* did not circumcise anyone. The reason? Anti-Semitic graffiti had been scrawled on the walls of the Jewish center, and the 11 Jews who were going to be circumcised were afraid and did not show up.

From Vladivostok they went by train to Birobijan. The trip took 22 hours. Long train trips are never pleasant, but this trip was particularly difficult because they had to be awake the entire time in order to ensure that their expensive equipment was not stolen. But the trip was worth it because they worked non-stop in Birobijan until they finished circumcising dozens of Jews.

The campaign ended in the city of Sadigora in the Ukraine. Gimmel Cheshvan is the *yahrtzeit* of the Ruzhiner Rebbe, and a group of Chassidim came with the Sadigora Rebbe to dedicate the new *ohel* which had been built on the gravesite. Two Jewish children were going to have a *briss* that day, and the Sadigora Rebbe served as the *sandek* at both *brissin*, performed in the medical center near the Ruzhiner's gravesite.

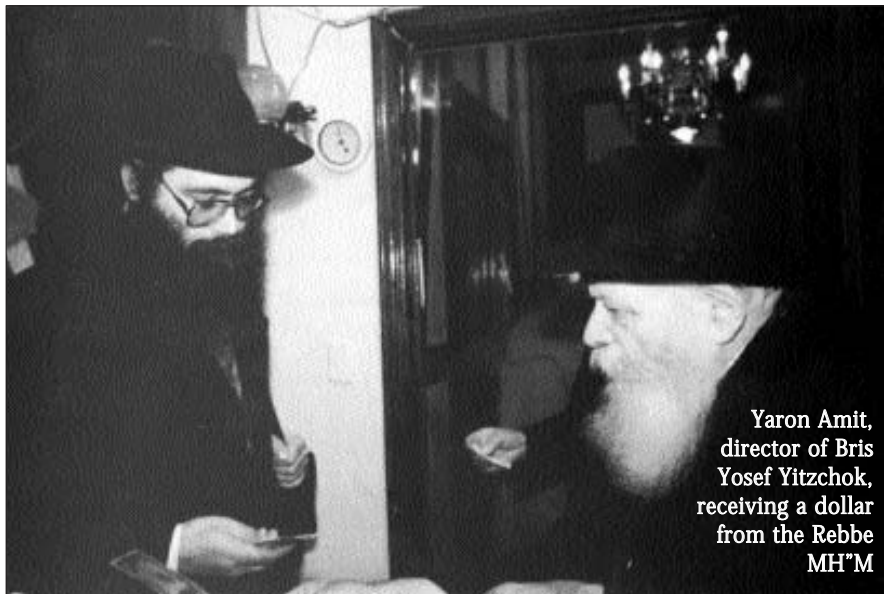
Are those having *brissin* all from the former Soviet Union?

Definitely not. Outside Eretz Yisroel, many babies are circumcised before the eighth day. Some were circumcised by gentile doctors because their families considered the babies gentiles. We had a story here with a foreign worker from China who asked for a *briss* connected to his conversion. When we asked him whether there were any Jews in his family, he said his grandmother was Jewish. She had fled Russia for China and married a Chinese man. She had a daughter, the mother of the would-be convert, who also married a Chinese. After carefully examining the family's documents, the story was verified and the man didn't need conversion since he was actually Jewish, though he did still need a *briss*.

Many of those who have had a *briss* feel the need to begin getting involved in *Yiddishkeit*. Many of those who had a *briss* through the organization are observant Jews today. Many of the *sandakim* have been blessed in *parnasa* and children. The Rishon L'Tziyon, Mordechai Eliyahu, advises childless

distant points in the U.S. We haven't missed a continent. We've been to Germany, France, Thailand, etc.

It should be pointed out that most of the *mohalim* are volunteers. They take a brief vacation from their work and travel for a week or two to do *brissin* wherever necessary. Here in Eretz Yisroel too, when we provide free transportation both ways for those having the *briss*, most of it is done by volunteers who drive the organization's ambulances and cars. Some people volunteer with their own vehicles. For those coming from Eilat, we buy plane tickets.



Yaron Amit,
director of Bris
Yosef Yitzchok,
receiving a dollar
from the Rebbe
MH" M

couples who come to him for a *bracha* to serve as *sandakim* for Bris Yosef Yitzchok. Many of them have afterwards had children. There was a woman who hadn't had children for thirty years but had twins after her father was *sandek* on her behalf.

How do you get the funding for your organization?

It's all from Heaven. There are wealthy people who help. It's not always easy and the expenses are great - tickets, clinics, buying supplies... For example, a clamp costs \$6,000. An operating table costs \$11,000. Then there are the bandages, the syringes, etc. We spend over \$100,000 a year. So we ask anybody who can to be a partner in this *mitzva*. You can dedicate a clinic in memory of a loved one, for example, a clinic in which hundreds and thousands of Jews will enter the *bris* of Avrohom Avinu.

What are some of the more unusual places you've traveled to to perform *brissin*?

We've made *brissin* in the most forsaken places - in the Siberian plains, cities of Georgia, Uzbekistan, Hungary, etc., but a really interesting place is right here in the Eilon prison medical center. After much effort in cooperation with prison rabbis, we arranged an agreement with the prison authority that inmates from any prison interested in having a *bris* would be transferred from their prison to the medical center at the Eilon prison.

We've made dozens of *brissin* for inmates there. The medical center looks typical, aside from the fact that the windows are barred ... After a *bris* one inmate said that it paid to come to jail just in order to become a proper Jew!

There's a story about an older



Young men who had *brissin* in Birobijan in -30° weather



A *bris mila seuda* in Kuba in Azarbaijan. The *mohel*, Erika Gelfand, is at the head of the table

Jew who, on Shabbos at the end of the *davening* went over to the rabbi and with tears in his eyes asked for a *bris* immediately. "In the *davening* I just said, 'In the [Shabbos] rest, uncircumcised shall not dwell' - so how can I remain an *arel*?" he cried.

I personally experienced a very special incident of *hashgacha pratis* in New York. I went on a bus and then realized I was heading in the wrong direction. I took out a map

and tried to find the way back and noticed that a fellow passenger was looking with interest in my direction. I suspected he was Jewish and began talking to him. It turned out I was right. I learned that he did not have a *bris*, so I referred him to Bris Avrohom in New Jersey. Within a few days he had a *bris*. Nu, in the end it turned out I was on the right bus after all!

(To be continued.)