

# 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 2 OF 2

## What age people do you circumcise?

From eight days till... the oldest thus far was an eighty-year-old man. The latter's story was very interesting. He was born in Austria, where he was mistakenly diagnosed as a hemophiliac. Today we do *brissin* on hemophiliacs too, but eighty years ago it wasn't done. The blood not coagulating after the *bris* is dangerous, and so he wasn't circumcised.

He emigrated to Eretz Yisroel many years ago and lived on a *kibbutz*. At some point he realized he wasn't a hemophiliac at all. He wanted to do a *bris*, but the *kibbutz* office pushed him off. Lately his caretaker became a *baalas t'shuva* and she contacted us. This man suffers from a number of serious medical conditions and so he was hospitalized in order to have the *bris* done.

*Baruch Hashem*, the *bris* took place without any problems. When we wanted to put *t'fillin* on him afterwards, he said tearfully, "At my *bar mitzva* they put *t'fillin* on me, and from that day until now, 67 years, I haven't put on *t'fillin*. Thank you for doing the *bris* and for putting *t'fillin* on me now."

Another story took place in Thailand. The *mohel* was Rabbi Yechezkel Lifshitz (today a *shliach* in Nepal). He was walking down the street when an Israeli approached him and said, "You look like a Rabbi. You must help me find a *mohel* to circumcise my baby boy." Rabbi Lifshitz, of course, performed the *bris*, perhaps the first one in that country.

## How successful are you at advertising?

We have fantastic success in advertising. I'll tell you a special story which I heard directly from the 16-year-old boy, an immigrant from the former C.I.S., while he lay in the recovery room after his *bris*.

The boy lived in Eretz Yisroel for

quite a while and wanted a *bris*, but didn't know where to have it done. He went to the *Kosel* for he heard that many prayers are answered there. He didn't know how to open a *siddur* or *T'hillim*, so he said a prayer that came from his heart. At the end he said, "Creator of the world, if you want me to have a *bris*, please give me a sign and show me who to turn to."

He turned to walk away from the *Kosel* and two *T'mimim* went over to him and gave him a brochure in Russian which discusses the *mitzva* of *bris mila* and how to contact us. Could there be a greater sign?

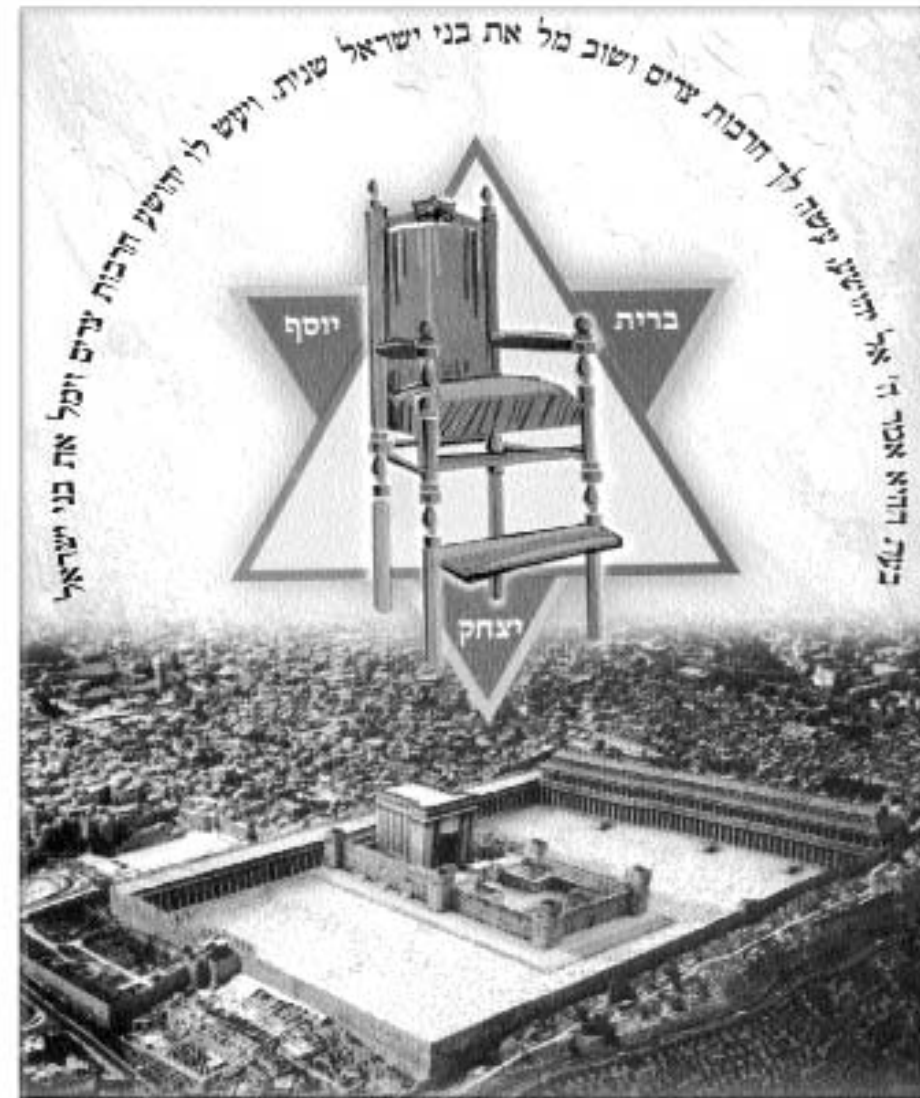
\* \* \*

It wasn't easy convincing the *mohel* Elika Gelfand to tell us about

### WE'LL TRAVEL ANYWHERE TO PERFORM A BRIS – FREE OF CHARGE

Throughout the interview, Yaron Amit emphasized that his organization didn't need glory. "Our *mohalim* are not interested in *kavod*. The only reason we want publicity is so that every *shliach* and Chabad *chassid* around the world will know that whoever needs a *mohel* can turn to us. There are many Jews around the world who still don't have a *bris*, or were not circumcised according to *halacha*. We want to do something about this!

The organization's phone numbers are: 02-571-1231 ; cellular phone: 050-209901. Their address is: Rechov Rav Lopian 814, Ramat Shlomo, Yerushalayim.



The Bris Yosef Yitzchok logo

his work; he doesn't like publicity. It was only the thought that perhaps his story would convince someone to fulfill the *mitzva* that finally persuaded him to tell us a little about himself.

"I was born in Azerbaijan, one of the republics of the C.I.S. which borders Iran, Armenia, and Georgia. I worked as a sailor, and one time there was a storm in which the ship was saved in a miraculous manner. This aroused in me the need to thank G-d and to begin keeping *mitzvos*. After a while, *Bris Yosef Yitzchok* heard about a religious man in

Azerbaijan, and they taught me *mila* and *sh'chita*. Since then, I have served as the *mohel* of Azerbaijan and Georgia. I live with my family in Baku, the capitol, and *baruch Hashem*, I have circumcised hundreds of Jews."

## Tell us of a special encounter you had.

All the Jews in the Caucasus were circumcised properly on the eighth day because the Communists didn't rule as strongly here. One day a Jew met me on the street and said to me with great emotion, "I

am 42 years old and still not circumcised. Please circumcise me as soon as possible." I asked him how it happened that he wasn't circumcised, and he told me the following with tears in his eyes:

"When I was born, my father was in prison. They did not circumcise me as they were waited for his release. By the time he was released, I was already four years old. My father arranged the *bris* and invited all the relatives, friends, and the *mohel*, of course.

The night before the *bris* I cried because my friends told me it would be very painful. The next morning, when the guests began arriving, I ran away and hid. Everybody arrived but I was missing.

They began searching for me in the yard and the street. I heard them call my name, but I was too afraid to come out of my hiding place. It was only a few hours later, when everybody had left, that I came out and returned home. My father told me that he didn't want to disappoint the guests, so he asked a family who had had a baby five days before to have their baby circumcised. The *mohel* agreed, and the five-day-old baby was circumcised.

Years went by, and every so often the idea of getting a *mohel* to circumcise me came up, but nothing ever happened.

You cannot imagine the joy of that man after I circumcised him. After years of having his conscience bother him, he joined the covenant of Avrohom Avinu.

\* \* \*

*Bris Yosef Yitzchok* has made thousands of *brissin* in the former Soviet Union. It is not always





A group of newly circumcised in Tashkent. In the second row, (from right to left): the *mohel*, Rabbi Chaim Rubin, Rabbi Dovid Abba Gurevitz, and *shliach* R' Y.Y. Levin



A bris in prison. On the right, the *sandek*, Rabbi Toledano, head prison chaplain

possible to rent a clinic at a local hospital, so the *brissin* are often done in private homes or *shuls*. In these cases, all the sterile equipment and instruments (which weigh a lot and whose value is tremendous) have to be flown over so that the *mohel* has it easier and the *brissin* are done in the best *halachic* and medical manner.

Despite the great cost involved in sending hundreds of pounds of equipment, the *mohalim* do not forget those being circumcised. For example, they bring electronic games for the kids to play with before the *bris* to distract them from their fears. They also bring huge packages of *tashmishei k'dusha* and kosher food on each trip for the various organizations and the Jews living there.

One of the *mohalim*, Rabbi Chaim Rubin, who flies frequently between Tel Aviv and the C.I.S. is dubbed the Flying Mohel. He has circumcised thousands of Jews all over the C.I.S., Germany, Hungary, Denmark, and Kazakhstan. He even went to Chavrovsk in eastern Siberia.

Rabbi Rubin describes some of

his experiences on his trips:

My last trip was to eastern Siberia, and next week *b'ezrat Hashem*, I will be flying to Uzbekistan. It says in Kabbala that the soul has three parts. A person is born with one part; he receives the second part at his *bris*; and the third part at his *bar mitzva*. It's clear that after the *bris* there is a special *hisorerus* to begin observing Torah and *mitzvos*, but I also merited to see with my own eyes how at the *bris* itself, a Jew receives part of his *neschama*. He simply becomes more

Jewish than before. Before the *bris* they ask him what Jewish name he wants, and some say they prefer their non-Jewish name. "It suits me, and I have no reason to change it." But right after the *bris*, while they are still on the operating table, I see many who change their minds and pick a Jewish name.

**Which is the most interesting place you made a bris?**

Birobijan, of course. It is the Jewish autonomous state which Stalin founded, wanting to have all the Jews in one area. The first time I

**THE SANDAK WHO BECAME THE MOHEL**

The *mohel* R' Ran Nachmani related how he came to be a *mohel* for *Bris Yosef Yitzchok*:

"I am a Breslover *chassid* today after having become a *baal t'shuva* as a *bachur*. I had been married a few years without having children, and even the best doctors were unable to help us. I *davened* regularly at Kever Yosef in Sh'chem, where I met Yaron Amit. He suggested that I be a *sandek* at a *bris*, which is a *segula* for children. I was thrilled when, in the *z'chus* of *sandeikus*, we had a son! My connection with *Bris Yosef Yitzchok* grew stronger.

"Yaron suggested I become his assistant"] at *brissin*. With time, I learned *mila* and I devoted time to studying the *halachos* in depth. Today I mostly circumcise babies, and I'm a partner of *Bris Yosef Yitzchok* here in Eretz Yisroel."

**MIRACLE MAN**

R' Yaron Amit himself was born in Chaifa, and had no religious background. He was very involved in the Shalom Achshav movement. He was one of the organizers of the large demonstration against the Begin government, which took place in Kikar Malchei Yisroel during the Peace in Galilee war, after the Arabs in Lebanon killed each other and those on the Israeli Left used the opportunity to their advantage.

Yaron experienced miracle upon miracle which led him to wonder about Hashem and how one approaches Him. This began when he was a reservist in Peace in Galilee and was saved from a mine, and continued with a shooting incident in which he was miraculously saved. But the biggest miracle of all took place when he was standing beside a tractor which suddenly flipped over: "The tractor toppled over on me, but I fell into some bushes which somehow saved my life. I remained there for a while, not believing I was alive and well. After this open miracle I began looking into Judaism and *mitzvos*. I became connected to Chabad after I married. I met R' Shimon Friedman and learned *chassidus* with him. I began working as a *melamed* in the Chabad Talmud Torah in Gilo. Later on I became acquainted with Rabbi Yitzchok Ginsberg, the *rosh yeshiva* of Od Yosef Chai in Sh'chem, with whom I continued learning *chassidus*."

Today, Yaron Amit runs a beautiful *chassidic* home in the Ramat Shlomo neighborhood of Yerushalayim, as well as *Bris Yosef Yitzchok*.

went there, was five years ago. A *yeshiva bachur* in Moscow whom I circumcised asked me to go with him to his hometown for his father wanted a *bris*. We called the father and he arranged a large group of people who wanted a *bris*. They told us that not one Jew had been circumcised in sixty years in all of Birobijan!

Along with the *mohel* Yishai Dahan, we went on the long trip. The flight from Moscow to Chavrovsk is nine hours, and from Chavrovsk to Birobijan it's a four-hour train ride. I was dumbstruck when I saw the sign at the train station written in large Yiddish letters.

Birobijan is a city of about 150,000 residents, among them 10,000 Jews. The entire area is considered a Jewish autonomy. What makes the city "Jewish" is that all the government officials are Jews, and many of the street signs are written in Yiddish. Many of the Jews there speak Yiddish fluently,

which made it easier for me to communicate with them.

I worked for four days with my friend Yishai, from early morning until sunset, circumcising dozens of Jews. Each day brought more Jews who wanted a *bris*. The most interesting incident occurred when we traveled with a Jew who helped

us out, and he noticed a fourteen-year-old Jewish boy on a street corner.

We stopped and our helper spoke with him about *bris mila*. The next day, with his parents' consent, he was circumcised. That wasn't the end of the boy's connection with us. He began showing an interest and curiosity about the Jewish people and its uniqueness, until he convinced his parents and they agreed to let him go to *yeshiva* in Moscow.

In *yeshiva* it turned out that he's a gifted student, and he was sent to a religious *yeshiva* in the United States. A few months ago he came to give a *shiur* to his friends in the *yeshiva* in Moscow!

Rabbi Rubin had another moving story to relate:

This took place a few years ago in Moscow before Erev Yom Kippur. I was sitting in *shul* with Rabbi Yitzchok Silber writing a list of the *brissin* I had made at the time. A few hours later I was supposed to return to Eretz Yisroel to be with my family for Yom Kippur. It was twenty minutes before sunset when a young boy entered the *shul*. As soon as he said he was Jewish, Rabbi Silber



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

asked him if he had a *bris*.

When the boy said no, he convinced him to have himself circumcised. When the boy recovered from the *bris*, he explained what had brought him to the *shul* in Moscow.

“I live in Svadlovsk near Siberia. I yearned to know what pure Judaism is about. The Jews of my city tried to explain it to me, but whatever they said didn’t satisfy me. I heard that in Moscow there were many centers of Jews, so I found myself packing up a few items of clothing and some food, and going to the airport.

“At the airport they told me there was a strike and that there wouldn’t be flights for at least ten hours. Like many others who were stuck, I sat down on a bench in the terminal and waited. Only a half an hour went by when suddenly a man came over to me and a few others and said he was a pilot of a mail plane which would be leaving shortly for Moscow. Whoever wanted to board for free was welcome... So that’s how I hitched a ride to Moscow, among the mail sacks!



Sandak R' Avrohom Genin, who - with *mesirus nefesh* - circumcised thousands under Communism

“At the airport in Moscow I met a Jew who gave me the address of this *shul* where I found you.”

Rabbi Rubin concludes: It’s a case of incredible *hashgacha pratit*! If

his original flight hadn’t been delayed he would have boarded the regular flight, and by the time he arrived I wouldn’t have been in Moscow!

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