

Rav Yitzchak Grossman

Is experiencing pain a requirement for fulfilling the mitzvah of *bris mila*? Many *poskim* have addressed this question in the context of whether it is permitted to anesthetize the baby prior to the *mila* and have taken a variety of approaches.

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The *Imrei Yosher* rules that pain is required based on an opinion in the Midrash (*Bereshis Rabba*) that Avraham experienced pain during his *bris* and received a double reward for the mitzvah as a result. He therefore rules that any type of anesthetic would be forbidden.

Other *poskim* are also *machmir*:

- The *Tzitz Eliezer* quotes the importance of tradition: Such a process was never performed during a *bris* in previous generations.
- Rav Moshe Feinstein: due to the potential danger involved in undergoing anesthesia (though perhaps topical anesthetics may be permitted).
- The *Shevet HaLevi*: the person receiving the *bris* must be awake at the time due to *mitzvos tzerichos kavanah* or because appointing a *mohel* to be his *shaliach* to perform the *bris* only works if he is awake during the *bris*.

Other *poskim* including the Maharsham, Rav Yitzchak Elchanan, and Rav Ovadia Yosef disagree and argue that there is no need to experience pain during a *bris*, and the Midrash does not mandate experiencing pain. In addition, they explain that there is no concern of *shelichus* or *mitzvos tzerichos kavanah* when a person is functioning normally but is simply sleeping, and tradition alone is an insufficient concern to render it forbidden.

Some contemporary *poskim* take a middle ground:

- In a regular *bris mila* for a baby, it is preferable not to use anesthesia.
 - In a more complicated *bris*, such as an older adult or a case where it will cause an unusual amount of pain, it is permitted.
- This approach was taken by the *Shevet HaLevi* as well as Rav Eliashiv, as reported by Rabbi Dr. Abraham in *Nishmas Avraham*.

