

Rabbi Yitzchok Cohen

## Do We Recite the Berakhah of Shehecheyanu at a Berit Milah?

The question of whether or not to recite the blessing of *Shehecheyanu* at a *berit milah* is one that has been discussed extensively by *poskim* (halakhic decisors) over the years. The *Shulchan Arukh* (*Yoreh De'ah* 265:7) quotes Maimonides (*Hilkhot Milah* 3:3) in ruling that the father of the child recites the *berakhah* of *Shehecheyanu* even though it would appear from the Rambam that the father himself does not need to perform the act of giving his son a circumcision, but rather can appoint an agent, the *mohel*, to perform the *mitzvah* in his stead. Nevertheless, the father recites the *berakhah* of *Shehecheyanu*. The *Tur* cites the *Ba'al Ha-Itur*, on the other hand, that the father can only recite the *berakhah* of *Shehecheyanu* if he himself performs the act of circumcision on his son, but if he does not perform the act he does not recite the *berakhah*. The Rama writes that the *Ashkenaz* custom is not to recite *Shehecheyanu*, contrary to the practice of the Sephardic Jews.

The reason given for the *Ashkenaz* custom is elaborated upon by the *Hagahot Maimoniyot*, who explains that since the baby boy experiences severe pain during the *berit*, one should not say the *Shehecheyanu*. The Rashba disagrees, as he claims the Talmud only agrees that the baby's pain is a reason not to say the blessing of "*she-ha-simchah bi-m'ono*" in *Birkat Ha-Mazon* at the conclusion of the *berit milah* meal, which we do recite as part of *Sheva Berakhot*.

The *Sefer Ha-Rokei'ach* gives another reason why *Shehecheyanu* is not recited, namely, that since the child is not completely assured of complete health until he lives for at least thirty full days, therefore *Shehecheyanu* cannot be recited, in contradistinction to at a *Pidyon Ha-Ben*, when we do recite *Shehecheyanu*, since the child has already lived for thirty days. The Rashba disagrees with the opinion of the *Sefer Ha-Rokei'ach*, as he believes that assuming the baby is born around the completion of the ninth month, and he is confirmed to be a healthy baby, there should be no concern about the child's longevity.

There is another reason given by the *Hagahot Maimoniyot* as to why we do not recite the *Shehecheyanu* at a *berit*. According to this reason, we only recite the blessing of *Shehecheyanu* to reflect our individual joy upon performing a *mitzvah* that, for example, comes once a year, like *megillah* or the *shofar*. The joy of performing the *berit milah*, however, is that of both the father and the mother. In a shared *mitzvah*, one does not recite the *berakhah* of *Shehecheyanu* but rather, one recites the *berakhah* of *Ha-Tov Ve-Ha-Meitiv*. We see, according to this opinion, that *Shehecheyanu* is insufficient in expressing the joy one shares with one's wife, and therefore, is not said.