

Customs and Laws from the Parsha: Tazria

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And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. (Leviticus 12:3)

The Torah commands us to perform a brit milah (*lit.* covenant of circumcision) on Jewish boys on the eighth day after their birth. After the brit milah is performed, blessings are recited over a cup of wine and the baby receives its Hebrew name (see Chief Rabbi's green siddur page 802).

The Gemara (compiled around the year 500 CE) mentions making the blessing 'Asher kideish yedid mibeten...), Who made the beloved [Isaac] holy from the womb...' which concludes 'koreit habrit', 'Blessed it the Lord Who establishes the covenant.' However, it does not mention reciting these blessings over wine (Shabbat 137b). This practice seems to have started in the period of the Gaonim, shortly after the redaction of the Gemara while the blessing naming the baby also appears to also be a later addition from the period of the Rishonim approximately 1,000 years ago.

When a blessing is recited before eating or drinking, it is normally forbidden to make any sort of interruption (verbal or otherwise) before partaking of the food or drink. Since the person who makes the blessing over the wine ought to drink some, it seems wrong to recite these blessings and name the baby before doing so.

Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher (d. 1343) explains that for this reason, after the blessing is made over the wine some drops of wine are given to the baby (Tur Yoreh Deah 265). Some have the custom to drink after the initial blessing of 'koreit habrit' while others give the wine to someone else to drink after the blessing of 'Our God and God of our forefathers'.

Wine is used at many Jewish ceremonies as it symbolises a completed and perfected human life. It starts off as grape juice, an inferior product representing childhood but develops through fermentation symbolising the struggles and challenges of life. Only then can it become wine, the superior drink which only improves with time.

We hope that the life of this new baby will also grow, experience its own struggles and reach its greatest potential in the fullness of time.

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