

## *Kvater<sup>1</sup>, Kvaterin<sup>1</sup>, Shushvin<sup>2</sup>, and Shushvina<sup>2</sup>,*

The custom is to have a couple, a man and a woman, in which the woman, called a '*kvaterin*', brings the baby to the room of the *Brit Milah* (Torah procedure of a circumcision), the man, called a '*kvater*', takes the baby from the woman, and brings the baby to the "*Chair of Elijah*". This custom is of the ruling (-See Tosfas, d"h Nifsal, Menochos 2b), "*A Custom of Israel is Torah.*" The custom includes specifically that there should be a woman's involvement as '*kavterin*', in which the woman is helping in the mitzvah of the *Brit Milah*, which comes from a '*support*' from the verse in our *parsha* that the verse (-Leviticus 12:3), "*And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised,*" is written the portion of, and in continuation to its verse (-verse 2), "*A woman when she conceives.*" Even though the commandment of, "*And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised,*" is on the father, and *not* upon the mother, and nevertheless, the commandment is written within the laws of the birthing mother, with no mention of the father, hence, a '*support*' for the custom of the '*kvaterin*,' the woman participating in the mitzvah of *Brit Milah*.

In many communities there is a specific custom to not have a pregnant woman be the *kvaterin*. This detail of the custom too, has a base to it, and, "*Is Torah.*" (See ShU" T HaRaSHB"A (-Vol I Simon 9), that anything of tradition that our elders have brought from generation to generation, is not overruled by questions asked upon the tradition.) Some explain the reason for a pregnant woman not being a *kvaterin*, is so as to protect her from an *Ayin Horah* - *Evil Eye*, upon her pregnancy. However, this would mean that this custom concerning a *kvaterin* at a *Brit Milah* has no connection to the *Brit Milah* or what the *kvaterin* stands for.

There are two meanings to the statement, "*A Custom of Israel is Torah*":

- (i) The custom has the strength (weight) of *Torah*, and therefore (-ibid, Simon 37), "*A custom of our ancestors are in our hands,*" and (-Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim 4:1) "*Do not change the custom of your ancestors.*"
- (ii) The etymology of the word *Torah* is *hora'ah*, which means, *a lesson*. Meaning, the custom is a lesson of the specific signification of the mitzva of which this custom is. Thus, the custom of having a kvater/in is of the signification of the mitzva of Brit Milah.

**Introduction:** In order to understand the significance of the *kvater/in* by a *Brit Milah*, let us turn to an identical custom of having *shushvinin* (groomsman and bridesmaid) for the groom and the bride at their *chupah*, of which our Sages state that they are both, "*it is but one custom,*" thus, there would be a similar reason to the two customs. And by the custom of having *shushvinin*, here too, there is the custom of not using a pregnant woman<sup>3</sup>.

**Explanation:** Concerning, "*The Custom of Kaparos on Erev Yom Kippur,*" we find in the *Code of Jewish Law* (Orech Chayim simon 605; Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Oruch, 605:3), "*Others follow the custom of taking a kaparah for every person individually. According to this view, three chickens should be taken for a pregnant woman, two hens and one rooster.*" The *Magen Avrohom* (-Orech Chaim, ibid, d"h Beis Tarnigolim) in the name of the *SheLoH* quotes that the *Arizal* followed this custom, as well<sup>4</sup>.

From this ruling we can understand a reason of the customs not to use a pregnant woman for *kvaterin* or *shushvina*, being that by both we specifically use two, a male and a female, or two of each gender by a *chupah*, in which two men accompany the groom, and two women accompany the bride. Therefore, we don't use a pregnant woman, being that we have the *fetus* --as we see that the fetus is counted as a person, and needs its own *kaparah*-- and then, either (i) there will be three people, or (ii) there will not be an equal amount of each gender, which is of importance by the *kvaterim* and the *shushvinim*.

**Note:** The fetus being under the *chupah* is not like anyone else being under the *chupah*, of which we are not concerned, being that the *fetus* is part of the *kvaterin*, and hence, is under the *chupah* as a *kvater*, and this is problematic.

Note: we find this law concerning witnesses who are related one to another, and are therefore unfit witnesses. Only if at the time of the incidence they both intended to testify, are all the witnesses unfit. However, if one intended to be a witness, and the other not, then the fact that two relatives were there and saw the incidence, does not render all the witnesses invalid. --You may have seen this concept in action at a *chupah*, when you heard a rabbi who has the custom to announce, "*Mr. Yosef Doeitch and Mr. Plony Almony are the witnesses to the marriage, in exclusion to all others present.*"

**Deeper Yet:** Concerning *kaparos* the concept is not that the fetus is a separate being, for if so, how can we say that an unborn being needs an atonement?! Rather, the concept of the pregnant mother bringing three *kaparos* is that the mother is bringing them all for herself! The *fetus* changes the mother's 'identity', that she is now two beings! *In other words:* The atonement needs to atone for every organ of the body, and for the pregnant woman, there may now be a 'male' organ, if the fetus is that of a male,. Thus, the rooster is not for the *fetus*, but for the '*organ*' of the mother that is male. Hence, we now understand that the reason for not having a pregnant woman serving as a *kvaterin* or *sushvina* is not because there is a fetus that counts as a third person, but rather, because the pregnant woman herself is counted as more than one person.

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Why does the *kavterenship* need to be made up of a man and a woman? By the *shushveninship* it can be explained that (-Kesubos 12a), "*(In Judea, at first) they would appoint for them two shushvinin, one for him and one for her,*" thus you have a man for the groom and a woman for the bride. However, why so by a *Brit Milah*?

- 1. *Kvater/in*a (i) Yiddish: *KeFotter*, "*like a father*", being an emissary of the father to bring the baby to the circumcision. (ii) Hebrew: *Koter*, *the one who offers the Ketoret* "*incense*", being that Circumcision is compared to *Ketoret*.
- 2. *Shushvin/a* (i) Aramaic for *friend, beloved* (ii) *Companion*, one who accompanies. -Refers to the groomsman and bridesmaid.
- 3. The Rebbe emphasizes that this talk is not to render a ruling for the custom upon all communities, but to explain the custom of those who follow it.
- 4. Being that twins are not ordinary, hence, we don't consider if the woman is having twins **G-d he has**

**Explanation:** The reason for having *shushvinin* is because it is difficult for the groom and the bride to go from being strangers to the depths of closeness that a marriage brings. Therefore, there are the *shushvinin*, which are the *friends* (literal definition of the Aramaic word *shushvin* is *Friend*), a man, of the groom, and a woman of the bride, who support and encourage the groom and bride in getting close to each other. Thus, it is but logical that the *shushvinin* be a married couple, in which they are experienced in the depths of closeness that exists within a marriage.

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**Mystically Speaking:** All that exists here *Below* are but ‘*dangling*’ from, and derive from, how it is *Above*. So too, marriage here *Below* derives from the *Supernal Marriage Above*, between G-d, the *Groom*, and Israel, the *Bride*. (-Songs 3:11 (Rashi there)): “*On the day of His nuptials*; (Rashi:) *The day of the giving of the Torah.*” At which there were the two *shushvinin*, Moses, *Shushvin of the King* (G-d), and Aharon, *Shushvin of the Queen* (Israel). Moses, the groomsman, drew close and drew down, Divinity from *Above to Below*, to Israel. Aharon, the bridesmaid, elevated and brought close Israel from *Below to Above*, until Israel became united with G-d.

The need for these *shushvinin* is, being that the soul descended from a ‘*high elevation: Under G-d’s Throne of Glory*, to a nether ‘*deep pit: The opaque world of egocentrism*,’ hence, the *Bride* had become distant and estranged from the *Groom*, and thus, feels embarrassed and afraid from the exalted greatness of G-d, her *Groom*. Therefore, there is the need for a bridesmaid to elevate the *Bride: Israel* --who are defined as (-Tanna D’vei Eliyahu Rabba, Chapter 9), “*A wife who does the will of her Husband*,”-- to G-d. And there is the groomsman for the *Groom: G-d* --Who’s level and function is that of *Husband*, Who (-Genesis 3:16), “*And he will rule over you*,”-- to draw *Divinity* from *Above to Below*, to Israel.

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This is why the *shushvinin* are connected to the *joy* at the time of the wedding, being that joy is from creating a *novelty*, which is the essence of a marriage. For a man and a woman, who are each but (-Zohar Vol III 7b), “*A half body*,” of each other, then they are distant and separated from each other from birth, and now, through the support and encouragement of the *shushvinin*, are brought close and are unified. This arouses a great joy. So too, with the *Supernal Marriage*, because the soul descended *Below*, it became distant and separated from being united and cleaving to G-d, therefore, when Israel, here *Below*, become united and get close with G-d, through Torah and Mitzvot, and even crystalize, refine, and elevate the physical, its “*G-dly Sparks*” to G-d -- which fell, descended, became very distant, and are marinating in the physical,-- this causes a great and wondrous joy.

This is the reason why, “*The day of the giving of the Torah*,” is called, “*The day of his nuptials and on the day of the joy of his heart*.” For before, “*The day of the giving of the Torah*,” there was the (-Tanchuma, Va’eira 15), “*Decree that the upper ones* (Heaven: spirituality) *not descend to the lower ones* (world; physicality), *and that the lower ones not ascend to the upper ones*.” However, at the *Giving of the Torah*, when there was the *chupah* and marriage of G-d to Israel, this decree was nullified, and there was created a unity and bond between G-d and Israel, as Israel is *here Below*, and through Israel, there was also created the novelty of a unity and bond between the physical with G-d. Therefore, this is, “*the joy of His heart*.”

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In light of the above, let us now understand the significance of the *kvater/in* at the *Brit Milah*, and its connection with the *shushvin/a*. The completion, the internal deepest unification of G-d with Israel comes into existence through the *Brit Mila*. The *Brit Milah* is when (-Genesis 17:13), “*And My covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant*,” takes place. The covenant between G-d and Israel is sealed within the physical flesh of the Jew. In other words, the novelty created at the *Giving of the Torah*, in which the *Upper Ones* (spirituality) descend to the *Below*, and the *Lower Ones* (physicality) ascend to the *Above*, is completed at a *Brit Milah*, to the point that the *physical body* enters into a covenant with G-d. While the body of a Jew bonds with G-d through all mitzvot (Mitzva from the etymology *Tzavsa V’chibur*: bond together as one) nevertheless, it is specifically the mitzva of *Brit Milah* in which it is visibly revealed within the body of Jew. This is the meaning of the *Alter Rebbe*’s ruling (Sh’A, Mahadura Basra 4:2), “*The entry of this holy soul begins... with the mitzvah of circumcision*,” being that this is when there is the covenant with G-d revealed *within the body* of the Jew.

Therefore, just as *shushvinin* are needed to support and encourage in the novelty of the union between the two estranged, “*half of bodies*,” the groom and the bride (the male *sushvin* for the groom, and the female *shushvina* for the bride), so too, at the *Brit Milah*, which is where the *Supernal Marriage* between G-d and Israel appears in visible revelation, there is the custom to have the male *kvater* for the *Groom*; G-d, the *Shushvin of the King*, and the female *kvaterin* for the *Bride*; Israel, the *Shushvina of the Queen*.

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It is thus understood why *joy* is a fundamental aspect of the *Brit Milah*, just as by the marriage, which we do not find with other mitzvot.

Note: Although all mitzvot need to be (-Psalms 100:2), “*You shall serve G-d with Joy*,” nevertheless, our Sages teach (-Shabbos 130a), “*Every mitzva that the Jews initially accepted upon themselves with joy, such as circumcision, as it is written: ‘I rejoice at Your saying (word) as one who finds great spoil,’* [Rashi: Your *one ‘saying’* that prefaced all other ‘sayings’, which is *Brit Milah*, which Israel does and rejoices upon it (for all other mitzvot are not present all the time, for example tefillin, mezuzah, and tzitzit, aren’t upon him when he is in the field or naked in the bathhouse. However this (*Brit Milah*) testifies upon him always. As it is stated in (tractate) *Menochais* (43b) concerning (King) *David*, when hwe saw himself in the bathhouse, and was pained, said, ‘Woe to me that I am naked of all mitzvot!’ When he pondered upon the *Brit Milah* his mind was soothed)] *they still perform it with joy*.” And the joy which is fundamental to *Brit Milah* is so to the point that our Sages explain (-Nidah 31b), “*For what (reason) does the Torah say that circumcision is (performed) on the eighth*

(day of the baby's life, and not beforehand)? *It is so that there will not be where everyone is happy* (at the circumcision ceremony) *but the father and mother are unhappy*, (as they are still prohibited from engaging in intercourse, due to the woman being rendered impure at childbirth until she stops bleeding and can go to the mikvah)." Commentaries explain that the Sages extrapolated this from the fact that the verse, "*And on the eighth day you shall circumcise his flesh*," comes right after the verse of the impurity of birthing, which *ends at seven* days.

Being that joy is produced by a novelty being created, as previously stated concerning a marriage, in which there is the novelty of (-Genesis 2:24), "*a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh*," and that this concept is completed specifically at the *Brit Milah*, in which the internal and depth of unification ("*and they shall become one flesh*") between G-d and Israel, the *Supernal Husband and Wife*, is created: "*My covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant*," hence, joy is a fundamental part of the *Brit Milah*.

Note: By a female, being that (-Avodah Zarah 27a), "*a woman is considered as one who is* (naturally) *circumcised*," hence, the internal and depth of unification between G-d and Israel takes place at birth.

And it is through our observance of these two mitzvot, (i) *Be fruitful and multiply*, which is the fulfillment of *marriage*, and (ii) *Brit Milah*, that we will merit imminently the complete and true redemption, at which time there will be the completion of the concept of *Brit Milah*, as the verse (-Deuteronomy 30:6) states, "*And the L-rd, your G-d, will circumcise your heart*," and there will be the completion of the *Marriage* between G-d and Israel, as it is stated (-Isaiah 54:5), "*For your Husband, your Maker*," and Moses and Aharon will be the *shushvinin*, as it is taught (-Tosfat, Pesachim 114b, d"h Echod Zecher...), "*(And when it (the Holy Temple) will be built) Moses and Aharon will be with us*."