

Circumcision - a stain of shame on Judaism and Israel

I write to you because I am ashamed and angry.

A delegation of the Israeli Knesset is coming to a hearing held by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to defend the right of Jews to perform Brit Milah (circumcision), a religious rite that involves the amputation of the foreskin of a baby boy when he is eight days old. Those Knesset members **do not** represent me and thousands like me in Israel who stand firm for the right of babies to grow up intact and not to be exposed to a custom that violates their bodies, that inflicts pain and puts them at risk.

I am Jewish and I am Israeli and I see Brit Milah as a stain of shame on Judaism and Israel.

You should ask the Knesset delegation about Knesset member Nissim Zeev - he has a first hand experience with the risk of circumcision. Knesset member Nissim Zeev was a mohel (traditional circumciser), and one time after cutting the foreskin of a baby he tried to stop the bleeding by applying a bandage, only the bandage was too tight. The tight bandage caused a necrosis and as a result two thirds of the boy's penis fell off. The boy's parents sued Nissim Zeev. The district court ordered Zeev to pay the parents ILS 500,000 (€ 105,000). Zeev appealed to the supreme court, and the supreme not only denied the appeal but raised the damages and ordered Zeev to pay the parents ILS 800,000 (€ 170,000).

My wife and I decided not to circumcise our son. This decision was not easy because of family and social pressure, and making this decision led me to start a [website](#) to inform Israeli parents about the damage, the risks and the pain of circumcision. The first thing that shocked me and shattered my ignorance about circumcision was the following paragraph from Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher and physician:

"This commandment has not been enjoined as a complement to a deficient physical creation, but as a means for perfecting man's moral shortcomings. The bodily injury caused to that organ is exactly that which is desired; it does not interrupt any vital function, nor does it destroy the power of generation. Circumcision simply counteracts excessive lust; for there is no doubt that circumcision weakens the power of sexual excitement, and sometimes lessens the natural enjoyment: the organ necessarily becomes weak when it loses blood and is deprived of its covering from the beginning."

I was appalled because cutting off the foreskin with the aim of diminishing sexual pleasure is exactly the same as female genital cutting. I was horrified to learn that Judaism, **my culture**, does this to babies with the aim of controlling sexuality. I was ashamed and angry that this is a part of being Jewish, of being Israeli, and that it was defended vehemently by my family and friends.

I started to learn about the [anatomy and functions of the foreskin](#), and the more I knew the more I became frustrated, because I realized that I was a **victim** of this custom, that I have lost the most erogenous part of my penis, and that I will never experience sex as nature intended it.

I started to collect reports about botched circumcisions and was amazed to learn about how many babies suffer not only the loss of their foreskin but also from complications and side effects of amputating the foreskin. The Israeli counter-resolution to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe says: "... male circumcision does not present a risk to the physical and mental health of male children and concurs with their right to be protected against the violation of their physical and mental integrity."

First, how can you cut off a healthy tissue and maintain physical integrity?

Second, please show those who phrased this shameful sentence the following sample list of circumcision complications from the Israeli media:

- Parents sue a mohel (traditional circumciser) ILS 2.5 Million (€ 420,000) for botching a circumcision and amputating a part of their son's penis. [News1, December 6, 2013](#)
- The mohel cut a vein, the bleeding did not stop, the parents called an ambulance, the paramedic saw a massive bleeding and stopped it with a special clutches. The baby was rushed to a hospital for treatment. [Ynet, June 30, 2013](#)
- Following a circumcision the baby lost consciousness, when the paramedic arrived he reported that the baby was blue in the face, he did not breath and had no pulse. The baby was rushed to a hospital and died the following week. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel denied that the death was due to circumcision. [Mako, June 7, 2013](#)
- A baby boy was hospitalized in a severe condition due to massive bleeding following a circumcision. [Nana10 News, October 12, 2012](#)
- A circumcision accident: the mohel cut off a third of the boy's penis. The baby was rushed to a hospital and surgeons worked for hours to stitch the severed part back. [Ynet, April 18, 2012](#)

This is just a drop in a bucket! This list goes on and on and of course what's being reported in the media is only a fraction of the cases of complications. There are cases of infections, of cutting too much skin or too little, or where the outcome requires a fixing surgery.

There are consequences of circumcision that are not related to the competence of the mohel. Meatal Stenosis (the narrowing of the urethra) is a very common complication of circumcision that results from exposing the glans. The delicate lining of the opening of the urethra gets scarred and the opening gets too narrow for urine to pass freely. This complication requires a surgery to widen the opening of the urethra. 5% to 10% of the boys who undergo circumcision suffers from this condition.

And as for the pain, well I dare you to go and watch Brit Milah - watch the baby's face, listen to his screams, watch his hands flailing, while one man restrains his tiny legs and the other cuts his foreskin. This is what Judaism is about? This is what being Israeli is about? No! It is not!

Usually when Brit Milah (circumcision) is performed, the mother of the baby cannot even watch. She covers her eyes, look away, cries or goes out of the room until it's over. A group of men usually hovers over the baby, a piece of cloth soaked with wine is shoved to the baby's mouth to distract him.

The Jewish law, which is observed by the vast majority of the mohels, instructs the mohel to

perform the circumcision as follows:

1. The mohel stretches the foreskin with his fingers, and it is recommended to make the penis hard for the stretch to be good, and then cuts all the skin to the glans, not just a little bit of skin.
2. After the cut the mohel should perform the Peri'aa (exposing), because the delicate inner lining of the foreskin remains on the glans. The mohel should insert his **finger nails** between the remaining inner lining of the foreskin and the glans, and then tear the lining to the sides in order to expose the glans. It is very important to completely expose the glans. The Peri'aa is complete when the glans is fully exposed and the delicate membrane that covers it is fully removed.
3. After the Peri'aa the mohel should perform the Metzizah (sucking). The mohel should suck the blood from the penis real good until the bleeding stops.

This is how circumcision is performed to this day by Jewish mohels (traditional circumcisers) in Israel and all over the world. And this is what the Knesset delegation is coming to defend! What a **SHAME!**

Please read this [Joint statement from the Nordic Ombudsmen for Children and pediatric experts](#). They state that, "Circumcision, performed without a medical indication, on a person who is incapable of giving consent, violates fundamental medical-ethical principles, not least because the procedure is irreversible, painful and may cause serious complications."

And [this statement](#) by The Royal Dutch Medical Association where they state that, "There is no convincing evidence that circumcision is useful or necessary in terms of prevention or hygiene. Non-therapeutic circumcision of male minors is contrary to the rule that minors may only be exposed to medical treatments if illness or abnormalities are present. Non-therapeutic circumcision of male minors conflicts with the child's right to autonomy and physical integrity."

I urge you to stand firm and protect children and babies from this practice.

Yours,
Eran Sadeh
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