

***Pidyon Haben* and Adoption:  
Affirmation of Jewish Identity and Community through Ritual**

Jeremy Lipton

A Master's Project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Academy for Jewish Religion's  
Master of Arts Degree in Jewish Studies

Advisor: Rabbi Jill Hammer, PhD

December 2020

## ***Pidyon Haben* and Adoption: Affirmation of Jewish Identity and Community through Ritual**

As a Jewish clergy professional, I am acutely aware of the opportunities and richness of being immersed in living an intentionally Jewish life, and the barriers, real and perceived, that exist for those who are brought into their Jewishness from the outside (i.e., for those who are not biologically born of a Jewish mother). As a member of a Jewish family that has grown through adoption, I have personally experienced the desire to both create a sense of community, and at the same time have each family member be recognized and fully accepted as equal participants within that community. The reality of this acceptance is challenged on a number of levels during the various stages of life, from the moment of birth, to welcoming a child through established ritual practices, to approaching the age of Jewish adulthood, and beyond.

Although there are surely a number of similar challenges for adoptive parents of both sons and daughters, the thrust of this study will use as a point of focus the birth and welcoming of a first child, a newborn son who is adopted, and consider how this experience might compare to that of initial rites and experiences when welcoming a first biological son into a family. A particular point of departure is the ritual of *Pidyon Haben*, the Redemption of the First Born.

Through the exploration of this topic, I will consider the traditional context of *Pidyon Haben*, including how Jewish texts, commentaries, *halakha*, interpretations through the lens of normative movement affiliations, and newly-created practices might inform personal choices that could affirm the universal and transformational nature of welcoming new life into a growing family and into the community. The fact that *Pidyon Haben* and adoption are mutually exclusive (from a halakhic perspective) will not inhibit my reflection upon the internal, psychological challenges for adoptive families that run parallel to existing practices and normative halakhic determinations. These issues

invite opportunities for adoptive families to not only consider what has been, but create a basis upon which to embrace new paradigms in connecting to a Jewish past, present and future.

## The Mitzvah of *Pidyon Haben*: traditional sources, practice and application

The ritual of *Pidyon Haben* is traditionally performed to discharge a *bechor* (firstborn male) Israelite child from a life of biblically-mandated service to God at the direction of the *kohanim*. Through this act of redemption, a fixed payment is made from the child's father to a *kohen* who fulfills both the legal requirements of release, while acknowledging that God is the ultimate source of this new life—a divine gift that represents the potential growth, strength, continuity, and future of a family. Eric Mendelsohn summarizes the sequence and practical details of the ritual through the lens of modern practice:<sup>1</sup>

In the traditional ceremony, the father who is not a *kohen* or *levi* brings the son at the age of one month to the *kohen* and recites a formula. The father responds to ritual questions, indicating that this is the Israelite mother's firstborn son, that she has no previous miscarriage, and the birth was vaginal and not caesarean, and he has come to redeem him as commanded in the *Torah*. The *kohen* asks the father which he would rather have, the child or the five silver *shekels* which he must pay. The father states that he prefers the child to the money, then recites blessings:

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו על פדיון הבן

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His *mitzvot*, and commanded us concerning the redemption of a son.

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם, שהחינו וקי'מנו והגינו לזמן הזה

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion.

He hands over five silver coins (or coin or bullion of at least 100 grams silver). The *kohen* holds the coins over the child and declares that the redemption price is received and accepted in place in the child. He then blesses the child with the parental and priestly blessing and returns him to the custody of his family...The ceremony traditionally takes place amidst a *minyan* of 10 men. The child is sometimes presented on a silver tray, surrounded by jewelry lent for the occasion by women in attendance. The event is accompanied by a meal, and guests in some places are given cloves of garlic and cubes of sugar to take home which have been placed on the tray with the baby; these strongly-flavored foods can be used to flavor a large quantity of food which will in some sense extend the *mitzvah* of participation in the ceremony to all who eat them.

---

<sup>1</sup> Eric Mendelsohn, "D'var Torah for Tetzaveh: Reconstructing Judaism," March 2017, available at <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/dvar-torah/dvar-torah-tetzaveh>

Even from Mendelsohn's brief description of *Pidyon Haben*, it is clearly inferred that the frequency of this ceremony's occurrence is relatively small, even in families whose traditional practice is high on the observance spectrum. It becomes obvious that there are many more Jewish children born in the world who are excluded from this practice than included, when one considers that the obligation is to redeem is limited to the child who is a *bechor* (first-born), his mother's *peter rechem* (first to "open the womb" from a halakhic perspective), and who is not a *kohen* or a *levi*. In actual practice, approximately 12% of Jewish births meet all of the necessary requirements for having a traditional *Pidyon Haben*.<sup>2</sup>

What is the textual basis for the creation of this ritual practice? We turn first to the primary biblical sources (in the *Torah*, Exodus 13:2, 11-15 and Numbers 18:15-16) that articulate and mandate our responsibilities regarding the *bechor's* distinction.<sup>3</sup>

#### EXODUS 13:2

קִדְּשׁ-לִי כָל-בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר כָּל-רֶחֶם בְּבִנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה לִי הוּא:

Consecrate to Me every *bechor* (first-born); man and beast, the first issue of every womb among the Israelites is Mine.

#### EXODUS 13:11-15

וְהָיָה כִּי-יָבֹא אֵל-אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי כַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לָךְ וּלְאֲבוֹתֶיךָ וַיְבַרְכֶנּוּ לְךָ:

וְהֵעֲבַרְתָּ כָל-פֶּטֶר-רֶחֶם לַיהוָה וְכָל-פֶּטֶר אֶשֶׁר יִשְׁגֵר בְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה לָּךְ הַזְּכָרִים לַיהוָה:

וְכָל-פֶּטֶר חֲמֹל תִּפְדֶּה בְּשֵׂה וְאִם-לֹא תִפְדֶּה וְעִרְפְּתוּ וְלֹא בְּכוֹר אָדָם בְּבִנֵיךָ תִּפְדֶּה:

וְהָיָה כִּי-יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מַה-זֶּאת וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּחֻזֶּק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרָיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים:

וַיְהִי כִּי-הִקְשָׁה פְרַעֲהוֹ לְשַׁלְּחַנּוּ וַיַּהַרְג יְהוָה כָּל-בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם מִבְּכֹר אָדָם וְעַד-בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה עַל-כֵּן אָנֹכִי זֹכֵר לַיהוָה כָּל-פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם הַזְּכָרִים וְכָל-בְּכוֹר בְּנֵי אֶפְרָיִם:

And when the LORD has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and has given it to you, you shall set apart for the LORD every *peter rechem* (first issue of the womb): every male firstling that your cattle drop shall be the LORD's. But every firstling ass you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. And

<sup>2</sup> Nissan Rubin, Coping with the Value of the Pidyon Ha'ben Payment in Rabbinic Literature: An Example of a Social Change Process," *Jewish History* 10/1 (Spring 1996): 40, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20101250>

<sup>3</sup> Sefaria.org. 2020. *Tanakh | Sefaria*. [online], available at <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Tanakh>

you must redeem every *bechor* (first-born male) among your children. And when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘It was with a mighty hand that the LORD brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD slew every *bechor* (first-born) in the land of Egypt, the *bechor* (first-born) of both man and beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD every male *peter rechem* (first issue of the womb), but redeem every first-born among my sons.’

In this final *Torah* excerpt, God speaks to Aaron and his sons.

NUMBERS 18:15-16

כָּל-פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם לְכָל-בֶּשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרִיבוּ לַיהוָה בְּאֲדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה יִהְיֶה-לָּךְ אִךְ | פְּדִיהַ תְּפִדָּה אֶת בְּכוֹר הָאָדָם  
וְאֶת בְּכוֹר-הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּמֵאָה תְּפִדָּה:

וּפְדוּיָו מִבֶּן-חֹדֶשׁ תְּפִדָּה בְּעֶרְכָּךְ כֶּסֶף חֲמִשָּׁת שֶׁקֶלִים בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ עֶשְׂרִים גֶּרָה הוּא:

The *peter rechem* (first issue of the womb) of every living being, man or beast, that is offered to the Lord, shall be yours; but you shall have the *bechor* (first-born) of man redeemed, and you shall also have the *bechor* (firstling) of impure animals redeemed. Take as their redemption price, from the age of one month up, the money equivalent of five *shekels* by the sanctuary weight, which is twenty *gerahs*.

The *Torah* clearly states that all firstborns are to be consecrated to God and given to the *kohanim*, subsequently mandating redemption from the *kohanim* of each *bechor* who is a *peter rechem*. The *Torah* is also explicit as to why a *bechor* must be redeemed (in acknowledgment of God’s role in the exodus from Egypt), as well as the exact price for that redemption (the value of five silver *shekels*).

The *Mishnah* (*Bekhorot 8:1-8*) provides the earliest documented written rabbinic reflections that begin to flesh out and further elucidate the distinctions of the *bechor*. Here the rabbis begin to unfold how to fulfill the intent of the *Torah’s* positive *mitzvah* of a *bechor’s* redemption, including clarification of what it means to be a mother’s *peter rechem*, the conditions under which a newborn child might or might not meet that definition for mandatory redemption, the nuanced distinctions between a *bechor* for the sake of redemption and a *bechor* for the sake of inheritance, as well as what constitutes the completion of the transactional payment of redemption between a father and a *kohen*. As in all of the

traditional halakhic sources cited, the focus is clearly on the biological relationship of the child to the mother, as well as the physical circumstances of his birth.<sup>4</sup>

MISHNAH, BEKHOROT 8:1-8

יש בכור לנחלה ואינו בכור לפהו, בכור לפהו ואינו בכור לנחלה, בכור לנחלה ולפהו, יש שאינו בכור לא לנחלה ולא לפהו. איזהו בכור לנחלה ואינו בכור לפהו, הבא אחר הנפלים שיצא ראשו חי, וכן תשעה שיצא ראשו מת, והמפלט כמין בהמה חיה ועוף, דברי רבי מאיר. וחכמים אומרים, עד שיהא בו מצורת האדם. המפלט סנדל, או שליא, ושפיר מרקם, והיוצא מחתה, הבא אחריהו, בכור לנחלה ואינו בכור לפהו. מי שלא היו לו בנים ונשא אשה שקבר ילדה, עודה שפחה ונשתחררה, עודה נכרית ונתגירה, משבאת לישראל ילדה, בכור לנחלה ואינו בכור לפהו. רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר, בכור לנחלה ולפהו, שאמר (שמות יג), פטר כל רחם בבני ישראל, עד שיפטר רחם מישראל. מי שהיו לו בנים ונשא אשה שלא ילדה, נתגירה מעברת, נשתחררה מעברת, ילדה היא וכהנת, היא ולויה, היא ואשה שקבר ילדה, וכן מי שלא שהתה אחר בעלה שלשה חדשים ונשאת וילדה, ואין ידוע אם בן תשעה לראשון, או בן שבועה לאחרון, בכור לפהו ואינו בכור לנחלה. איזהו בכור לנחלה ולפהו, המפלט שפיר מלא דם, מלא מים, מלא גנינים, המפלט כמין דגים וחגבים שקצים ורמשים, המפלט יום ארבעים, הבא אחריהו, בכור לנחלה ולפהו

There is one who is [counted as] a firstborn [with respect to] inheritance but not with respect to redemption from a priest; a firstborn with respect to redemption from a priest but not a firstborn [with respect] to inheritance; a firstborn [with respect to both] inheritance and redemption from a priest; and a firstborn [in respect] to neither inheritance nor redemption from a priest. Which is a firstborn [with respect] to inheritance but not to redemption from a priest? One which follows one which was not viable whose head came forth alive, or one born in the ninth month whose head came out dead, or when a woman aborts something that looks like an animal, beast or bird, the words of Rabbi Meir. But the sages say: [it is not considered an opening of the womb] until [the abortion] has the form of a human being. If [a woman] aborts a sandal or a placenta or a fetus having an articulated shape, or if an embryo came out by pieces, [the infant] which follows after them is a first-born [with respect] to inheritance but not a first-born for redemption from a priest. If one who never had children married a woman who had already given birth, even if she had given birth when she was a slave but is now free, or [had given birth] when she was a non-Jew but has since converted, if after coming to the Israelite she gave birth, [the infant] is considered a first-born [with respect] to inheritance but not a first-born for redemption from a priest. Rabbi Yose the Galilean says: [the infant] is a firstborn [with respect] to inheritance and for redemption from a priest, as it says: "Whatever opens the womb in Israel" (*Exodus 13:2*), meaning only if it opens the womb in Israel. If one had children already and married a woman who had never given birth previously Or if she converted when pregnant, or if she was freed when pregnant, and she gave birth; If she and a priestess gave birth, she and a Levite's daughter, she and a woman who had already given birth; And similarly [if a woman] who did not wait three months after her husband's death, married and gave birth and it is not known if the infant was born in the ninth month since the death of the first [husband] or in the seventh month since she married the second, it is a firstborn for redemption from a priest but not a first-born [with respect] to inheritance. Which is a firstborn both [in respect] of inheritance and for redemption from a priest? If [a woman] miscarries a sac full of blood or full of water or

<sup>4</sup> Sefaria.org. 2020. *Mishnah | Sefaria*. [online], available at <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Mishnah>

full of pieces of flesh; or if [a woman] miscarries something with the shape of fish or locusts or reptiles, or creeping things, or if she discharges on the fortieth day [of conception], [the infant] which follows after [these discharges] is a firstborn both [in respect] of inheritance and for redemption from a priest.

2

יוצא דפן והבא אחריו, שניהם אינן בכור לא לנחלה ולא לכהן. רבי שמעון אומר, הראשון לנחלה, והשני  
לחמש סלעים:

A fetus extracted by means of a caesarean section and one that follows neither is a first-born for inheritance or a first-born to be redeemed from a priest. Rabbi Shimon says: the first is a first-born for inheritance and the second is a first-born as regards [the redemption] with five *selas*.

3

מי שלא בכרה אשתו וילדה שני זכרים, נותן חמש סלעים לכהן. מת אחד מהן בתוך שלשים יום, האב  
פטור. מת האב והבנים קיימים, רבי מאיר אומר, אם נתנו עד שלא חלקו, נתנו. ואם לאו, פטורין. רבי  
יהודה אומר נתחייבו נכסים. זכר ונקבה, אין כאן לכהן כלום

If a man's wife had never before given birth and she gave birth to two males, he gives five *selas* to the priest. If one of them dies within thirty days [of birth] the father is exempt. If the father dies and the sons survive: Rabbi Meir says: if they gave the five *selas* before the property was divided up, then what they gave is given; but if not, they are exempt. But Rabbi Judah says: there is a claim on the property. If she gave birth to a male and a female, the priest receives nothing.

4

שתי נשים שלא בכרו וילדו שני זכרים, נותן עשר סלעים לכהן. מת אחד מהן בתוך שלשים יום, אם לכהן  
אחד נתן, יחזיר לו חמש סלעים. אם לשני כהנים נתן, אינו יכול להוציא מידם. זכר ונקבה או שני זכרים  
ונקבה, נותן חמש סלעים לכהן. שתי נקבות וזכר או שני זכרים ושתי נקבות, אין כאן לכהן כלום. אחת  
בכרה ואחת שלא בכרה וילדו שני זכרים. נותן חמש סלעים לכהן. מת אחד מהן בתוך שלשים יום, האב  
פטור. מת האב והבנים קיימים, רבי מאיר אומר, אם נתנו עד שלא חלקו, נתנו. ואם לאו, פטורין. רבי יהודה  
אומר, נתחייבו נכסים. זכר ונקבה, אין כאן לכהן כלום

Two women who had never before given birth gave birth to two males: he [the father] gives ten *selas* to the priest. If one of the children dies within thirty days [of its birth], if he gave the redemption money to one priest alone, he returns five *selas* to him, but if he gave it to two priests, he cannot reclaim the money from them. If they gave birth to a male and a female or to two males and a female, he gives five *selas* to the priest. If they gave birth to two females and a male, or to two males and two females, the priest receives nothing. If one woman had given birth before and the other had never given birth, and they gave birth to two males, he gives five *selas* to the priest. If one of the children died within thirty days [of its birth], the father is exempt. If the father dies and the sons survive: Rabbi Meir says: if they gave the five *selas* before the property was divided up, then what they gave is given; but if not, they are exempt. But Rabbi Judah says: there is a claim on the property. If they gave birth to a male and a female, the priest receives nothing.



שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֶׁל שְׁנֵי אֲנָשִׁים שֶׁלֹּא בְּכָרוּ וְיָלְדוּ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים, זֶה נוֹתֵן חֲמֵשׁ סְלָעִים לַכֹּהֵן, וְזֶה נוֹתֵן חֲמֵשׁ סְלָעִים לַכֹּהֵן. מֵת אֶחָד מֵהֶן בְּתוֹךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם, אִם לָכֵן אֶחָד נִתְּנוּ, יַחְזִיר לָהֶן חֲמֵשׁ סְלָעִים. אִם לְשְׁנֵי כַּהֲנִים נִתְּנוּ, אֵינָן יְכוּלִין לְהוֹצִיא מִיָּדָם. זָכָר וְנִקְבָּה, הָאֲבוֹת פְּטוּרִין, וְהַבֵּן חַיֵּב לְפָדוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ. שְׁתֵּי נִקְבוֹת וְזָכָר אוֹ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וְשְׁתֵּי נִקְבוֹת, אֵין כָּאֵן לַכֹּהֵן כְּלוּם:

If two women who had never before given birth married two men and gave birth to two males, the one father gives five *selas* to the priest and the other gives five *selas* to the priest. If one of the children died within thirty days [of its birth], if they gave the redemption money to one priest alone, he returns five *selas* to them, but if they gave the money to two priests, they are not able to recover it from them. If they gave birth to a male and a female, the fathers are exempt, whereas the son must redeem himself [as in any case he is a first-born]. If they gave birth to two females and a male or to two females and two males, the priest receives nothing.

אֶחָת בְּכָרָה וְאֶחָת שֶׁלֹּא בְּכָרָה שֶׁל שְׁנֵי אֲנָשִׁים, וְיָלְדוּ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים, זֶה שֶׁלֹּא בְּכָרָה אֲשֶׁתּוֹ, נוֹתֵן חֲמֵשׁ סְלָעִים לַכֹּהֵן. זָכָר וְנִקְבָּה, אֵין כָּאֵן לַכֹּהֵן כְּלוּם. מֵת הַבֵּן בְּתוֹךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם, אֵף עַל פִּי שְׁנֵתֵן לַכֹּהֵן, יַחְזִיר (לוֹ חֲמֵשׁ סְלָעִים). לְאַחַר שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם, אֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁלֹּא נָתַן, יִתֵּן. מֵת בְּיוֹם שְׁלֹשִׁים, כִּיּוֹם שֶׁלְּפָנָיו. רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אוֹמֵר, אִם נָתַן, לֹא יִטּוֹל. וְאִם לֹא נָתַן, לֹא יִתֵּן. מֵת הָאֵב בְּתוֹךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם, בְּחֻזְקַת שֶׁלֹּא נָפְדָה, עַד שֶׁיָּבִיא רְאִיָּה שֶׁנָּפְדָה. לְאַחַר שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם, בְּחֻזְקַת שֶׁנָּפְדָה, עַד (שֶׁיָּבִיא רְאִיָּה) שֶׁלֹּא נָפְדָה. הוּא לְפָדוֹת וּבְנוֹ לְפָדוֹת, הוּא קוֹדֵם אֶת בְּנוֹ. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר, בְּנוֹ קוֹדֵמוֹ, שֶׁמִּצְוֹתוֹ עַל אָבִיו, וּמִצְוֹת בְּנוֹ עָלָיו:

If one woman had given birth before and the other had never before given birth, the two women belonging to two husbands, and they gave birth to two males, the one whose wife had never before given birth gives five *selas* to the priest. If they gave birth to a male and a female, the priest receives nothing. If the son dies within thirty days although he gave the priest [the five *selas*], he must return them. If he dies after thirty days, although he has not yet given the five *selas*, he (the father) must give them. If he dies on the thirtieth day, it is as if he died on the previous day. But Rabbi Akiva says: if he gave [the five *selas*] he cannot reclaim them, but if he had not yet given, he need not give. If the father dies within thirty days, [the infant] is under the presumption of not having been redeemed until proof is brought that he has been redeemed. If the father dies after thirty days, the infant is under the presumption of having been redeemed until he [the son] is told that he was not redeemed. If both he and his son need to be redeemed, the father takes precedence over his son. Rabbi Judah says: his son comes first for the command to redeem him was upon his father, and the command of his son is upon him.

חֲמֵשׁ סְלָעִים שֶׁל בֶּן, בְּמִנְהַ צוּרִי. שְׁלֹשִׁים שֶׁל עֶבֶד, וְחֲמֵשִׁים שֶׁל אוֹנֵס וְשֶׁל מַפְתֵּה, וּמֵאָה שֶׁל מוֹצִיא שֵׁם רָע, כְּכֹל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ, בְּמִנְהַ צוּרִי. וְכֹלֵן נִפְדִּין בְּכֶסֶף, וּבִשְׁוֵה כֶּסֶף, חוּץ מִן הַשְּׁקָלִים:

The five *selas* of a first-born [are paid in] the standard of Tyrian *maneh*. As regards the thirty shekels of a slave and likewise the fifty shekels of the rapist and seducer and the one hundred shekels for one who spreads an evil name in all these cases the payment is in the holy *shekel*, in the standard of Tyrian *maneh*. All of these are redeemed with money or the equivalent of money with the exception of *shekel* payments.

אין פודין לא בעבדים, ולא בשטרות, ולא בקרקעות, ולא בהקדשות. כתב לכהן שהוא חייב לו חמש סלעים, חייב לתן לו ובנו אינו פדוי, לפיכך אם רצה הכהן לתן לו מתנה, רשאי. המפריש פדיון בנו ואבד, חייב: באחריותו, שנאמר (במדבר יח), יהיה לך ופדה תפדה

We must not redeem [a first-born] with slaves, nor with notes of indebtedness, nor with immovable properties, nor with objects of *hekdesh*. If one gives a written acknowledgment to a priest that he owes him five *selas* he is bound to give them to him, although his son is not considered as redeemed. Therefore, if the priest wishes to give him [the note of indebtedness] as a gift he is permitted to do so. If one set aside the redemption money of his son and it became lost, he is responsible for it, because it says: “Shall be for you [but] you shall surely redeem” (Numbers 18:15).

Through the *Mishnah's* careful consideration and anticipation of various situations that could arise relating to the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of *Pidyon Haben*, the details expressed above provide additional clarification about who might be required to be redeemed, under what circumstances that redemption must or need not take place, and how the transactional nature of the ritual is an integral part of its completion.

The *Talmud* builds upon and expands the *Mishnah's* inquiry relating to *Pidyon Haben*, and addresses even more nuanced topics, with questions, rulings and an array of tangential discussions that explore a number of areas of inquiry, including:<sup>5</sup>

- Who is required to say the blessings for *Pidyon Haben* (especially the second *bracha*, the *Shehecheyanu*) – the *kohen* or the father of the *bechor*? (*Pesachim* 121b)
- Does the son of a *kohen* whose lineage is flawed need to be redeemed? (*Bekhorot*, 47b)
- Does the *peter rechem* of a mother who converted to Judaism while she was pregnant need to be redeemed and if so by whom? (*Bekhorot* 47b)
- What are the different rabbinic opinions regarding whether a son born by Caesarian section or a child naturally born following one who was born by Caesarian section is a *bechor*, either relating to inheritance and/or redemption? (*Bekhorot* 47b)
- If a *bechor* is not redeemed by his father a month following his birth, who should redeem the child and when should that redemption take place? (*Kiddushin* 29a)
- Is a firstborn daughter required to be redeemed? (*Kiddushin* 29a)
- May the mother redeem either her *bechor* or her daughter who is a *peter rechem*? (*Kiddushin* 29a)

<sup>5</sup> Sefaria.org. 2020. *Talmud | Sefaria*. [online], available at <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Talmud>

- If a *bechor* is born to a man who himself is a *bechor* but was never redeemed by his father, whose redemption should take precedence, his or his son's? (*Kiddushin* 29a-29b)
- If a man has five sons with five different wives (each son the *peter rechem* of his mother), is he required to redeem each of them? (*Kiddushin* 29b)
- What are the ways that the problematic payment for the redemption of a *bechor* might be resolved following the birth of twin sons whose father dies shortly after their birth? (*Bekhorot* 48a-48b)
- What are the potential complications for the redemption payment/s to a *kohen* when the parentage of newborn children become confused and the identity of their specific father/s is in question? (*Bekhorot* 48b-49a)
- Does a *bechor* who dies before he is thirty days old need to be redeemed? (*Bekhorot* 49a)
- Does a *kohen* who has not yet been paid for *Pidyon Haben* need to be paid to redeem a *bechor* who dies after being alive for more than thirty days? (*Bekhorot* 49a)
- Does a *bechor* need to be redeemed if he dies on its thirtieth day of life? (*Bekhorot* 49a)
- What happens to the money if a father pays for the redemption of his *bechor* in advance of the thirtieth day and the child dies before the thirty first day? And how does whether or not the money has already been spent influence the outcome of this situation? (*Bekhorot* 49a-49b)
- If the payment to a *kohen* for *Pidyon Haben* is based upon property upon which there is a lien, how does this effect the priority of redemption in a case where a father and his *bechor* both need to be redeemed? (*Bekhorot* 49b)
- What is the validity of using a pledged loan for payment to a *kohen* for *Pidyon Haben*? (*Kiddushin* 6b)
- Does a promissory note given to a *kohen* for redemption of a *bechor* enough to complete the legal transaction required for a valid *Pidyon Haben*? (*Bekhorot* 51a-51b)
- If a *kohen* returns the payment to the father of the *bechor* is the *Pidyon Haben* considered valid? (*Bekhorot* 51b)
- May the father give payment to a *kohen* for redemption of his *bechor* with a required pre-condition that it be returned to him following the *Pidyon Haben*? (*Bekhorot* 51b)
- How does the status of the mother who is the daughter of a *kohen* or *levi* influence whether or not her *bechor* who is her *peter rechem* needs to be redeemed through *Pidyon Haben*? (*Bekhorot* 47a, *Bekhorot* 4a)
- How does the status of the father who is a *kohen* or *levi* influence whether his *bechor* is exempt from or obligated to *Pidyon Haben*? (*Bekhorot* 47a)
- If a *bechor* who is his mother's *peter rechem* is mauled by a wild animal and dies before he is thirty days old, how does that impact the obligation to redeem him? (*Bava Kama*, 11b)
- How does the responsibility to assure payment to the *kohen* for *Pidyon Haben* compare to the responsibility to which one must be obliged for the redemption of a firstborn donkey? (*Bekhorot* 12b)

The distillation of practices of *Pidyon Haben* as found in the *Torah*, with consideration for all of the questions, debates, and halakhic determinations that were discussed in the above-cited *masechtot* from

the *Talmud*, surfaced as succinct statements by the Rambam in his late, twelfth-century halakhic code, *Mishneh Torah* (*Sefer Zemanim, Bikkurim, 11:1-30*). Here, he puts forth a singular, clear, systematic, and organized set of rules and principles that one could follow to understand who was obliged to be redeemed, and the circumstances of when and how that redemption could be fulfilled.<sup>6</sup>

MISHNEH TORAH, BIKKURIM - CHAPTER 11:1-30

א

מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה לְפָדוֹת כָּל אִישׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל בְּנוֹ שֶׁהוּא בְּכוֹר לְאִמּוֹ הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִית שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוֹת לֵד יט) "כָּל פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם לִי". וְנֶאֱמַר (בְּמִדְבָר יח טו) "אִךְ פְּדֵה תִפְדֶּה אֶת בְּכוֹר הָאָדָם":

1

It is a positive commandment for every Jewish man to redeem his son who is the firstborn of his Jewish mother, as [Exodus 34:19] states: "All first issues of the womb are mine" and [Numbers 18:15] states: "And you shall surely redeem a firstborn man."

ב

וְאִין הָאִשָּׁה חִיבַת לְפָדוֹת אֶת בְּנָהּ. שֶׁחִיב לְפָדוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ הוּא שְׁחִיב לְפָדוֹת אֶת בְּנוֹ. עֶבֶר הָאֵב וְלֹא פְדָהוּ כְּשִׁיגְדֵל יְפָדָה אֶת עַצְמוֹ:

2

A woman is not obligated to redeem her son, for one who is obligated to redeem himself is obligated to redeem his son. If the father transgressed and did not redeem his son, when he comes of age, he is obligated to redeem himself.

ג

הִיָּה הוּא לְפָדוֹת וּבְנוֹ לְפָדוֹת יְפָדָה עַצְמוֹ תַּחֲלָה וְאַחַר כֶּן בְּנוֹ. וְאִם אֵין לוֹ אֶלֶּא כְּדֵי פְדִיּוֹן אֶחָד יְפָדָה עַצְמוֹ:

3

If it is necessary to redeem both the person himself and his son, he should redeem himself first and then his son. If he only has enough [money] for one redemption, he should redeem himself.

ד

הִיָּה בְּנוֹ לְפָדוֹת וְהִגִּיעַ עַת לְעֵלוֹת לְרִגְלֵי וְאִין לוֹ כְּדֵי לָזֶה וְלָזֶה. פּוֹדֶה אֶת בְּנוֹ וְאַחַר כֶּן עוֹלָה לְרִגְלֵי שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוֹת לֵד כ) "כָּל בְּכוֹר בְּנֶיךָ תִּפְדֶּה" וְאַחַר כֶּן (שְׁמוֹת לֵד כ) "וְלֹא יֵרָאוּ פְנֵי רִיקִם":

4

If [a father] had to redeem his son and the time arrived for him to make a festive pilgrimage [to Jerusalem] and he does not have the resources for both, he should redeem his son and then make the pilgrimage. [This is alluded to in Exodus 34:20:] which states: "You shall redeem all your firstborn sons" and afterwards [continues]: "Do not behold My countenance emptyhanded."

ה

הַפּוֹדֶה אֶת בְּנוֹ מְבָרֵךְ אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל פְּדִיּוֹן הַבֵּן. וְחֹזֵר וּמְבָרֵךְ שֶׁהִחַיֵּנוּ. וְאַחַר כֶּן נוֹתֵן הַפְּדִיּוֹן לַפֶּהֱן. וְאִם פְּדָה עַצְמוֹ מְבָרֵךְ לְפָדוֹת הַבְּכוֹר וּמְבָרֵךְ שֶׁהִחַיֵּנוּ:

5

A person who redeems his son should recite the blessing: "[Blessed are You...] who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the redemption of a son." Afterwards, he recites the blessing *Shehechyanu* and then gives [the money for] the redemption to the priest. If [a

<sup>6</sup> *Mishneh Torah, | Chabad—Text and Writings* [online] at Chabad.org. 2020, available at [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/1002537/jewish/Bikkurim-Chapter-11.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1002537/jewish/Bikkurim-Chapter-11.htm). English translation by Eliyahu Touger.

son] redeems himself, he should recite the blessing: "[Blessed... who commanded us] to redeem the firstborn" and he should recite the blessing *Shehechyanu*.

**י**  
מִצְוָה זוֹ נוֹהֶגֶת בְּכָל מְקוֹם וּבְכָל זְמַן. וּבְכַמָּה פְּדוּיָהּ בְּחֵמֶשׁ סְלָעִים שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בַּמִּדְבָּר יח טז) "וּפְדוּיָו מִבֶּן חֹדֶשׁ תִּפְדֶּה". בֵּין בְּכֶסֶף בֵּין בְּשֵׁוּה כֶּסֶף מִן הַמִּטְלָטְלִין שֶׁגוֹפֵן מִמּוֹן כְּעֵבֶן הַשֶּׁקֶלִים. לְפִיכָךְ אֵין פְּדוּיִן בְּקִרְקָעוֹת וְלֹא בְּעֲבָדִים מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהֵן קִרְקָעוֹת וְלֹא בְּשִׁטְרוֹת לְפִי שֶׁאֵין גּוֹפֵן מִמּוֹן. וְאִם פְּדוּיָהּ בְּהֵן אֵינוֹ פְּדוּיִ:

**6**

This mitzvah is practiced in every place and at all times. For how much should the son be redeemed? Five *selaim*, as [Numbers 18:16] states: "And those to be redeemed: from one month you shall redeem [according to the valuation of five silver *shekalim*]." [The redemption may be paid] in silver or in articles worth silver, i.e., movable property that is of financial worth like the *shekalim* are. Therefore, one may not redeem [a firstborn] with landed property or with servants. Nor may promissory notes [be used], because they are not of inherent worth. If one redeemed a firstborn with these, he is not redeemed.

**ז**  
כִּתְבֵּהוּ הָאֵב לִפְנֵיהֶן שֶׁהוּא חַיֵּב לוֹ חֵמֶשׁ סְלָעִים חַיֵּב לָתֵן לוֹ וּבְנֵו אֵינוֹ פְּדוּיִ. נִתֵּן לוֹ כְּלֵי שֶׁאֵינוֹ שֵׁוּה בְּשִׁוּק חֵמֶשׁ סְלָעִים וְקִבְלוּ הַלֵּהן בְּחֵמֶשׁ סְלָעִים הָרִי בְּנֵו פְּדוּיִ. נִתֵּן חֵמֶשׁ סְלָעִים לְעֹשֶׂרָה כֹּהֲנִים בֵּין בְּבֵת אַחַת בֵּין בְּזָה אַחֵר זָה יָצָא:

**7**

When a father writes to a priest that he is obligated to give him five *selaim*, the obligation takes effect, but the son is not redeemed. If he gives him a utensil that is not worth five *selaim* in the market, but the priest accepts it as if he was given five *selaim*, the son is redeemed. If he divides the five *selaim* among ten priests, whether at once or one after the other, he fulfils his obligation.

**ח**  
רָצָה הַלֵּהן לְהַחְזִיר לוֹ הַפְּדוּיִן מִחֲזִיר. וְלֹא יִתֵּן לוֹ הוּא וְדַעְתּוֹ שֶׁיַּחְזִיר. וְאִם עָשָׂה כֵּן וְהַחְזִיר לוֹ אֵין בְּנֵו פְּדוּיִ עַד שֶׁיִּגְמַר בְּלִבּוֹ לָתֵן לוֹ מַתְנָה גְּמוּרָה. וְאִם רָצָה הַלֵּהן אַחֵר כִּי לְהַחְזִיר יַחְזִיר. וְכֵן אִם פָּרַשׁ וְנִתֵּן לוֹ עַל מְנַת לְהַחְזִיר הָרִי בְּנֵו פְּדוּיִ:

**8**

If the priest desires to return [what was given for] the redemption to [the father], he may. He should not, however, give it to him with the intent that he return it. If he did so, and [the priest] returned it, his son is not redeemed. [Instead,] he must give it to him with the resolution that he is giving him a present without any reservations. Afterwards, if the priest desires to return it, he may return it. Similarly, if he gives it to him as a present with the stipulation that it be returned, his son is redeemed.

**ט**  
כֹּהֲנִים וְלוֹיִם פְּטוּרִים מִפְּדוּיִן הֵבֵן מִקֵּל וְחֹמֶר. אִם פְּטְרוּ שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּמִּדְבָּר דִּין הוּא שֶׁיִּפְטְרוּ עִצְמוֹן:

**9**

The priests and the Levites are exempt from the redemption of their firstborn, as evident from a logical deduction: If they served as the redemption of the Israelites firstborn in the desert, certainly, they themselves are exempt.

**י**  
יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵבֵא מִן הַלֵּהנֵת וּמִן הַלֵּוִיָּהּ פְּטוּר. שֶׁאֵין הַדְּבָר תְּלוּי בְּאֵב אֲלֵא בְּאֵם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר פְּטוּר רַחֵם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

**10**

An Israelite who is born to a woman of the priestly or Levite family is exempt, for this matter is not dependent on the father, but rather on the mother, as [indicated by the phrase]: "the first issue of the womb in Israel."

יא

לוֹיֵה הַמַּעֲבֵרֶת מֵעַכּוּ"ם בְּנֵה פְטוּר. וְלִהְיֹת הַמַּעֲבֵרֶת מֵעַכּוּ"ם בְּנֵה חֵיב שֶׁהָרִי נִפְסְלָה אִמּוֹ מִן הַכֹּהֵנָה בְּבַעֲלִית הָעַכּוּ"ם:

11

When a woman of the Levite family was impregnated by a gentile, her son is exempt. If, however, a woman of the priestly family was impregnated by a gentile, her son is obligated, for his mother was disqualified from the priestly family because of relations with the gentile.

יב

כֹּהֵן שֶׁנּוֹלַד לוֹ בֶּן חֵלֶל. מֵת הָאָב בְּתוֹךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם הֵבֵן חֵיב לְפָדוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ. שְׁלֹא זָכָה הָאָב בְּפִדְיוֹנוֹ. מֵת אַחֵר שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם אִינוֹ חֵיב הֵבֵן לְפָדוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ. שֶׁהָרִי זָכָה הָאָב בְּפִדְיוֹנוֹ:

12

When a priest fathers a son who is a *challal* and the father dies within 30 days [of the son's birth], the son is obligated to redeem himself, because the father did not acquire the redemption. If [the father] dies after 30 days [have passed], the son is not obligated to redeem himself, because the father acquired the redemption.

יג

הַשְּׁפָחָה שֶׁנִּשְׁתַּחֲרָה וְכוּתִית שֶׁנִּתְגַּיְרָה כְּשֶׁהִיא מֵעַבְרֹת וְיָלְדָה. אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁהוֹרְתָה שְׁלֹא בְּקִדְשָׁה הוֹאִיל וְנֹלַד בְּקִדְשָׁה חֵיב. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר פֶּטֶר רָחֵם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָרִי פֶטֶר וְרָחֵם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. אִין יָדוּעַ אִם קִדְּם שֶׁנִּתְגַּיְרָה יְלֵדָה אוֹ אַחֵר שֶׁנִּתְגַּיְרָה יְלֵדָה הַמוֹצֵיא מִחֲבֵרוֹ עָלָיו הָרָאִיָּה:

13

If a maidservant was freed - or a gentile woman converted - while she was pregnant and then she gave birth, since he was born in holiness, [the child] is obligated [to redeem himself] even though he was not conceived in holiness, as [indicated by] the phrase: "the first issue of the womb in Israel." For this child is the first issue of a womb in Israel. If it is not known whether the woman gave birth before she converted or afterwards, [we follow the principle:] When one desires to expropriate property from a colleague, the burden of proof is on him.

יד

הַכּוּתִית וְהַשְּׁפָחָה שֶׁיָּלְדָה וְאַחֵר כֶּךָ נִתְגַּיְרָה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲרָה וְיָלְדָה וְנֹלַד אַחֵר הָרִי זֶה פְטוּר שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בַּמִּדְבָּר ג' יב) (בַּמִּדְבָּר יח טו) "פֶּטֶר רָחֵם" וְאִין זֶה פֶּטֶר רָחֵם. וְכֵן הֵבֵא אַחֵר הַנִּפְלִים כֹּל נֶפֶל שֶׁאִמּוֹ טְמֵאָה יְלֵדָה הֵבֵא אַחֲרָיו אִינוֹ פֶּטֶר רָחֵם. וְכֹל נֶפֶל שֶׁאִין אִמּוֹ טְמֵאָה יְלֵדָה כְּמוֹ הַמַּפְלֵת כְּמִין דְּגִים וְחֲגָבִים אוֹ הַמַּפְלֵת יוֹם אַרְבָּעִים וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָּהֶן הֵבֵא אַחֲרָיו בְּכוֹר לִכְהֵן וְחֵיב לְפָדוֹת:

14

When a gentile woman or a maidservant gave birth and then converted or was freed and then gave birth again, [the second child] is exempt, as [indicated by] the phrase "the first issue of the womb," and this is not [the woman's] first issue of the womb.

Similar concepts apply when a son is born after a *nefal*. Whenever the mother is ritually impure due to birth because of a *nefal*, a son born afterwards is not considered the first issue of the womb. Whenever a *nefal* does not cause the mother to be ritually impure due to birth, e.g., a woman who miscarries and the issue resembles a fish or a grasshopper, a woman who miscarries on the fortieth day [after conception], or the like, a son born afterwards is [under obligation] to the priesthood and must be redeemed.

טו

חֵתֵךְ הַעֲבֵר בְּמַעֲיָה וְהוֹצִיאוֹ אִיבֵר אִיבֵר הֵבֵא אַחֲרָיו אִינוֹ פֶּטֶר רָחֵם. בֶּן שְׁמוֹנֶה חֳדָשִׁים שֶׁהוֹצִיֵא רִאשׁוֹ וְהוּא חֵי וְהִחְזִירוֹ וְמֵת. וְכֵן בֶּן תִּשְׁעָה שָׁמַת וְיָצָא רִאשׁוֹ וְהִחְזִירוֹ וְאַחֵר כֶּךָ יָצָא אַחֲיוֹ וְיָלְדָה. זֶה שֶׁיְלֵדָה אִינוֹ פֶּטֶר רָחֵם. שֶׁהָרִי נִפְטֵר בְּרִאשׁוֹ שֶׁל רִאשׁוֹן. וּמִשְׁתַּצָּא פְּדוּתוֹ פֶּטֶר הֵבֵא אַחֲרָיו:

15

When a fetus in a woman's womb was cut up and removed limb by limb, a son born afterwards is not considered to be "the first issue of her womb." When the head of a fetus that was carried for

eight months emerged alive and then was withdrawn back to the womb where it died - or the head of a stillborn fetus that was carried for nine months emerged and then was withdrawn - and afterwards the [twin] brother [of the fetus] emerged as [a viable] birth, the viable birth is not considered the first issue of the womb, for [all subsequent births] became exempt with the [emergence of] the head of the first [fetus]. As soon as its forehead emerged, it exempted those born afterwards.

**טו**

יוצא דפן והבא אחריו כדרכו שניהם פטורים. הראשון לפי שלא יצא מן הרחם והשני מפני שקדמו אחר:

**16**

When a baby is born by Caesarian section, both it and the next birth are exempt: the first because it did not emerge from the womb, and the second, because it was preceded by another birth.

**יז**

מאימתי יתחייב בפידיין. משישלם שלשים יום שנאמר (במדבר יח טז) "ופדיו מן חדש תפדה". מת הבן בתוך שלשים ואפלו ביום שלשים. וכן אם נעשה טרפה. אינו חייב בחמשה סלעים. ואם הקדים ונתן לכהן יחזיר לו הפדיון. [ואם מת אחר שלשים יום חייב בפידיין] ואם לא נתן יתן:

**17**

When does the obligation for redemption take effect? When the baby completes 30 days of life, as [Numbers 18:16] states: "And those to be redeemed should be redeemed from the age of a month." If the son died within the thirty days - even on the thirtieth day - or it became mortally ill, there is no obligation [to pay the priest] five *selaim*. If he gave the priest [the money for] the redemption beforehand, he should return it. If the baby died after its thirtieth day, the father is obligated to redeem him. If he did not give [the money to the priest], he should.

**יח**

מי שפדה בנו בתוך שלשים יום אם אמר לו מעכשו אין בנו פדוי. ואם אמר לו לאחר שלשים יום בנו פדוי ואף על פי שאין המעות קיימין לאחר שלשים יום:

**18**

[The following rules apply when] one redeems his son within 30 days of his birth: If he tells [the priest]: "I am redeeming him at this time," his son is not redeemed. If he tells him that [the gift should take effect] after 30 days, his son is redeemed even if the coins no longer exist after 30 days.

**יט**

מי שהוא ספק אם חייב בפידיין או לא הרי זה פטור שהמוציא מחברו עליו הראיה. מת האב בתוך שלשים יום הרי הבן בחזקת שלא נפדה עד שביא ראיה מאביו שפדהו קדם שנימות. מת האב לאחר שלשים יום הרי הוא בחזקת פדוי עד שיודיעוהו שלא נפדה:

**19**

If there is a doubt whether a son is obligated to be redeemed or not, he is exempt. [The rationale is that when] one desires to expropriate property from a colleague, the burden of proof is on him. If a father dies within 30 days [of his son's birth], we operate under the assumption that the son was not redeemed unless he brings proof from his father that he redeemed him before he died. If the father died after 30 days [following the son's birth], we operate under the assumption that he was redeemed unless he informed us that he was not redeemed.

**כ**

מי שלא בכרה אשתו וילדה זכר ונקבה ואין ידוע אי זה מהן יצא ראשון אין כאן לכהן כלום. ילדה שני זכרים אף על פי שאין ידוע אי זה מהן הבכור נותן חמשה סלעים לכהן. מת אחד מהן בתוך שלשים יום פטור שהמוציא מחברו עליו הראיה. מת האב בין בתוך שלשים יום בין אחר שלשים יום. בין שלא חלקו האחים בין שחלקו. ינתן מן הנכסים חמשה סלעים לכהן שכבר נתחייבו הנכסים:

**20**

When a person's wife has never given birth and she gives birth to a male and a female, but it is not known which emerged first, there is no obligation to give the priest anything.

If she gave birth to two males, even if it is not known which is the firstborn, [the father] must give five *selaim* to the priest. If one of them dies within 30 days, [the father] is exempt, [based on the principle, when] one desires to expropriate property from a colleague, the burden of proof is on him]. If the father died - whether he died within 30 days of the birth of his sons or afterwards, whether the sons divided his estate or not - five *selaim* should be given from the estate to the priest, because an obligation was already established upon the estate.

**כא**

שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁיו שָׁלַא בְּכָרוֹ וַיִּלְדוּ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים נוֹתֵן עֲשָׂרָה סְלָעִים לַכֹּהֵן. מֵת אֶחָד מֵהֶן בְּתוֹךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם אִם לָכֵהן אֶחָד נִתֵּן יַחְזִיר לוֹ חֲמִשָּׁה סְלָעִים. וְאִם לְשְׁנֵי כֹהֲנִים נָתַן אֵינוֹ יָכוֹל לְהוֹצִיא מֵהֶן שְׁהָרִי לֹא צִיָּן פְּדִיוֹן זֶה עַל בֶּן זֶה. וְכָל אֶחָד מֵהֶן יָכוֹל לומר הַחֲזִיר מִחֲבָרָי:

**21**

[The following rules apply when a man has] two wives who have not yet given birth and they give birth to two sons and [the father] gives ten *selaim* to the priest [within 30 days of their birth]. If one dies within 30 days and he had given [the ten *selaim*] to one priest, he should return five *selaim* to him. If he gave the money to two priests, he cannot expropriate the money from them, since he did not specify which son he is redeeming and each can tell him: "Have my colleague refund you."

**כב**

שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁיו שָׁלַא בְּכָרוֹ שִׁילְדוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה אוֹ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וּנְקֵבָה נוֹתֵן חֲמִשָּׁה סְלָעִים לַכֹּהֵן. שְׂאִי אֶפְשֶׁר שָׁלַא יְהִיָּה זָכָר אֶחָד מֵהֶן פְּטוֹר רַחֵם:

**22**

When a man has two wives who have not given birth yet and they give birth to a male and a female or two males and a female [and it is not known which mother gave birth to which child and which is the order of the children's births], he should give five *selaim* to a priest. [The rationale is that] it is impossible that among them there will not be one male who is the first issue of the womb.

**כג**

יִלְדוּ שְׁתֵּי נְקֵבוֹת וְזָכָר. אוֹ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וּשְׁתֵּי נְקֵבוֹת. וְאִין יָדוּעַ אִי זֶה נוֹלַד רִאשׁוֹן. אִין קָאן לָכֵהן כְּלוּם שְׂאִי אוֹמֵר נְקֵבָה נוֹלְדָה תַּחֲלָה וְאַחֲרָיָה זָכָר:

**23**

[In the above situation, if the women] give birth to two females and a male or two males and two females and it is not known which was born first, the priest is not entitled to anything. For [with regard to each mother], it is possible to say a female was born first and then a male.

**כד**

שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁיו אֶחָת בְּכָרָה וְאַחֶת לֹא בְּכָרָה וַיִּלְדוּ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וּנְתַעֲרְבוּ. נוֹתֵן חֲמִשָּׁה סְלָעִים לַכֹּהֵן. מֵת אֶחָד מֵהֶם בְּתוֹךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם הָאֵב פְּטוֹר. מֵת הָאֵב יִנָּתֵן מִן הַנְּכָסִים חֲמִשָּׁה סְלָעִים:

**24**

[When a man has] two wives, one who has already given birth and one who has not yet given birth, and they give birth to two sons who become mixed together, he must give five *selaim* to a priest. If one of the sons dies within thirty days, the father is exempt. If the father died, five *selaim* should be paid from his estate.

**כה**

יִלְדוּ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה אוֹ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וּנְקֵבָה אִין קָאן לָכֵהן כְּלוּם. שְׂאִי אוֹמֵר זֶה שָׁלַא בְּכָרָה יִלְדָה נְקֵבָה תַּחֲלָה וְאַחֲרָיָה זָכָר וְזֶה שֶׁבְּכָרָה יִלְדָה זָכָר:

**25**

[In the above situation, if the two wives] gave birth to a male and a female or two males and a female, the priest is not entitled to anything. For it is possible to say that the woman who did not give birth yet gave birth to a female first and then a male and the one who had given birth already gave birth to a male.

**כו**



שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֶׁל שְׁנֵי אָנָשִׁים שָׁלָא בְּכָרוּ וְיָלְדוּ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וְנִתְעַרְבוּ זֶה נוֹתֵן חֲמִשָּׁה סְלַעִים וְזֶה נוֹתֵן חֲמִשָּׁה סְלַעִים. נִתְּנוּ וְאַחַר כֵּן מֵת אֶחָד מִן הַבָּנִים בְּתוֹךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם. אִם לְשְׁנֵי כְּהֻנִּים נִתְּנוּ אֵינָן יְכוּלִין לְהוֹצִיא מִיָּדָן. וְאִם לִכְהֵן אֶחָד נִתְּנוּ כּוֹתֵב אֶחָד מֵהֶן לְחִבְרוֹ הַרְשָׁאָה וְיִלֵּךְ זֶה בְּהַרְשָׁאָה וְיַחְזִיר מִן הַכֹּהֵן חֲמִשָּׁה סְלַעִים:

**26**

When there are two men who have wives who had not yet given birth and they both gave birth to males and they became mixed together, each father must give five *selaim*. [The following rules apply if] they both gave [that amount] within thirty days and then one of the sons died within that time. If they gave the money to two priests, they cannot expropriate it from them. If they both gave it to the same priest, one should write a document giving power of attorney to the other and then the one with power of attorney should expropriate five *selaim* from the priest.

**כז**

יָלְדוּ זָכָר וְנִקְבָּה וְנִתְעַרְבוּ הָאֲבוֹת פְּטוּרִין וְהַבֵּן חַיֵּב לְפָדוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ. וְכֵן מִבְּכֹרֵת שָׁלָא שְׁהֵתָה אַחַר בַּעֲלָהּ שְׁלֹשָׁה חֳדָשִׁים וְיָלְדָה וְאִין יָדוּעַ אִם בֶּן תִּשְׁעָה לְרֵאשׁוֹן אוֹ בֶּן שִׁבְעָה לְאַחֲרוֹן שְׁנִיָּהּ פְּטוּרִין. וְהַבֵּן חַיֵּב לְפָדוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ:

**27**

[In the above situation, if the women] gave birth to a male and a female and they became mixed together, the fathers are exempt and the son is obligated to redeem himself. Similar [laws apply when] a woman who has not given birth previously does not wait after [being divorced from] her [first] husband three months [before marrying] and gives birth [to a child, whose lineage is doubtful]. It is not known whether he is the first [husband's] son having been born after nine months or the last husband's son, having been born after seven. Both fathers are exempt and the son is obligated to redeem himself.

**כח**

יָלְדוּ שְׁתֵּי נְקִיבוֹת וְזָכָר אוֹ שְׁתֵּי נְקִיבוֹת וְשְׁנֵי זָכָרִים אֵין כָּאֵן לִכְהֵן כָּלוּם:

**28**

[In the above situation, if the women] gave birth to two females and a male or two females and two males, the priest is not entitled to anything.

**כט**

שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֶׁל שְׁנֵי אָנָשִׁים אַחַת בְּכָרָה וְאַחַת לֹא בְּכָרָה וְיָלְדוּ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים. זֶה שָׁלָא בְּכָרָה אֲשֶׁתּוֹ נוֹתֵן חֲמִשָּׁה סְלַעִים לִכְהֵן. יָלְדוּ זָכָר וְנִקְבָּה אֵין כָּאֵן לִכְהֵן כָּלוּם:

**29**

[The following laws apply when] there are two wives of two men and one gave birth previously and one did not [and they gave birth and the infants became mixed together]. If they gave birth to two males, the father whose wife had not given birth previously must give five *selaim* to a priest. If they gave birth to a male and a female, the priest does not receive anything.

**ל**

יָלְדוּ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וְנִקְבָּה זֶה שָׁלָא בְּכָרָה אֲשֶׁתּוֹ נוֹתֵן חֲמִשָּׁה סְלַעִים. שָׁלָא נְפֹטָר אֲלָא בְּשְׁנֵי סְפָקוֹת אִם אֲשֶׁתּוֹ יָלְדָה זָכָר בְּלִבָּד חַיֵּב וְאִם הִיא יָלְדָה הַזָּכָר וְהַנְּקִיבָה חַיֵּב אֲלָא אִם כֵּן יָלְדָה נְקִיבָה תַּחֲלָה. וְהוֹאִיל וְהַדָּבָר רַחוּק יִתֵּן פְּדִיוֹנוֹ:

**30**

[In the above situation, if the women] gave birth to two males and a female, the man whose wife had not given birth previously should give five *selaim*. The rationale is that his exemption implies a compounded doubt. For if his wife gave birth to a male only, he is obligated. And if she gave birth to a male and a female, he is obligated unless she gave birth to the female first. Since the probability of this is distant, he should give the money for the redemption.

*Sefer Hachinuch*, the anonymous thirteenth-century Spanish halakhic code that follows the order of the *mitzvot* as given in the *Torah* (based upon those identified in Rambam's *Sefer HaMitzvot*), summarizes the laws of *Pidyon Haben* more concisely than the *Mishneh Torah*, but is particularly valuable in providing a contemporaneous detailed description of the ritual itself:<sup>7</sup>

SEFER HACHINUCH, 392

וכן למדונו רבותינו שבזמננו, שבסדר כזה עושין פדיון הבן, מביאין כוס יין והדס לבית אבי הבן או למקום אחר, והכהן שיבחר בו האב לתת לו פדיון בנו מברך תחלה על היין ועל ההדס, ואחר כך מברך ברכה זו ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדש עבר במעי אמו, ולארבעים יום חלק את אבריו מאתיים ויפח באפיו וגו'. עור ובשר (בראשית ב ז) ארבעים ושמונה אברים, ואחר כך נפח בו נשמה, כדכתיב עור ובשר תלבישני ובעצמות וגידים תסככני. וצוה לו (איוב י יא) הלבישו, ובעצמות וגידים סוככו, כדכתיב מאכל ומשתה, דבש וחלב, להתענג בו, וזמן לו שני מלאכי השרת לשמרו בתוך מעי אמו, דכתיב חיים וחסד וגו' אמו אומרת זה בני בכורי, שבו פתח הקדוש ברוך הוא דלתי בטני, אביו אומר, זה בני בכורי הוא, וכל בכור אדם בבניך תפדה, יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהי, שכשם (שמות יג יג) ואני מזהר לפדותו. שנאמר שזכית את אביו לפדותו כן תזכהו לתורה לחפה ולמעשים טובים, ברוך אתה ה' מקדש בכורי ישראל לפדיונם. ואבי הבן מברך שתיים (רמב"ם בכורים פי"א הל"ה) על פדיון הבן, ושהחינו. ונותן לכהן הפדיון הידוע, שהוא חמש סלעים, כמו שקצוב בתורה, והם ששים ארגיני"ץ של כסף צרוף במשקל ארצנו, ואחר הפדיון, מברך הכהן שלש ברכות אלו שכתבנו

Our Rabbis also taught us that in our time, we do the redemption of the first-born in an order like this: They bring a cup of wine and a myrtle branch to the home of the father of the son or to [some] other place, and the priest to whom the father chooses to give the redemption of his son blesses first over the wine and over the myrtle and then recites this blessing - "Blessed are You, our Lord, King of the Universe, Who sanctified the fetus in his mother's innards, and at forty days individuated his limbs into two hundred and forty-eight limbs, and then breathed in the spirit of life, as it is written (*Genesis 2:7*), 'and He breathed in his nostrils ...'; He clothed him with skin and flesh, and covered him with bones and ligaments, as it is written (*Job 10:11*), 'He clothed me with flesh and skin and covered me with bones and ligaments.' He appointed food and drink for him, honey and milk to bring him joy, and appointed two ministering angels to guard him in his mother's womb, as it is written (*Job 10:12*), 'with life and kindness, etc.'" His mother says, "This is my firstborn son, with which God opened the doors of my belly." His father says, "This is my first-born and I am warned about redeeming him, as it is stated (*Exodus 13:13*), 'and all the first-born of man, your sons shall you redeem.' May it be the will in front of You, Lord, my God, that as You have allowed his father to merit to redeem him, so too should you allow him to merit Torah, marriage and good deeds. Blessed are You, Lord, who sanctified the first born of Israel to be redeemed." The father of the son then recites two blessings: 'on the redemption of the first born'; and 'Who has allowed us to live.' He gives the well-known redemption to the priest, which is five *selā*, as specified in the *Torah*. This is equal to sixty

<sup>7</sup> *Sefer HaChinukh 392* | *Sefaria* [online], at Sefaria.org. 2020, available at [https://www.sefaria.org/Sefer\\_HaChinukh.392?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Sefer_HaChinukh.392?lang=bi)

*argents* of refined silver in our land. And after the redemption, the priest recites these three blessings that we wrote.

עוד כתב הרמב"ן זכרונו לברכה, שבשעה שנותן האב כסף פדיונו לכהן, שנותן בנו ביד הכהן ואומר לו הכהן איזה חביב עליך יותר, בנך או חמש סלעים הללו? והאב משיב בני חביב עלי. מיד נוטל הכהן הדינרין ומוליכן בידו על ראש הבן ואומר זה תחת זה, חלוף זה, זה מחלל על זה, יצא זה לכהן, ויכנס זה הבן לחיים ולתורה וליראת שמים, יהי רצון, שכשם שנכנס לפדיון כן יכנס לתורה ולחפה ולמעשים טובים, (תהלים קכ"א ה) 'ונאמר אמן. ונתן הכהן את ידיו על ראש הבן ומברכו כפי שידוע לברכו, כגון "שמרך וגו' "שמרך מכל רע ישמר את נפשך וגו' (תהלים שם ז). ומוציאו (משלי ג ב) 'כי ארך ימים ושנות חיים וגו' [לכל חפצו. ויתר פרטיה, במסכת בכורות יו"ד סימן שה

Ramban, may his memory be blessed, also wrote that when the father gives the money to the priest, he should first give the child into the priest's hand, and the priest should say, "Which is more beloved to you, your son or these five *selā*?" And the father responds, "My son is more beloved to me." The priest immediately takes the silver coins and passes them over the head of the son and says, "This is in the place of this, traded for this, this is rendered no longer sacred through this. This goes out to the priest and this child should come to life and *Torah* and fear of heaven. May it be His will that as this one came to redemption, may he also come to *Torah*, marriage and good deeds, and let us say *amen*." The priest places his hands on the son's head and blesses him, according to how he knows to bless him, such as "May the Lord guard you, etc." (*Psalms* 121:5), or "As length of days and years of life, etc." (*Proverbs* 3:2) or "The Lord shall protect you from all evil and guard your soul, etc." (*Psalms* 121:7). And [the father] takes him out for all of his will. [This] and the rest of its details are elucidated in Tractate *Bekhorot*.

The laws of *Pidyon Haben* as articulated in the Yosef Karo's transformational halakhic compendium, *Shulchan Aruch* (1563), still serve as normative authoritative halakhic references for the traditional Ashkenazic world. There, we find what appears to be a confluence of details found in the *Mishneh Torah*, with additional commentary and added contemporaneous practice. Once again, the classic issues of who is obligated to be redeemed, when the redemption must take place, qualifications of valid forms of payment, the structure and content of the ritual itself, and clarifying determinations of potentially challenging situations that relate to the father, mother, and/or child are all explored and addressed, providing clear guidance within a biologically Jewish framework for fulfilling this positive *mitzvah*.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 305 | Alhatorah*. [online], at Alharorah.org 2020, available at [https://shulchanarukh.alhatorah.org/Main/Yoreh\\_Deah/305.28#m7e1n6](https://shulchanarukh.alhatorah.org/Main/Yoreh_Deah/305.28#m7e1n6). English translation by Idan Irelander and Jeremy Lipton.

יורה דעה ש"ה

מי חייב בפדיון בכור, ומתי ראוי לפדיון, וכל דיניו, ובו ל"א סעיפים

Who is obligated to [fulfill the *mitzvah* of] *Pidyon Haben* (Redemption of the Firstborn), and when is it proper to redeem, including all of its laws; contained in thirty-one *s'ifim*:

(א) מצות עשה לפדות כל איש מישראל בנו, שהוא בכור לאמו הישראלית, בה' סלעים שהם ק"כ מעים שהם שלשים דרהמים כסף מזקק. [ועין לעיל סי' רצ"ד כמה היא המעה. ויש אומרים שה' סלעים הם בערך שני זהובים רייני"ש, שהם ב' זהובים פולני"ש (פסקי מהרא"י סי' מ"ח).]

It is a positive commandment to redeem every Jewish son who is the first-born (*bechor*) son of his Jewish mother, with five *selaim* [weights or coins equal to two common *shekels*] which are equivalent to 120 *ma'im* (weights), that they are 30 *derhamim* of refined silver. {See the above Chapter 274 [to understand the] the value of a *ma'ah*}. And there are those who say that five *selaim* are equivalent to two Rhenish gold coins, that are equal to two Polish gold coins (*Piskei Mahara"i*, S. 48).}

(ב) אין האשה חייבת לפדות את בנה (ל' רמב"ם פ' י"א מהלכות בכורים ד"ב).

A woman is not obligated to redeem her son. (see Rambam, Chapter 11 from *Hilchot Bechorim*, 4:2).

(ג) אלו החמשה סלעים נותן לכהן בכסף או בשוה כסף מכל דבר שירצה, חוץ מקרקעות ועבדים ושיטות; ואם פדהו בהם, אינו פדוי.

These five *selaim* may be given to the *kohen* in silver, or the equivalent of the value of silver from anything that he wants, except for property, slaves, or deeds; and if [the father] redeemed [a first-born] with these, [the son] is not redeemed.

(ד) כתב לכהן שהוא חייב לו חמשה סלעים בשביל פדיון בנו, חייב לתנם לו ובנו אינו פדוי (טור בשם ה"ג). {אמר לכהן שנתן לו לפדות את בנו, אסור לחזר בו. מיהו אם חזר, הוי חזרה (מרדכי ס"פ כל הגט) ועין לעיל סי' רס"ה.}

[When a father] writes to a *kohen* that he is obligated to give him five *selaim*, the obligation takes effect, but the son is not redeemed (Tur, in the name of the Rama). {If he says to the *kohen* that he gives it to him to redeem his son, [the *kohen*] is forbidden to return it. But if he returns it, it is returned (*Mordechai*, end of chapter "*Kol Haget'*") and see above S. 265}.

(ה) נתן לו כלי שאינו שוה בשוק חמשה סלעים, וקבלו הפנה בחמשה סלעים, הרי בנו פדוי; (רמב"ם שם) והוא שישוה חמשה סלעים לשום אדם.

If [the father] gave him an item that is not worth five *selaim* in the market place, but the *kohen* accepted it as if it were worth five *selaim*, behold, the son is redeemed (Rambam *ibid*); and this is also so if it [the item] doesn't have the value of five *selaim* to anyone.

(ו) נתן לו כלי בפדיון בנו, סתם, אם הוא שוה ה' סלעים, אף על פי שלא שמו אותו בתחלה, בנו פדוי. {הגה: ואם אינו שוה, אין בנו פדוי (טור). ואם הפנה רוצה להחזיק בכלי, אין צריך להחזיר לו, והוא ישלים לו עד ה' סלעים (מהרי"ל).}

If [the father] gave to him an item in order to redeem his son, purposely, if it has the value of five *selaim*, even though they didn't value it in advance, his son is redeemed. {Gloss: And if it

does not have the value [of five *selaim*], his son is not redeemed (Tur). And if the kohen wants to keep the item, he is not required to return it to him, and he will [need to] complete it to the value of five *selaim* (Mahari"א)}

(ז) נתן ה' סלעים, אפלו לעשרה כהנים, בין בבת אחת בין בזה אחר זה, בנו פדוי.

If [the father] gave the five *selaim*, and even if [he divided them] among ten *kohanim*, whether at once or one after the other, his son is redeemed.

(ח) אם רצה הכהן להחזיר לו הפדיון, רשאי (ל' רמב"ם שם ד"ח); אבל לא יתן הוא לפנה על מנת שיחזיר לו, ואם עשה כן והחזיר לו [ונדעת הכהן היתה מתחלה שלא לקבלה על מנת להחזיר (כך משמע בבית יוסף)], אין בנו פדוי עד שיגמר בלבו לתן לו מתנה גמורה, ואם רצה הכהן אחר כך להחזיר יחזיר. ולא יתן הכהן רגיל להחזיר לכל, שלא להפסיד לשאר כהנים, שמתוך כך לא יתנו הכל פדיוני בכוריהם אלא לו. אבל לעניים רשאי להחזיר בכל פעם. וכל שכן שמזה הטעם לא יקבלם על מנת להחזיר; ומכל מקום אם עבר וקבלם, ופרש שנותן לו על מנת להחזיר, הבן פדוי, דמתנה על מנת להחזיר שמה מתנה. [ונדוקא שאמר: על מנת להחזיר, אבל אי אמר: הא לך ה' סלעים ותחזירם לי, לא הוי מתנה ואין בנו פדוי (רשב"א סי' קצ"ח ותשנ"ט)].

If the *kohen* wishes to return to him [what was given for] the redemption, he may to do so (see Rambam, *ibid*, 4:8); but he may not give it to the *kohen* with the intent that he return it to him, and if he did this and it is returned to him {and the *kohen* had known from the beginning that he will would receive it under the condition that it would be returned to him (this according to Beit Yosef),} his son is not redeemed until he resolves to give it to him as a unrestricted gift, and if the *kohen* wishes to return it afterward, he may return it. And the *kohen* should not customarily return to everyone, so that it will not be a loss for the rest of the *kohanim*, that from this precedent one should not generally assume that everyone would not give the money of redemption for their first-born sons [like they did] to him. But to the poor, it is permitted to return and to him in all cases. All the more so, from that logical basis, he shall not accept in order to return it. And in all places if it happened and they received it, and explained that they are giving to him a gift to return, the son is redeemed; a gift that is meant to be returned is still a gift. {And if he actually said: a gift in order to return, but if he said: here are five *selaim* for you, and you will return them to me, [then] it is not a gift and his son is not redeemed (Rashb"א, S. 198 and 759).}

(ט) הפריש חמשה סלעים לפדיון בנו, ונאבדו, חייב באחריותו עד שיבואו לידי פהו.

If [the father] set aside five *selaim* to redeem his son, and they were lost, he is obligated and responsible until the *kohen* receives them.

(י) בשעה שנותן הפדיון לפנה מקבר: אקב"ו על פדיון הבן, וחוזר ומקבר: שהחינו, ואחר כך נותן הפדיון לפנה, ואם פודה עצמו, מקבר: אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לפדות הבכור, ומקבר: שהחינו (רמב"ם שם ד"ה). {הגה: ויש אומרים דאף הפודה עצמו מקבר: על פדיון הבכור, וכן נוהגין (טור וריב"ש סי' קל"א). ועין לעיל סי' רס"ה. יש אומרים דמיתתי ליה לבכור קמיה פהו ומודיע ליה שהוא בכור פטר רחם, והפנה שואל אותו: במאי בעית טפי, בבנג בכורך או חמשה סלעים דמחייבת לפדות בהו, והאב אומר: בבני בכורי והילך חמשה סלעים בפדיונו, ובהדי שנותן לו המעות מקבר ברכות הנזכרות (טור ורא"ש בשם הגאונים), וכן נוהגין במדינות אלו, אם האב אצל הבן. אבל אם אינו אצלו, פודה אותו בלאו הכי, אלא אומר לפנה שיש לו בכור לפדותו, והוא אומר: במאי בעית טפי וכו' (כן הוא בהגהת מרדכי ס"פ האשה וכן כתב הבית יוסף בשם סמ"ק). ואם האב היתה רוצה להניח הבן לפנה, אינו יוצא, רק צריך לפדותו (פסקי מהרא"י סי' קל"ה). ויש שכתבו שנהגו לעשות סעדה בשעת הפדיון (שם בהגהות מרדכי ומהרי"ל ות"ה סי' רס"ט). ואם יין בעיר, מקבר הפנה על היין מיד אחר הפדיון (מהרי"ל). וכן נוהגין עכשו כדי לפרוסמי מלתא. ואין נוהגין לבקר שהשמחה במקומו (אבודרהם). ואין האב יכול לפדות על ידי שליח. וגם אין בית דין פודין אותו בלא האב (ריב"ש סי' קל"א).}

At a time when [the father] gives the redemption to the *kohen*, he should recite the *b'racha*: [Blessed are You...] "who sanctified us by His *mitzvot*, and commanded us regarding *Pidyon Haben*," and afterwards he recites the *b'racha*: *Shehecheyanu*, and then [the father] gives the redemption [money] to the *kohen*, and if [the son] redeems himself, he should recite the *b'racha*: [Blessed are You...] "who sanctified us by His *mitzvot* and commanded us to redeem the firstborn," and then recite the *b'racha*: *shehecheyanu* (Rambam, *ibid* 4:5). {Gloss: And there are those who say that even the one who performs the redemption itself needs to recite a *b'racha* on the redemption of the firstborn, and this is the custom) (Tur and Riba"sh S. 131). And see above Chapter 265. There are those who say that when [the father] brings the firstborn to the *kohen* and declares in front of him that he is a *bechor peter rechem*, and the *kohen* asks him: "What do you want, your own firstborn or the five *selaim* with which you are required to redeem?" And the father answers: "My firstborn son, and there are five *selaim* for his redemption," and when he gives him the coins, he invokes the blessings of remembrance (Tur and Ro"sh in the name of the Geonim). These are the customs in those countries if the father is in possession of the son. But, if the son is not in his possession, he redeems him anyway, however he informs the *kohen* that he has a firstborn to be redeemed and he says: What do you want, etc. (it is like this in *Hagaat Mordechai*, end of chapter "*Ha'isha*" and similarly written in Beit Yosef in the name of *Sefer Mitzvot Katan*). And if the father were to hand the son to the *kohen*, he has not fulfilled his obligation, but [rather] he is required to redeem him (*Piskei Mahar"i* S. 135). And there are those who wrote that it was customary to have a meal at the time of redemption (*B'haghot Mordechai* *ibid* and Mahari"l and *Terumat HaDeshen* S. 269). And if there is wine in the city, the *kohen* should bless for the wine immediately following the redemption (Mahari"l). And this is the custom today in order to publicize the practice. And it is not customary to bless while the *simcha* is in his dwelling place (Abudarham). And the father cannot redeem through a representative. And also, a *beit din* cannot redeem without the father (Riba"sh S. 131).

(יא) אין הבכור ראוי לפדיון עד שיעברו עליו שלשים יום; ואחר שלשים יום יפדנו מיד, שלא ישקה המצוה. ואם חל יום ל"א להיות בשבת, אין פודין אותו בשבת, אלא ימתין עד יום א'. {יש אומרים דאין לעשות פדיון הבן בחל המועד (במהרי"ו בשם ספר המצות מצוה ר"ר), ויש מתירין (תוספות פ"ק דמ"ק), וכן עקר.}

The firstborn is not eligible for redemption until thirty days have passed over him; and after thirty days, he should be redeemed immediately, lest the *mitzvah* be delayed. And if the thirty first day falls on *Shabbat*, you shall not redeem on *Shabbat*, rather, you will wait until Sunday. {There are those who say that one may not have a *Pidyon Haben* on *Chol Hamoed*, Mahari"l *ibid*, *Sefer Hamitzvot*, *Mitzvah* 220); and there are those who permit it (*Tosafot*, first chapter of *Moed Katan*) and similar principle).

(יב) מת הבן בתוך שלשים, ואפלו ביום שלשים, וכן אם נעשה טרפה קדם שעברו עליו שלשים יום, אינו חייב בפדיון; ואפלו הקדים ונתן לכהן הפדיון, יחזירונו לו. {מת לאחר שלשים, חייב לפדותו (טור) ולברך על הפדיון, אבל לא יברך שהחינו (ד"ע וכן הוא במהרי"ק סוף שרש מ"ט).}

If the son dies within thirty days and even on the thirtieth day, and if he became a *treifa* before thirty days have passed, he is not obligated for redemption. And even if he gave the redemption to *kohen* in advance, [the *kohen*] should return it to him. {If died after thirty days, he must redeem him (Tur) and recite the *b'racha* over the redemption, but will not recite the *Shehecheyanu* blessing (in his own words, and similarly in the Mahari"l *Sof Shores* 59).}

(יג) מי שפדה בנו בתוך שלשים יום, אם אמר ליה: מעכשו, אין בנו פדוי. ואם אמר ליה: לאחר שלשים יום, בנו פדוי ואף על פי שאין המעות קימים לאחר ל' יום. {הגה: ויש אומרים דאם אין המעות קימים או

שְׁהִחְזִירֵן לְאֵב תּוֹךְ ל', אֶפְלוּ בְּדִיעֲבַד אֵין בְּנוּ פְדוּי (מֵהֲרָא"י בַת"ה סִימָן רס"ד וּבִכְתָּבּוּ סִימָן רל"ד); וְטוֹב לְהַחְמִיר לְחַזֵּר לְפָדוּתוֹ. מִי שֶׁהוּא סֹפֵק אִם הוּא חַיֵּב בְּפָדְיוֹן, פְּטוּר, שֶׁהִמּוּצִיא מִחֲבֵרוֹ עָלָיו הָרָאִיָּה.

[The following rule applies when] one redeems his son within thirty days [after his birth], if he said to [the *kohen*]: [I am redeeming him] at this time, his son is not redeemed. And if he tells him [that the gift should take effect] after thirty days, his son is redeemed, and even though the coins may no longer exist after thirty days. {Gloss: And there are those who say that if the coins don't exist, or were returned to the father within thirty days, even after the fact, his son is not redeemed (Mahara"i 402:5 S. 264 and in his *Ketavav* S. 234). And it is better to stringent, so he will return to redeem him.} Whoever is doubtful whether he owes a ransom, he is not obligated, for the one who takes out from his friend, the evidence is upon him [the plaintiff bears the burden of proof].

(יד) מֵת הָאֵב בְּתוֹךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם, הֲרִי הֵבֵן בְּחֻזְקָתָהּ שֶׁלֹּא נִפְדָּה, עַד שֶׁיָּבִיא רָאִיָּה שֶׁפָּדְאוֹ אָבִיו. וְאִם מֵת הָאֵב לְאַחַר שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם, בְּחֻזְקָתָהּ שֶׁנִּפְדָּה עַד שֶׁיּוֹדִיעוּהוּ שֶׁצָּנָה בְּשַׁעַת מִיתָהּ וְאָמַר שֶׁלֹּא נִפְדָּה.

If the father dies within thirty days, behold the son is presumed to not to have been redeemed, until he brings evidence that his father had redeemed him. And if the father dies after thirty days, he is presumed to have been redeemed until he is informed that he was commanded [to do so] at the time of his [father's] death and he said that [the son] was not redeemed.

(טו) עֵבֶר הָאֵב וְלֹא פָדָה אֶת בְּנוֹ, כְּשִׁיגְדִיל, חַיֵּב לְפָדוּת עֲצָמוֹ. וְיִישׁ מִי שֶׁכָּתַב דְּכוּתָבִין לוֹ עַל טֶסֶט שֶׁל כֶּסֶף שֶׁאִינוֹ נִפְדָּה וְתוֹלִין לוֹ בְּצִנּוּאוֹ, כְּדִי שֶׁיִּדְעַע לְפָדוּת עֲצָמוֹ כְּשִׁיגְדִיל (מֵהֲרִי"ל). הִיָּה הוּא לְפָדוּת וּבְנוֹ לְפָדוּת, וְיָפְדָה עֲצָמוֹ תַּחֲלָה, וְאַחַר כֵּן יִפְדָּה אֶת בְּנוֹ. וְאִם אֵין לוֹ אֶלֶּא כְּדִי פְדִיוֹן אֶחָד, יִפְדָּה עֲצָמוֹ.

If the father transgressed and did not redeem his son, when the son grows up, he must redeem himself. {(And there is someone who wrote that one writes on a plate of silver "not redeemed", and they hang it on [the unredeemed child's] neck, so he remembers to redeem himself when he is older (Mahari"ו).} If he has to redeem [himself] and [also is obligated to] redeem his son, he should redeem himself first and then [redeem] his son. And if he only has enough for one redemption, he should redeem himself.

(טז) אִם אֵין לוֹ נְכָסִים בְּנֵי חוּרִין כְּדִי פְדִיוֹן, אֵין הִפְהֵן גּוֹבָה מֵהִמְשַׁעֲבָדִים, אֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁקָּדַם חוֹב הַפְדִּיוֹן לְחוֹב הַבַּעַל חוֹב.

If [the father] has no available assets to use for a redemption, the *kohen* does not charge from the enslaved, even though the debt for the redemption precedes the debt for the debtor.

(יז) אֵין פְדִיוֹן הַבְּכוֹר תְּלוּי אֶלֶּא בְּפֶטֶר רַחֵם, שֶׁאִם אִינוֹ בְּכוֹר לְאֵם אֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁהוּא בְּכוֹר לְאֵב אִינוֹ חַיֵּב בְּפָדְיוֹן. וְאִם יֵשׁ לוֹ כֶּמָּה נְשִׁים, וְיִישׁ לוֹ בְּכוֹר מִכָּל אַחַת וְאַחַת, חַיֵּב לְפָדוּת אֶת כָּלֶם.

The redemption of the firstborn only depends on [being a mother's] *peter rechem*, that if [the child] is not the *bechor* of the mother, even though he may be the *bechor* of the father, he is not obligated to be redeemed. And if the father has several wives, and he has a *bechor* from every one of them, [the father] is obligated to redeem them all.

(יח) כֹּהֲנִים וְלוֹיִם פְּטוּרִים מִפְדִּיוֹן הַבֵּן. וְאֶפְלוּ כֹּהֲנֵת וְלוֹיָהּ נְשׂוּאָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, אֵין הֵבֵן חַיֵּב בְּפָדְיוֹן, שֶׁאֵין הַדְּבָר תְּלוּי בְּאֵב אֶלֶּא בְּאֵם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: פֶּטֶר רַחֵם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל (בַּמִּדְבָּר ג', יב) וְאִם נִתְעַבְּרָה מֵעוֹבָד כּוֹכָבִים, בֵּן הַלוֹיָהּ פְּטוּר מִפְדִּיוֹן, וּבֵן הַכֹּהֲנֵת חַיֵּב בְּפָדְיוֹן, שֶׁהֲרִי נִתְחַלְלָה אִמּוֹ מִן הַכֹּהֲנָה בְּכַעֲלֵת הָעוֹבָד כּוֹכָבִים. (הֲגָה: וְאִם הִיא אוֹמֶרֶת שֶׁמִּיִּשְׂרָאֵל נִתְעַבְּרָה, וְהִישְׂרָאֵל מִכַּחֲשָׁה וְאָמַר שֶׁמֵּעוֹבָד כּוֹכָבִים נִתְעַבְּרָה, הֵבֵן פְּטוּר מִן הַפְדִּיוֹן (ת"ה סִימָן רס"ד). {

*Kohanim* and *leviim* are exempt from *Pidyon Haben*. And even a *kohenet* or a *leviah* who may be married to an Israelite man, their son is not obligated to be redeemed, because the matter does not depend on the father, but rather on the mother, as it is said: “*peter rechem b’yisrael*” [“the first to open the womb in Israel”] (Num. 3:12). And if she got pregnant by a non-Jew, the *leviah*’s son is exempt from redemption, but the *kohenet*’s son is obligated for redemption, for behold his mother desecrated the the priesthood through sexual intercourse with a non-Jew. {Gloss: And if she says that she got pregnant by an Israelite and the Israelite denies it and says that she got pregnant from a non-Jew, the son is exempt from redemption}. (*Terumat HaDeshen* S. 264).}

(יט) כהן שנולד לו בן חלל, מת האב בתוך שלשים יום חיב הבן לפדות את עצמו, שלא זכה האב בפדיונו. ואם מת האב לאחר שלשים יום, כבר זכה האב בפדיונו וירשו בנו ממנו, הלכה יפריש הפדיון ויעבדנו לעצמו.

Should a *hallal* son [one that is not considered a *kohen* because of the father’s improper relationship] be born to a *kohen*, if the father died within thirty days, the son will be obligated to redeem himself, as the father did not achieve his redemption. And if the father died after thirty days, the father already achieved his redemption and the son inherited from him, so he will set aside the redemption and delay it for himself.

(כ) השפחה שנשתחררה וכותית שנתגיירה כשהן מעברות, וילדו, אף על פי שהורתו שלא בקדשה, הואיל ונולד בקדשה חיב, שנאמר: פטר רחם בישראל (במדבר ג, יב) והרי פטרו רחם בישראל. אין ידוע אם קדם שנתגיירה או אחר שנתגיירה, המוציא מחברו עליו הראיה.

Should [either] a female servant who was released or a non-Jewish woman [complete the process of] conversion while they were pregnant and then gave birth, even though they conceived when they were in an unsanctified state, since the child was born in a sanctified state, [the child] is obligated [to be redeemed]. As it is said: “*peter rechem b’yisrael*” (Num. 3:12). And behold, they opened the womb of Israel. If one doesn’t know whether [the birth took place] before she converted or after she converted, the one who takes out from his friend, the evidence is upon him [the plaintiff bears the burden of proof].

(כא) העובדת כוכבים והשפחה שילדו ואחר כך נתגיירה ונשתחררו, וילדו אחר כך, פטור, שאין זה פטר רחם.

Should the non-Jewish woman or the female servant give birth, if she converted and if [the female servant] was released after that, and then they gave birth, [the child is] exempt [from redemption], as this is not [a case of] *peter rechem*.

(כב) בן ח' חדשים שהוציא ראשו והוא חי, והחזירו ומת, או בן ט' שהוציא ראשו, אפלו אחר שמת, והחזרו ואחר כך יצא אחיו וילדה וילד קימא, אינו פטר רחם, שהרי נפטר בראשו של ראשון, ומשתצא פדתו פוטר הבא אחריו. וכן המפלת כמין בהמה, חיה ועוף שחצי פרצוף פניהם דומה לצורת אדם, או סנדל או שליא או שפיר מרקם (פי' חתיכה של בשר בצורת אדם, ערוך) או שיצא הולד מחתך איברים איברים, הנולד אחר כל אחד מאלו אינו פטר רחם (לשון טור).

Should an [unborn] eight-month boy [fetus] whose head came out and was alive, and he returned, and [then] died, or an [unborn] nine-month boy [fetus] whose head came out and was returned, and afterward his brother came out, and then she gave birth to [this] new baby, he [the one who was born] is not considered a *peter rechem*, for behold, he was born after the head of the first child. And when his head came out, it exempted the one who came after him. And similarly, if the discharge is like a beast, an animal or a fowl that half of their face is similar to a human being’s



shape, or a sandal or a placenta, or a textured amnion (meaning to the cut of a flesh as the shape of a sandal, and the meaning of placenta, the pocket in which the fetus is laying inside of it, and the meaning of a textured amnion, a piece of flesh that has a shape of a human being, edited), or if the baby comes out in pieces, limb after limb, the baby who comes after the limbs is not a *peter rechem* (according to Tur).

(כג) בן ח' חדשים שהוציא ראשו מת, והמפלת שפיר מלא דם או מלא מים או מלא גונים, והמפלת כמין דגים וחגבים, שקצים ורמשים, והמפלת ליום ארבעים, הנולד אחר כל אלו בכור לפדיון. {וכל זמן שאין איבריו מרקמים, אין פוטר הבא אחריו, ואפלו בזמן הזה סומכין על זה (מהרי"ק שרש קמ"ג).}

Should an [unborn] eight-month boy [fetus], whose head came out and was dead, and the amnion discharge was full of blood, or full of water, or full of shades, and the discharge was like fish and grasshoppers, detested things and insects and the discharge of forty days, a [son] who is born after all these, he is considered a *bechor* for [the sake of] redemption. {And as long as his limbs are not textured, the one [who is born] after this is not exempt [from redemption], and even at this time we depend on this (Mahari"k *Shoresh* 143).}

(כד) יוצא דפן והנולד אחריו כדרפנו, שניהם פטורין. הראשון, מפני שלא יצא מהרחם; והשני, מפני שקדמו אחר.

Should an exceptional child be born [through Caesarian section] and then an ordinary one [is born and] comes out after him, both are exempt [from redemption]. The first [is exempt from redemption], because he did not come out of the womb; and the second [is exempt from redemption], because he was preceded [by the other who was] different.

(כה) מי שלא בכרה אשתו, וילדה זכר ונקבה, ואין ידוע איזה מהם יצא ראשון, אין כאן לכהן כלום. ילדה שני זכרים, אף על פי שאין ידוע איזה מהם הבכור, נותן חמשה סלעים לכהן. מת אחד מהם בתוך ל' יום, פטור, דשמה הבכור מת והמוציא מחברו עליו הראיה.

Should a woman who never before had given birth, gave birth to [both] a male and a female [baby], and there is no certainty who came first, there would be nothing to give to the *kohen* here [for redemption]. Should she give birth to two males, although it is not known which of them is the *bechor*, he [the father] should give five *selaim* to the *kohen* [for redemption]. If one of them dies within thirty days, the [remaining child] would be exempt [from redemption], since perhaps the *bechor* died, since the one who gives it from his friend, the evidence is upon him [the plaintiff bears the burden of proof].

(כו) מת האב קדם שפדאן, בין מת תוך ל' בין מת לאחר ל', והבנים קימים, נותנין בין שניהם ה' סלעים, אפלו חלקו כבר הנקטים.

Should the father die before redeeming them, whether within thirty days [after they were born] or after thirty days, and the boys are alive, five *selaim* should be given [to the *kohen* for redemption] on behalf of the two of them, even if the [father's] assets were already divided.

(כז) שתי נשיו שלא בכרו, וילדו שני זכרים, נותן עשר סלעים לכהן. מת אחד מהם בתוך ל' יום, אם לכהן אחד נתן, יחזיר לו ה' סלעים; ואם לשני פהנים נתן, אינו יכול להוציא מהם, שהרי לא עין פדיון זה על בן זה, וכל אחד יאמר: אני תופס בשביל החי. ילדו זכר ונקבה, או שני זכרים ונקבה, נותן ה' סלעים לכהן. ואם מת אחד מהזכרים תוך ל' יום, אינו נותן לכהן כלום. ילדו שתי נקבות וזכר, או שני זכרים ושתי נקבות, ואין ידוע איזה נולד ראשון, אין כאן לכהן כלום, שאני אומר: נקבה נולדה תחלה ואחריה זכר (לשון טור).

Should [a man have] two wives, neither of whom had given birth before, and they gave birth to two boys, [the father] should give ten *selaim* to the *kohen*. If one of them died within thirty

days, if [the father already] gave [payment for] one of them to the *kohen*, he will have five *selaim* returned to him; and if he gave [payment] to two [different] *kohanim*, he cannot take it back from them, since behold, he did not consider a specific redemption for a specific son and each could say: I seize [as payment] for the living. If [the two wives] gave birth to a male and a female, or two males and a female, [the father] should give five *selaim* to the *kohen*. And if one of the sons died within thirty days, he does not give anything to the *kohen*. If [the two wives] gave birth to two females and a male, or two males and two females, and it is not known which one was born first, there is nothing here to give to the *kohen*, as I [might] say: the female was born first and then the male (according to Tur).

(כח) שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים, אַחַת בְּכֶרֶה וְאַחַת לֹא בְּכֶרֶה, וְיִלְדוּ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וְנִתְעַרְבוּ, נוֹתֵן ה' סְלָעִים לְכֹהֵן, וְאִם מֵת אֶחָד מֵהֶם בְּתוֹךְ ל', אֵין קָאן לְכֹהֵן כְּלוּם. וְאִם מֵת הָאֵב, נוֹתְנִים בֵּין שְׁנֵיהֶם ה' סְלָעִים. זָכָר וְנִקְבָּה, אוֹ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וְנִקְבָּה, אֵין קָאן לְכֹהֵן כְּלוּם.

Should [a man have] two wives, one of whom had previously given birth and the other one had not given birth, and they both gave birth to sons and the babies got mixed up, [the father should] give five *selaim* to the *kohen* [for redemption], but should one of [the sons] dies within thirty days, there is nothing [that needs to be] given to the *kohen*, and should the father die, one gives five *selaim* on account of the two of them. Should either a male and a female [child be born], or two male [children] and a female [child be born], nothing at all [needs to be] given to the *kohen* [for redemption].

(כט) שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֶׁל שְׁנֵי אֲנָשִׁים שְׁלֹא בְּכֶרֶה, וְיִלְדוּ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וְנִתְעַרְבוּ, זֶה נוֹתֵן ה' סְלָעִים וְזֶה נוֹתֵן ה' סְלָעִים. נִתְנוּ, וְאַחַר כֵּן מֵת אֶחָד מֵהַבָּנִים בְּתוֹךְ ל' יוֹם, אִם לְשְׁנֵי כְּהֻנִּים נִתְנוּ, אֵינֶם יְכוּלִים לְהוֹצִיא מִיָּד. וְאִם לְכֹהֵן אֶחָד נִתְנוּ, כּוֹתֵב אֶחָד מֵהֶם הַרְשָׁאָה לְחִבְרוֹ, וְיִלֵּךְ זֶה בְּהַרְשָׁאָה וְיוֹצִיא מֵהַכֹּהֵן ה' סְלָעִים. וְאִם יִלְדוּ זָכָר וְנִקְבָּה, וְאֵין יְדוּעַ אִיזוֹ יִלְדֶה זָכָר וְאִיזוֹ יִלְדֶה נִקְבָּה, אוֹ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וְנִתְעַרְבוּ, וּמֵת אֶחָד מֵהֶם, הָאֲבוֹת פְּטוּרִים וְהֵבֵן חֵיב לְפָדוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ.

Should there be two wives of two [different] men neither of whom had previously given birth, and they gave birth to two male [children] and [the children] got mixed up, [both] this [father] gives five *selaim* and the [other father] gives five *selaim* [for redemption of the children]. And if after this [payment was made] one of the boys should die within thirty days, if they had given [payment] to two [different] *kohanim*, they cannot receive [the payment back] out of their hands. But if they gave [both payments] to one *kohen*, one of them should write an authorization to his friend and he should go with the authorization and take back five *selaim* from the *kohen*. And if [these] two [different] women gave birth to a male [child] and a female [child], and it is not known to whom the male [child] belonged and to whom the female [child] belonged, or if they gave birth to two males who got mixed up, and one of them died, the fathers are exempt [from redemption] and the son must [later be responsible to] redeem himself.

(ל) וְכֵן מְבַקְרֵת שְׁלֹא שֶׁהִתָּה אַחַר בְּעֵלָהּ ג' חֳדָשִׁים, וְנִשְׂאָה וְיִלְדֶה זָכָר, סָפֵק בֶּן ט' לְרֵאשׁוֹן אוֹ בֶּן ז' לְאַחֲרוֹן, הָאֲבוֹת פְּטוּרִים, וְהֵבֵן חֵיב לְפָדוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ, וְאִם יִלְדוּ שְׁתֵּי נִקְבוֹת וְזָכָר, אוֹ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וְשְׁתֵּי נִקְבוֹת, אֵין קָאן לְכֹהֵן כְּלוּם.

And similarly, should a wife who had not been with her [former] husband for three months, got married [to another husband] and gave a birth to a male child, it is doubtful whether [the child] is the nine [month] son of the first [husband] or the seven [month] son of the last [husband], [therefore] both husbands would be exempt [from the obligation of redemption], and the son will be obligated to redeem himself [at a later time], and should they gave birth to two females

and a male, or two males and two females, there is nothing here to give [regarding payment for redemption] to the *kohen*.

(לא) שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֶׁל שְׁנֵי אָנָשִׁים, אַחַת בְּכֶרֶה וְאַחַת לֹא בְּכֶרֶה, וְיָלְדוּ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים, זֶה שֶׁלֹּא בְּכֶרֶה אִשְׁתּוֹ, נוֹתֵן  
ה' סְלֵעִים לְכַהֵן. זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה אוֹ שְׁנֵי זָכָרִים וּנְקֵבָה, אֵין קָאן לְכַהֵן כְּלוּם.

Should there be two wives of two men, one of whom had previously given birth and one who had not previously given birth, and they gave birth to two male children, the [husband] whose wife had not previously given birth shall give five *selaim* to the *kohen*. If a male child and a female child [are born], or two male children and a female child [are born], there is nothing here to give [regarding payment for redemption] to the *kohen*.

## Relevance and Evolution of *Pidyon Haben*

The halakhic imperative of *Pidyon Haben* as a positive *mitzvah* is clearly an important aspect of its traditional observance. The cited sources place emphasis on its fulfillment as a biblical and rabbinic imperative, and the classic interpreters of *halakha* are unambiguous about the very specific ways that its obligation must be fulfilled. But for those who may search for meaning beyond the mandate, what other principles and purpose could be derived from the ritual? How does *Pidyon Haben* affirm identity and peoplehood? Is its value only limited to fulfilling a biblical obligation, or could it also be viewed as an acknowledgement and a ritualized reminder of God's active presence in our lives as we recognize the miracle of life's renewal through the birth of a first child? Why does it apply only to a firstborn son and not to a daughter? Does it celebrate the anticipation of the perpetuation of a family's name, a legacy that from a cultural perspective only a son will retain? Or, is it an anachronistic reflection of a former societal norm that placed a heightened value on male heirs and minimized the worth of daughters? How have the liberal streams of Jewish practice confronted traditional norms in an effort to seek meaning and value within the framework of what might be viewed as an exclusionary practice?

Contemporary responsa and philosophical writings that explore some of these questions and issues that relate to *Pidyon Haben* began to surface in the early 1970s from the Reform, Conservative, Liberal Judaism, and Reconstructionist movements. Through their consideration of the obligation, value, and potential evolution of the ritual itself, they explore if and when to ritualize "redemption," for whom such a ritual might have meaning, and whether the framework of the ritual's structure and purpose might lend itself to strengthening a family's Jewish identity.

I was most surprised to read the extensive reflections on the subject through the lens of Reform Judaism's official "responsa," these from a movement that considers *halakha* non-binding and anachronistic, and which also rejects the caste-like system that creates ritual distinctions between

different categories of Jews (*Kohen, Levi, and Yisrael*). Why would questions even arise within the movement about nuanced adherence to or engagement in the practice of *Pidyon Haben*? Perhaps the fundamental position of Reform Judaism is best expressed best in the following introductory paragraphs by Mark. S. Golub and Norman Cohen:<sup>9</sup>

For two reasons, the traditional ceremony for redeeming firstborn sons, *Pidyon Haben*, is unacceptable to most Reform Jews. An immediate objection is that it is performed for male children only, making it incompatible with the Reform Jewish principle that men and women are of the same ultimate worth before God and among the Jewish People. Yet were the ceremony to be "reformed" to include girl children (that is, add the ceremony of *Pidyon Habat*), the ritual would still remain unacceptable because of its inextricable link with the institution of the priesthood.

Since Reform Judaism has rejected the categories of Priest, Levite, and Israelite, there is neither a priest with whom the father can barter for his child, nor a priestly "institution" from which the child can be "redeemed." The entire concept of redemption, based on the assumption that there is someone and something from whom or which to redeem the child, is meaningless in the Reform context. It would appear, therefore, that the *mitzvah* of the Redemption of the First-born Son has no place in contemporary Reform practice.

Most striking to me is the strong normative voice represented by the Reform movement, which speaks through Golub and Cohen's words—namely, that *Pidyon Haben* has "no place in contemporary Reform practice." Why then, was there a continuous stream of responsa that considers a ritual that seems to have been rejected out of hand? And yet, we see in the excerpts below some of the movement's other reflections, reactions, and guidance (offered in its published question-and-answer format), which are drawn from official CCAR Responsa from 1971-2010. They are listed in chronological order.

In his "Possible *Pidyon* of Second Son" (1971) Solomon Freehof explores whether there is room to consider redemption for children beyond classic halakhic boundaries:<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Mark S. Golub and Norman Cohen, "An Alternative to *Pidyon Haben*," Central Conference of American Rabbis, in *The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 1973): 71.

<sup>10</sup> Solomon B. Freehof, "Possible *Pidyon* of Second Son," in *Reform Responsa for Our Time*, Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Responsa* (1971), available at <https://www.ccar-net.org/ccar-responsa/jrj-winter-1989-87-88/>

In the law of redeeming the first-born son, Scripture speaks specifically of “opening the womb.” Therefore, the following question arises: Suppose the first-born child was born by Caesarean operation and is, therefore, not eligible for *pidyen*, not being “the opener of the womb”; then a year later a son is born in the normal way; does the second son, being “the opener of the womb” require a *pidyen*?

...This question is raised in the same tractate (Bekhorot, 8:2) in the case of humans. If the first child is born by Caesarean and the second is born from the womb, Rabbi Simon has the same doubts which Rabbi Tarfon voiced with regard to calves, and thinks that each child has some qualities of “first-born.” But the anonymous Mishnah states that neither requires redemption; and that is the law. Thus, too, the law is given by Maimonides (Yad, *Hilchos Bekurim* 11:16), who says simply that if one child is taken from the side (i.e., by Caesarean) and the other is born normally, both of them are free from redemption; the first because he did not go forth from the womb, and the second because another child had preceded him. And so the law is given in the *Tur* and the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yore Deah* 305 (Y.D. 24).

Thus, the law seems clear enough that the second son does not require redemption. However, there is some doubt involved in this question due to what might be called medical reasons.

The law is stated in Scripture in *Numbers* 18:15 as follows: “Everything that openeth the womb...both of man and beast...the first-born,” etc. The law thus mentions both requirements for redemption, namely, “the opener of the womb” and “first-born.”

...At all events, while Maimonides would consider a normal child-birth after a Caesarean (except for twins) as “an astounding phenomenon,” that opinion of his would not lead him to state that if such an astounding phenomenon did occur, the second child would need redemption. Therefore, in his Codes, as in all the Codes, the law is simply stated that neither child needs to be redeemed...

In a slightly later article, Freehof further reflects on *Pidyon Haben*, this time including the issue of adoption.<sup>11</sup> Although it is not clear from the stated question whether the child being discussed is the biological mother’s *petur rechem*, Freehof explores whether or not it would be possible and appropriate for an adopted mother to engage in the practice of *Pidyon Haben* for her child.

A woman divorced her husband. She divorced him in court but has not yet received her *Get*. She became pregnant and states that the child belongs to her lover. She gave birth to the child and her sister adopted him. The sister now wishes to circumcise the child and give it a Jewish name. Since she did not receive a *get* from her husband, the child could easily be considered a *mamzer*, and therefore the question of circumcision is involved and all the problems of *mamzeruth*. In fact, the mother asked if she could have a *Pidyon ha-Ben*.

---

<sup>11</sup> Solomon B. Freehof, “Two Adoption Problems,” in *Reform Responsa for Our Time*, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Responsa (1974), available at <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/jrj-winter-1989-87-88/>

It is interesting that Rabbi Soloveitchik said that he would hesitate about calling this child a *mamzer*. I wish he would publish his response. His students justly admire him, but he deprives the rest of us from seeing his answers in writing.

The persons who asked you the question assume a principle which is not correct. They assume that a *mamzer* is out of the general orbit of Jewish law and that, therefore, it is a question whether circumcision, etc., are required in his case. But the laws concerning the *mamzer* are actually entirely different.

A *mamzer* is restricted only with regard to certain specific marriage laws.

... So, there is no question about the child's being circumcised. That is mandatory (a **mitzvah**). Also, there is no question about the *Pidyon ha-Ben*, except that with regard to the *Pidyon ha-Ben* certain difficulties may arise. It is the responsibility of the father to arrange the *Pidyon ha-Ben*. In this case, then, this man (the "lover") would have to acknowledge the child as his and arrange for his redemption.

And, in his "Quarreling Family and *Bar Mitzvah*," another article from that same year, Freehof considers whether widening the scope of parental responsibility for *Pidyon Haben* is potentially affected by the broken relationships in question. Once again, his answer is based upon a traditional view of the biological relationship of father and child as being the determining factor for the obligation to redeem.

Let us consider, for example, the commandment of the redemption of the first-born child (*Pidyon ha-Ben*). This definitely has the status of a commandment, an inescapable Mitzvah. It is rooted in Scripture in a number of places. See for example *Numbers* 18: 4-16. It is positive commandment #393, and occupies a whole large section in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yore Deah* 305).

Now with regard to this well-established *Mitzvah*, the rights and the status of the father are absolutely clear. The redemption is a duty incumbent upon the father and upon no one else. If the father dies or neglects the duty, the son, when he grows up, must redeem himself. An interesting discussion of the father's right and duty in the redemption is given by Chaim Sofer in his responsa, *Machaney Chaim*, Volume III, *Even Hoezer* 75....

At all events, judging by these laws of the redemption of the first born, the father's duty and right are virtually absolute and unless he appoints an agent legally, the redemption cannot be fulfilled by any other person, grandfather or not. If we have the right to make an analogy between the redemption and the *Bar Mitzvah* (since they differ so in their status) it would seem that the father's right cannot be dispensed with.

The next excerpt, drawn from the Reform movement's 1990 responsa, shows a clear re-affirmation of the movement's rejection of tribal status, a central component in the transactional nature

of the traditional *Pidyon Haben*.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, it does point to widening the scope of the practice as a connection to Jewish peoplehood and tradition—a significant distinction when considering how to free a family from the rigid halakhic bonds of obligation, and direct them towards *Pidyon Haben* as an additional opportunity to express Jewish identity.

An intermarried couple knows that their first child will be a boy. They are thinking about a *pidyon haben*. The mother is Jewish. Her mother's family are *kohanim*. Her fathers are Israelites. What status does the child have if his father is not Jewish?

In this instance...the status of *kohen* does not continue; the woman is an Israelite who has married a non-Jew. If they are part of a more traditional family, they would then have to consider a *pidyon haben*. Of course, in Reform Judaism this is somewhat incongruous as we do not provide a special status to *kohanim*. Nevertheless, some families continue the practice simply as a tie to tradition. This may also be the initial act which begins the identification of the child.

Two years later, Walter Jacob succinctly restated the Reform movement's position as it relates to the status of *Pidyon Haben*, with an affirmation that if one opted to engage in its practice, it could be seen as a symbolic connector to one's Jewish heritage.<sup>13</sup>

Question: What is the status of *Pidyon Haben* (redemption of the first born) within Reform Judaism? Answer: Reform Jews have only seldom practiced this ritual. As we do not recognize any special status for priests and levites ("Philadelphia Conference Proceedings," *CCAR Yearbook*, vol. I, 1890, p. 178; W. Jacob, *Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect*, p. 108), it is, therefore, not logical to demand the redemption of the first born. If it is done in Reform circles, it is a symbol of a tradition and a tie to the past.

In 2000, CCAR's Responsa Committee argued that although there is a traditional rabbinic view of a father's obligation to his son (including *Pidyon Haben*), its ritual practice and Jewish parental responsibilities should not be so narrowly defined, but expanded to include and reflect universal and

---

<sup>12</sup> Responsa Committee, "A *Pidyon Haben* and *Kohanim*," in *Questions and Reform Jewish Answers: New American Reform Responsa*, Central Conference of American Rabbis, (1990), available at <https://www.ccarnet.org/responsa-topics/pidyon-haben-redemption-of-the-first-born-son/>

<sup>13</sup> Walter Jacob, "A *Pidyon Haben*," *CCAR Responsa*, available at <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/jri-winter-1989-87-88/>



egalitarian ideals.<sup>14</sup> This opens avenues for creativity in defining how the evolution of traditional rituals might be more inclusive.

The *Mishnah* speaks of *mitzvot haben `al ha'av*, obligations that the father owes to his son. The *Talmud* lists these as follows: the requirement to have his son circumcised; to perform the *mitzvah* of *pidyon haben*; to teach him *Torah*; to find him a wife; and to teach him a trade. These texts refer in part to religious obligations that apply only within a Jewish context, and they reflect distinctions in gender roles that no longer make sense to us as Reform Jews. It is our practice to read such texts in an egalitarian way and in a way that does not make invidious distinctions between Jews and non-Jews in determining ethical duties, responsibilities that we as human beings bear toward other human beings. When we read the texts in this manner, they teach us that a parent is obligated to provide for his or her child's basic needs, to help educate that child so that he or she may become a responsible member of human society.

Finally, in 2010 the Reform movement issued its strongest statement, one that rails against the cultural stratification represented by a traditional, religious caste system (*Kohen, Levi, and Yisrael*).<sup>15</sup> Here, *Pidyon Haben* is cited as a negative vestige of that system, seemingly incongruous with Reform Judaism's ideals. The authors take the stance that *Pidyon Haben* should not be modified because at its core, its rituals support an anachronistic, inherent religious exclusivity. Although I appreciate the strength of their statements, I believe that to take this position gives too much power to the mandate of the ritual, without embracing the potential connectivity that its essence may engender.

"Reform (Judaism) does not recognize a hereditary priesthood." This statement, presented without dissent in our official CCAR publications, describes a fundamental aspect of our religious world view. It means, specifically, that the tradition of priestly status is irrelevant to us as a religious category and plays no role whatsoever in Reform Jewish observance today. Our common Reform practice testifies to this fact. In our communities, the *kohen* receives none of the privileges to which he is entitled under traditional Jewish law and custom...And in the absence of such a purpose or interest, it would arguably be unethical for us, as a movement dedicated to an egalitarian vision of Judaism, to maintain such distinctions in any form, even if it

---

<sup>14</sup> Responsa Committee, "Withholding Paternity Information from a Father," Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Responsa* (2000), available at <https://www.ccarnet.org/responsa-topics/withholding-paternity-information-from-a-father-parents/>

<sup>15</sup> Responsa Committee, "Priestly and Levitical Status in Reform Judaism," Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Responsa* (2010), available at <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/priestly-levitical-status-reform-judaism/>

be “gender-neutral” in its structure. It follows that there is not – and should not be – any uniquely “Reform” version of the *k’hunah* or redefinition of its rules.

To say that priestly *yichus* (inherited status) is irrelevant to our religious life should not suggest that the awareness of priestly status has completely disappeared from among our people. Reform Jews can and often do acknowledge the fact of their *yichus* as a matter of family tradition. They will often maintain the title “*hakohen*” or “*halevi*” in their Jewish names, as testimony that they were born to a father of either status. We certainly have no objection to this custom. We would emphasize, however, that when Reform Jews do recognize their priestly or levitical descent, they express thereby a sense of connection to historical institutions rooted in our Biblical heritage and not to some (non-existent) Reform version of those institutions.

Our Rabbi’s Manual offers an illustration. It declares that, precisely because we do not recognize a hereditary priesthood, the ceremony of *pidyon haben*, the redemption of the first-born son (Exodus 13:1, 11-15), is “incongruous for Reform Jews.” Given, however, that “our colleagues will be called upon to participate in the ritual and interpret its rules,” the Manual proceeds to summarize those rules as they are formulated in Jewish tradition and to refer the reader to sources for the traditional *pidyon haben* liturgy. The message is clear: if Reform Jews choose *pidyon haben* for their sons, they are choosing to participate in a ceremony that reflects the context of the hereditary Biblical priesthood. Since we as a movement do not recognize that priesthood, there is no Reform, gender-neutral version of *pidyon haben*.

The Conservative movement’s recognition of the binding nature of *halakha* stands in stark contrast to that put forth by Reform Judaism. For Conservative Jews, *halakha* informs all aspects of ritual practice and Jewish life, but its interpretation is dynamic, evolving over time through the lens of modernity and through the exploration of legal precedents and careful consideration of competing legal imperatives and priorities. Over the past thirty years, there have been three *teshuvot* that specifically address questions that relate to *Pidyon Haben*, which have been published by the Rabbinical Assembly’s Committee for Jewish Laws and Standards. They do not challenge the validity or need for ritual itself, but do explore the halakhic appropriateness and advisability of widening the scope of to whom the *mitzvah* might apply.

In his 1991 *teshuvah*, Howard Handler focuses on the traditional realm of *Pidyon Haben* as a narrowly-defined ritual that is, at its core, a tool for fulfilling a halakhic need. Even the idea of widening the traditional ritual to include other first-born sons is rejected by the author based on his

understanding of *halakha*.<sup>16</sup> However, it does not close the door to creating other rituals which might meet the needs of others who don't fit into the category of *Pidyon Haben's* religious obligations.

*Sh'eilah*: May a first-born male child born by Caesarean section have a *Pidyon Haben*?

*Teshuvah*: In very ancient times, the first-born son in every Israelite family was vested with special responsibilities. From the day of his birth he was consecrated to the vocation of assisting the priests in the conduct of worship.

Later when a Tabernacle was built in the wilderness this vocation of the first-born was transferred to the Levites, a priestly tribe. The Torah then decreed that every father release his firstborn son from the duties incumbent upon all firstborn sons by redeeming him from a *Kohen*. The ancient obligations of the firstborn son thus continues to be recalled. [J. Harlow, *A Rabbi's Manual*, (New York, Rabbinical Assembly, 1965), p. 14]

Rabbi Gary Atkins of Temple Beth El in Lancaster, Pennsylvania has asked whether a first-born male child born by Caesarean section may have a *Pidyon Haben*? His opinion is that in Talmudic times Caesarean sections were a rare event whereas today they constitute thirty percent of all births...

*Conclusion* -- In light of the above-mentioned sources, it is clear that *Pidyon Haben* is a limited institution. It applies specifically to an obligation that falls upon first-born male children born through the birth canal only. The traditional ritual for *Pidyon Haben* would not be appropriate for any other child because the blessing involved can only be recited where there is an obligation to redeem. In this case *lo zazah mishna mim'komah* (a *mishna* doesn't move from its place). [The conclusion of this paper neither mandates nor precludes the development of an alternative ceremony for first born boys by Caesarian section.]

In his 1993 *teshuvah*, Gerald Skolnik wrestled with the conflicting priorities of halakhic integrity and creating a modified ritual based upon *Pidyon Haben* to recognize other first-born children.<sup>17</sup> The fact that his particular focus was on first-born daughters is not what informs my interest in his discussions (although I firmly believe that there should be no exclusionary gender distinctions or

---

<sup>16</sup> Howard Handler, "Pidyon Haben and Caesarean Sections," Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards, *Yorah Deah*, CJLS YD 305/24 (1991), available at [https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/handler\\_pidyon.pdf](https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/handler_pidyon.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Gerald Skolnik, "Should there be a Special Ceremony in Recognition of a First-Born Female Child?," Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards, *Yoreh Deah*, CJLS YD 305/I (1993), available at [https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/skolnik\\_firstborn\\_female.pdf](https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/skolnik_firstborn_female.pdf)

limitations within facilitating Jewish ritual practice). In his understanding of halakhic limits, he explains that in order to acknowledge a first-born child who is not its biological mother's *petur rechem*, one would have to disengage newly-created rituals from *Pidyon Haben's* obligatory limitations.

*Sh'eilah*: Should there be a Special Ceremony in Recognition of a First-Born Female Child?

*Teshuvah*: While the desire to enhance the sense of worth and value to the Jewish community of a female child is understandable and laudable, it would be preferable to include the element of *bat bachura* as a component of a *Simchat Bat* ceremony, rather than create a new ceremony which few would be likely to utilize and which would have no true halakhic integrity.

The general question of whether or not a *Pidyon Haben* ceremony might properly be performed for a female first-born child is answered clearly and unequivocally in the *Torah*. The mandated practice of redeeming the first-born son from his special religious obligations via the agency of the *levi'im* (or today their descendants, the *kohanim*; see *Exod.* 13:1-2, and *Num.* 3:11-13 and 18:15-16) clearly holds only with regard to male first-born children, and not female. No matter what the motivation, one cannot change history and retroactively project this obligation onto a female child.

In our own time, a number of factors have conspired to cause the practice of *Pidyon Haben* to fall into widespread disuse. In addition to the general unfamiliarity of our laity with its origins and significance, large numbers of adoptions in the Jewish community, the tremendous number of women who have had previous abortions or miscarriages, or whose first-born sons were delivered by Caesarean section, have contributed to this situation even more. All are practices or states of being which render a *Pidyon Haben* unnecessary. While it might be something of an exaggeration to call a *Pidyon Haben* a rare occurrence, it certainly does not occur with the frequency of a *Brit Milah* or a *Simchat Bat*. Moreover, those instances when a *Pidyon Haben* does occur are, as often as not, more excuses for food to be served and friends and relatives to be gathered together than they are religious events of any real significance.

None of this in any way renders null and void the *Torah's* command with regard to the redemption of the first-born son. Certainly, the ignorance of the laity on this matter can-not be the determining factor, nor can the relative rarity of the event. These ceremonies should be taking place when they are supposed to.

Yet the fact that the *Torah* clearly restricts the practice of *Pidyon Haben* to male first-born children only serves to reinforce the sense of distress experienced by some men and women regarding gender-related status issues in the Jewish community. Is a first-born female child less precious to God in our eyes than a male one? The exclusive obligations and privileges of a first-born male Jewish child in ancient Israel certainly do, to many, suggest that. And for those who feel that way, the absence of a parallel ritual today for first-born female Jewish children only serves to exacerbate the sense of historic inequity.

It was to address this situation that the Chairman of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards suggested that perhaps someone would be interested in drafting a ceremony to take

note of the special status—in our eyes today—of the first-born female Jewish child. I volunteered believing at the time that such a ritual might alleviate the aforementioned inequity perceived by some, without doing harm to the halakhic issues involved in *Pidyon Haben*.

Although it is somewhat uncomfortable to say so, I have, after a good deal of consideration, come to the conclusion that the development of such a ceremony is unnecessary and perhaps even ill-advised. I would rather withdraw from my original position than compose some sort of service that I myself would probably never utilize.

The reasoning behind my decision is as follows. To a great degree, the development and increasing prevalence of *Simchat Bat* ceremonies has effectively served the purpose of providing a meaningful and parallel yet unique vehicle for welcoming a female child into the covenant between Israel and God. The task before me, therefore, was not to create some sort of ritual expressing the covenant idea. And, though the true thematic rationale for the ceremony would be redemption, it also increasingly seemed to be a mistake to create a ceremony which would assume that women needed to be redeemed from obligations which they never had in the first place.

What remained, therefore, was to create a ritual vehicle for expressing the special spiritual and familial status of the first-born Jewish female child, much as a first-born male child would enjoy in today's family. Ultimately, I came to the conclusion that it would be better to incorporate the aspect of "first-born-ness" into the *Simchat Bat* ceremony than to create an entirely different ceremony which relatively few people would ever utilize.

In a very brief span of time as Jewish law goes, the *Simchat Bat* ceremony has become widely accepted and utilized, even outside the Conservative community. To the degree that we can reinforce the importance of welcoming a female child into the covenant with the same sense of enthusiasm that we do a male child. *Harei zeh m'shubach* [Behold, this is praiseworthy]. The absence of a halakhic time-mandate for a *Simchat Bat* affords parents the opportunity to hold the ceremony at their convenience. Unless they are specifically wedded to the parallelism of a *Brit Milah* ceremony on the eighth day after birth, there is no reason why the *Simchat Bat* ceremony for a first-born female child could not be held on the day when a *Pidyon Haben* would have been held for a male first-born child - i.e., *ufduyav miben-chadash tifdeh* (Num. 18:16).

For an idea as to how to thematically and appropriately bring the notion of the *Pidyon* ceremony into the *Simchat Bat*, I am grateful for the creative suggestion of my friend and colleague Rabbi Laurence Sebert. The juxtaposition of the command to redeem the first-born Israelite child in Exodus 13 with the account of the plague of the slaying of the Egyptian first-born in Exodus 12 has, to some commentators, suggested an association between the two. In that light, the well-known text from *Sh'mot Rabbah* 1:12 seems particularly appropriate:

Rabbi Akiva interpreted: By virtue of the reward due the righteous women of the generation of the Exodus were our forefathers redeemed from Egypt.

What better or more appropriate connecting text could there be?

*Conclusion* -- For all of the above reasons, I have therefore concluded that the Biblically mandated practice of *Pidyon Haben* is restricted to male first-born children, and should not be

expanded to include first-born female children. However, all gatherings which serve the purpose of enhancing the sense of blessing and specialness associated with the birth of a first-born female child are to be encouraged.

In his *teshuvah*, Vernon Kurtz reinforces the Conservative movement's focus on the supremacy of halakhic considerations, while still trying to encourage as many people as possible to engage in the *mitzvah* of *Pidyon Haben*.<sup>18</sup> Particularly intriguing is his statement that we should center our lives around "Jewish time," which implies that by allowing ourselves to be guided by the temporal structure of rituals, we are more able to build a meaningful spiritual life through their anticipated observance. This is precisely my intent—to search for creative, meaningful ways for more families to benefit from the universal aspects of rituals like *Pidyon Haben*, recognizing God's role in every aspect of bringing a first child into the world, regardless of their biological status.

*Sh'eilah*: May *Pidyon Haben* be postponed beyond the thirty-first day?

*Teshuvah*: According to the *Torah*, *Pidyon Haben* takes place after one month of life. This coincides with the child being a viable human being. There is a discussion in the sources whether the month should be seen as exactly a month by astronomical time, or not.

Based upon these [a number of halakhic sources and opinions cited] sources, I therefore conclude:

The *mitzvah* of *Pidyon Haben* should be encouraged among Conservative Jews.

We should strongly encourage *Pidyon Haben* at its appointed time, *bizmanah*, on the thirty-first day. We accept the desired goal of "the zealous perform *mitzvot* as soon as they are able to do so." If we do not do so, we are unfair to the tradition's response to the timeliness of *mitzvot* and the need to adapt our lives to "Jewish time."

Should the thirty-first day occur on a *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*, *Pidyon Haben* should occur during the daylight hours on the next possible date (Sunday or after the Second Day of the Festival).

If the parents persist and for their own reasons want the ceremony to take place on a date later than on the thirty-first day then we may allow it on the authority of the *Iggrot Moshe* and the

---

<sup>18</sup> Vernon H. Kurtz, "Delay of *Pidyon Haben*," Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards, *Yoreh Deah*, CJLS YD 305/II (1995), available at [https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/kurtz\\_pidyon.pdf](https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/kurtz_pidyon.pdf)

fact that most authorities do not believe that one “transgresses the positive commandment each day.”

Perhaps our opinion is best expressed by the *Sefer HaHinukh mitzvah* 392: Even though this *mitzvah* does not have a fixed time, since any time after the thirtieth day is possible for *Pidyon Haben*, even so the pious will do the *mitzvah* as soon as one is able to accomplish it.

The tenants of Liberal Judaism, a non-*halakhic*, progressive movement based in Great Britain that has much in common with Reform Judaism, affirms the synthesis of Judaism and modernity, acknowledge the diversity and dynamic nature of Jewish tradition, and respect the validity of all conscientious options that relate to Jewish practice and belief.<sup>19</sup> Although the movement has no formal responsa, their published commentary articulates some of Liberal Judaism’s views that relate to the tradition of *Pidyon Haben*, while suggesting that a universal transformation of its framework be used by families to mark the arrival of a child.<sup>20</sup>

Liberal Judaism rejects *Pidyon haben* – a ritual for boys only, which relates to the priesthood, and focuses on the ‘purchase’ of the child. But are we missing something by dispensing with it, or can we reinvent it to suit our own thinking and practices?

There are aspects of this ritual that we feel are relevant. It provides an opportunity for a home ceremony to which friends and family can be freely invited. Having a ceremony a month after the birth, rather than at eight days for the *brit milah*, also gives time to plan, and there is less of the shock, exhaustion and vulnerability that comes with the arrival of a first child.

More important, though, are the religious reasons. The essence of *Pidyon haben* seems to be an acknowledgement that a child is a gift from God. Perhaps most centrally, *Pidyon haben* is a reminder that a child is entrusted to us and that to have children is a privilege and responsibility.

For *Pidyon haben* to accord with Progressive Jewish values, we would change the name itself. The root “PDH”, meaning to redeem, implies financial payment for a child. A more appropriate concept would be that expressed by the Hebrew root “PKD”, meaning to entrust. Rather than us “redeeming” the child from God, the child is entrusted to us from God. An appropriate title for the ceremony might therefore be *Pikdon haben/bat*, “the entrusting of a son/daughter”. It

---

<sup>19</sup> Rabbinic Conference of Liberal Judaism, *Affirmations of Liberal Judaism*, rev. ed. 2006, no. 27, available at <https://www.liberaljudaism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Affirmations-of-Liberal-Judaism-Booklet-MAR-2020.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Jacobi and David Ehrlich, “Renewing Ritual: Margaret Jacobi and David Ehrlich Suggest a New Ceremony, a Month after Birth, to Mark the Arrival of a Child,” *Liberal Judaism* 32/4 (July/August 2005): 3.

should apply to any first child – boy or girl – and irrespective of previous miscarriages or the mode of birth.

There are arguments for and against restricting the ceremony to first children. A ceremony for the birth of a firstborn could recognize the special nature of becoming parents for the first time, and the beginning of a journey into the unknown land of parenthood. In this sense, the first child is special. On the other hand, we would not want any distinction that implies later children are of less value. It may therefore be appropriate to have a ceremony for each child, but with a special prayer for the first, which recognized the huge change of becoming a parent for the first time.

The idea of making a donation of some sort is important; perhaps, on this occasion, it could be to the synagogue religion school, or a charity that cares for underprivileged children.

Finally, we turn to Reconstructionist Judaism, self-described as post-halakhic relating to the diversity of its practices. Its approach to Jewish ritual and custom considers past ethics and values in a “dynamic, community-driven and, perhaps most important, self-conscious process that reflects our philosophy of living in two civilizations.”<sup>21</sup> Some propose that in Reconstructionist practice “*halakha* has a vote, not a veto.”<sup>22</sup> Others suggest that a more accurate view would be “past understandings of *halakha* have a vote but not a veto in our formulations of contemporary *halakha*.”<sup>23</sup> As with Liberal Judaism, the Reconstructionist movement does not issue any formal responsa; however, the following statements were published under its auspices.<sup>24</sup>

How do Reconstructionist communities approach life cycle passages? We begin by affirming traditional life-cycle rituals and strive to discover personal meaning within these rituals and the

---

<sup>21</sup> “How does Reconstructionism regard *Halakah*/Jewish law and Jewish tradition?,” Jewish Reconstructionist Communities, in association with the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (2016), available at <https://archive.jewishrecon.org/resource/faqs-reconstructionist-approaches-jewish-ideas-and-practices>

<sup>22</sup> Shelley Kapnek Rosenberg, “Adoption and the Jewish Community: Like a Branch Transplanted,” in *The Reconstructionist* 26/2 (Spring 2000): 19, available at <https://www.bjpa.org/content/upload/bjpa/adop/Adoption%20and%20the%20Jewish%20Community.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Cedarbaum, “Reconstructing *Halakha*,” in *Reconstructing Judaism* (May 6, 2016), available at <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/article/reconstructing-halakha>

<sup>24</sup> “How do Reconstructionist communities approach life-cycle passages?,” Jewish Reconstructionist Communities, in association with the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, available at <https://archive.jewishrecon.org/resource/faqs-reconstructionist-approaches-jewish-ideas-and-practices>



values they represent. We reconstruct traditional rituals to conform to a current idiom and develop new life cycle-events and liturgy to mark a meaningful passage with a uniquely Jewish stamp.

In the Reconstructionist Federation of Congregations and *Havurot's* 1973 *Call them Builders*, Sandy Sasso rejected the obligation to traditional *Pidyon Haben*, though she suggested ways to modify it as an affirmation of a family's Jewish identity.<sup>25</sup>

Reconstructionist Judaism does not approve of *Pidyon Haben* for the following reasons: 1) *Pidyon Haben* emphasizes a caste system of Kohen, Levi, and Israel, which runs counter to contemporary conceptions of human equality. 2) Redemption of human life by money is considered irreconcilable with present spiritual standards. 3) There is no equivalent ceremony for girls.

Within the last few years, a number of alternatives to *Pidyon Haben* have been suggested. They take into account the need for an equivalent ceremony for girls and attempt to give new and deeper significance to the concept of "redemption."

...Questions for further study: 1) Does a ceremony solely for the first-born bestow a special status on the first-born male to the exclusion of future children? Are there psychological consequences to be considered? 2) Is the first birth experience an especially unique moment which we wish to celebrate? If so, should it not apply equally to girls as well as boys and what form might that celebration take? Consider possible reinterpretations of the concept of redemption and the mother's participation. 3) Should we substitute the concept of redemption with the idea of dedication to be expressed through a contribution to a charitable cause?

In Eric Mendelsohn's reflections of *Pidyon Haben*, he considers how to find balance between tradition's framework and a desire to seek contemporary value and meaning:<sup>26</sup>

Its original power depends on social and religious hierarchies and values which are foreign to most contemporary Jews. But beyond this initial response, we can ask: What can we recognize about this event that is important and worth noting? How can we adapt the ritual in such a way that the ancient rite is respected and yet it is not offensive?

A firstborn child marks the beginning of a new generation, and as such should be marked. And the idea remains powerful that a family would in principle desire to devote its best and dearest to a life of service of the community. Both of these needs can be met by a simple ceremony

---

<sup>25</sup> Sandy Sasso, *Call Them Builders: A Resource Booklet About Jewish Attitudes and Practices on Birth and Family Life* (New York, Reconstructionist Federation of Congregations and Havurot, 1977), 11-13.

<sup>26</sup> Eric Mendelsohn, "D'var Torah for Tetzaveh," *Reconstructing Judaism*, March 2017, available at <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/dvar-torah/dvar-torah-tetzaveh>

which respects the tradition's core values as we now understand them, marking the beginning of a new generation...In this way, an adapted *pidyon ha-ben/bat* ritual can be transformed from an outdated and problematic rite to a newly revalued milestone in the life of a family and a community.

### **What are the universal aspects of this ritual? What does it intend to affirm?**

There is a plethora of contemporary opinions that offer interpretations that relate to the ritual of *Pidyon Haben* (outside of the biblical and rabbinic mandates), each of which seeks to explain why it might be meaningful to engage in this act of redemption. Included among those core ideas we find a number of recurring themes: 1) affirming our relationship with God; 2) a way to mark an individual's acceptance of the obligations of parenthood; 3) a reminder that nothing belongs to us, but rather to God; 4) an opportunity to strengthen family relationships; 5) the affirmation of Jewish continuity through the birth of an heir; 6) longing for a traditional past, with connections represented by the *kohanim* in service to the Temple; 7) alternative way to recall vestiges of child sacrifice; 8) a practical vehicle for supporting communal leaders (e.g., payment to the *kohanim*); 9) gratitude for the gift of life; and 10) a lesson in transforming the material to the spiritual.

In his reflections on the laws and customs of *Pidyon Haben*, Hershel Greenberg explores its spiritual purpose:<sup>27</sup>

From the *Torah's* description of the obligation to sanctify and redeem the first-born it appears that it is a direct consequence of the Redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt, those whom G-d designated as His first-born... G-d's relationship with us is as a father to a child... The entire process of Redemption underscored G-d's role as a father so that even those who did not deserve to be liberated were liberated... We can now get a glimpse into the spiritual dynamic of the *Pidyon Haben*. When one's first child is born it transforms a person into a parent for the first time. And since every physical phenomenon is a product of a parallel spiritual dynamic, it follows that the birth of a first-born reveals the Father-child relationship of G-d to the Jewish people. When this relationship is awakened it generates the process of Redemption for G-d's children, the entire Jewish people. As long as that relationship lies dormant, we can languish in exile. When the father-child dynamic is awakened it unleashes a parallel parental bond between G-d and the Jewish people and their drive to Redemption. This is why we perform the *Pidyon Haben* Redemption ceremony: it highlights the intimate connection G-d has with us and invites the Redemption of all the Jewish people from their exile...

---

<sup>27</sup> Hershel Greenberg, *The Ultimate Pidyon Haben* (January 31, 2020), available at <https://www.onestopjewishbuffalo.com/parsha/the-ultimate-pidyon-haben/>

In his *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, Isaac Klein notes a possible sociological framework for the practice of *Pidyon Haben*:<sup>28</sup>

Undoubtedly, the original reason for the redemption of the firstborn was the feeling that he belonged to God or was dedicated to God. It expressed the pious awareness that our first obligation is always to God. The ceremony of *Pidyon Haben*...is widely practiced and has a great deal of appeal for American Jewish families. Alas, the cause has been more sociological than religious...The birth of a child is an important and joyous event, even in our sophisticated society, and families often wish to solemnize it with proper celebrations...The celebration of a *Pidyon Haben* provides an opportunity to...enrich the Jewish home with meaningful ritual.

And Avi Matmon notes the following in relation to man's natural tendency to acknowledge life's first fruits:<sup>29</sup>

The first fruits of the land were chosen to express this basic principle, because whatever is first is always precious to a person. The same concept applies to *pidyon haben* – redeeming of the first-born son. It's special because it has enhanced the status of man to father; there is a continuity of the new father where he has the opportunity to pass down the Jewish tradition which he has received from his father. The precious valuable commodity firstborn belongs to God and the father proudly redeems the boy. Human nature has always anointed the first in every aspect of life, as special.

This excerpt from *Ksharim* suggests that ritual is a way to express our connection to the past, especially in acknowledgment of the Holy Temple:<sup>30</sup>

This in spite of the fact that after the destruction (and indeed even in the preceding years) the priestly elite was gradually replaced by an elite distinguished not by birth but by talent – specifically in studying the Torah...Are these distinctions just an anachronism, or yet another way in which we (symbolically?) yearn for the rebuilding of the Temple and the renewal of its rituals?

---

<sup>28</sup> Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religions Practice* (New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1979), 430-431.

<sup>29</sup> Avi Matmon, "D'var Torah on Ki Tavo," in *Spark of Jewish Experience*, September 17, 2013, available at <http://sparkofjewishexperience.com/category/mitzvot-and-traditions/pidyon-haben/>

<sup>30</sup> Marc Rosenstein, *Ksharim*, "Childhood", 306-307, available at <https://makomisrael.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/ksharim.pdf> (accessed 28 October 2020)

Cantor Lauren Phillips reflects upon her desire to find personal meaning within the rituals *Pidyon Haben* in a contemporary, non-Orthodox context:<sup>31</sup>

At first, the idea of redeeming a newborn son to a *Kohen* seemed sexist and outdated, but then we thought about how infrequently the ritual takes place and struggled to find a modern context for it. We decided to explore ways to put a present-day spin on the tradition and use the ceremony as an educational opportunity for my congregation. The *pidyon haben* ceremony affirms that a newborn belongs to God and the Jewish faith. As progressive Jews working toward repairing our world (*tikkun olam*), our first child also signifies our desire to build a family with an eye toward social justice. In addition to the symbolic ritual of exchanging the five coins, we celebrated Alex's birth by giving *tzedakah* (using money to do the work of world-repair or, literally, justice) to five Jewish organizations that are significant to us – one for each coin. We hope that doing so will highlight our devotion to family, education, Israel, and the arts as one facet of welcoming Alex into the Jewish community. It is for precisely these reasons that we chose to have a *pidyon haben* for Alex: to commemorate tradition, to take advantage of a rare opportunity for a *mitzvah* (commandment), and to lay a foundation for him to live a meaningful life within the Jewish community and beyond.

Richard L. Rubenstein questions whether *Pidyon Haben* reflects vestiges of ancient human sacrifice:<sup>32</sup>

“The mythic-ritual complex that I have been calling ‘child sacrifice’ was never *eradicated*; it was only *transformed*” [Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, p. 45]. A prime example of that transformation is the *pidyon ha-ben* ritual in fulfillment of the commandment already noted: “You shall redeem all the firstborn of your sons. None shall appear before me empty-handed” (*Exod 34:20*). ...The fundamental purpose of the ceremony was subliminally to acknowledge and deflect our infanticidal tendencies...I understood that at some level the ritual recognized that the subterranean power of the infanticidal impulse had never entirely disappeared. Today, the ceremony is a happy family occasion and few, if any, participants are aware of its older significance.

---

<sup>31</sup> Lauren Phillips, “How a Rare Jewish Ritual Added Meaning to Our Family,” in *Reform Judaism*, April 2018, available at <https://reformjudaism.org/blog/2018/04/02/how-rare-jewish-ritual-added-meaning-our-family>

<sup>32</sup> Richard L. Rubenstein, “What Was at Stake in the Parting of the Ways Between Judaism and Christianity?,” in *Shofar* 28/3 (Spring 2010): 82-83, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5703/shofar.28.3.78>

In his contextualization of the actual relative value of the money transferred for the ritual of *Pidyon Haben*, Nissan Rubin finds evidence that suggests a wide variance between halakhic determinations and documents recording actual contemporaneous practice:<sup>33</sup>

...Jewish culture is one of a written text, and these texts are considered to be sacrosanct and unchangeable. But the context, the social setting, changes as political and social living conditions change. The text which accompanies the society and which dictates its values and norms, must undergo a process of interpretation in order to continue to be relevant to it and to continue to be the guiding text. [This would suggest that changes that we make through a contemporary societal lens might be considered to be part of the continuum reflected by religious communities throughout the ages].

The case of the *pidyon haben* again confirms the idea that in every traditional framework there is an internal mechanism which permits - in certain conditions and in accordance with certain basic principles - change and deviance.

In his *D'var Torah*, "Choosing Your Child," Daniel Nevens suggests that the formulaic ritual of *Piyon Haben* creates an opportunity for transformation of the material into a spiritual affirmation of life:<sup>34</sup>

"Which do you prefer—your firstborn child, or the five coins required to redeem him?" While the *mitzvah* refers specifically to boys because of the association with the tenth plague, in our day we may expand the concept of redemption to girls as part of their own birth rituals. Indeed, baby-naming ceremonies for girls are often scheduled around the one-month mark in order to connect them to this ancient rite of passage. The question then is rhetorical, not a real choice. But what then does it mean?

I find this rare ritual moment to be poignant. At the beginning of the journey of parenthood, a new mother or father is overwhelmed with joy but also with responsibility. A vast realm of obligations has arrived together with their infant child, and thousands of decisions lie before them. Enormous expenses, more than they could have anticipated, are suddenly theirs. Thirty-one days into the journey, they are likely tired, cranky, and bewildered. At this very moment, a representative of our ancient tradition presents them with a choice—which do you prefer, your child or some money? After a dramatic pause, the parent or parents look at their child—their precious, perplexing child—and they claim it from the priest. They say, "I want my firstborn child—here are your coins." And so, a journey begins. There will be many multiples of those five coins paid—for food and clothes, medicine and education, culture, camp, and hopefully their

---

<sup>33</sup> Nissan Rubin, "Coping with the Value of the *Pidyon Ha'ben* Payment in Rabbinic Literature: An Example of a Social Change Process," in *Jewish History* 10/1 (Spring 1996): 56, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20101250>

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Nevens, "Choosing Your Child," The Jewish Theological Seminary, July 2016, available at [www.jtsa.edu/choosing-your-child](http://www.jtsa.edu/choosing-your-child)

child's marriage. But at this early stage, the new parents resolve to set aside their material worries for a moment. They redeem their child, praise God, and give gratitude for the gift of life.

Neil Gilman also suggests that we may acknowledge our humanity through engagement with the ideals of *Pidyon Haben*:<sup>35</sup>

The *Pidyon Haben* ceremony serves as a constant reminder that we have little ultimate control over our possessions. This lesson in humility is part of the touching message of the *Pidyon Haben* ritual.

Mark Golub and Norman Cohen remind us that through the rituals of *Pidyon Haben*, the renewal of life is connected to the presence of God:

The genius of the *Pidyon Haben* ceremony is that it weds the birth of parenthood to the birth of the Jewish People. It concretizes the idea that the survival of the Jewish People continues to be dependent upon the commitment of future generations, of our children, to the values, ideals, and goals of our People. At the same moment that two persons rejoice in the gift of life granted to them by God, the couple relives the initial moment of communal commitment by linking the gift of children to the service of God.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Neil Gilman, from *The Guide to the Pidyon HaBen Ceremony*, The Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs (1993): 4.

<sup>36</sup> Mark S. Golub and Norman Cohen, "An Alternative to *Pidyon Haben*," Central Conference of American Rabbis, in *The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 1973): 72.

**How can Jewish adoptive families (those whose relationship to their children are independent of biology) experience the affirmation inherent in the *Pidyon Haben* ritual?**

The concept of adoption within Judaism is a complicated subject, and because it is not the primary focus of this study, I will not delve into its history nor its halakhic intricacies. However, as it relates to the affirmation of Jewish identity, and the inclusion or exclusion of a family from Jewish ritual (e.g., *Pidyon Haben*), it is an issue whose framework prompts further commentary.

The basic frictions that arise for a Jewish adoptive family center on questions of Jewish status and Jewish identity. Perhaps the essence of the issue can be gleaned from the following short excerpt from Isaac Klein's *Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*:<sup>37</sup>

Though adoption is a legal fiction whereby a person who is a member of one family becomes a member of another family, in classical law, and in the laws of the West today, the fiction became a fact...In Jewish tradition, however, the fiction remains a fiction; ties of blood and kinship can neither be destroyed or created. Therefore, an adopted child has the same status as his natural father...On the other hand, Jewish law has not lost sight of the fact that emotional as well as legal ties are involved in adoption. The adoptive parents come to look upon the adopted child as their own. Their relationships with him become as strong as those of biological parents with their natural offspring.

Fessler points to rabbinic sources that support the idealized affirmation and normalization of Jewish families created through adoption:<sup>38</sup>

Traditional Jewish thought is clearly supportive of adoption. Such rabbinic sources as "He who brings up a child is to be called its father, not he who gave birth [sic]" (*Exodus Rabbah* 46:5) and "Whoever raises a child in his home, it is as if he had begotten him" (*TB Sanhedrin* 19b) clearly laud the act of adoption and extol the strength of an adopted parent's bond with his or her child.

Even though the overwhelming message—from a traditional Jewish perspective—is that the reality of Jewish status comes down to "nature," (i.e., biology), the emotional reality for adoptive

---

<sup>37</sup> Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religions Practice* (New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1979.), 436.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Fessler, "Adoption and Jewish Families: A Proposal," *The Reconstructionist* 66/1 (Fall 2001): 56, available at <http://therra.org/Reconstructionist/Fall2001.pdf>



parents is that “nurture” is at the core of their experience and it is their reality. When considering the differences between Jewish law and cultural Jewish practice, Gilbert C. Meilaender reflects upon the bonds between adoptive parents and their children:<sup>39</sup>

By Jewish law, the way that the child is raised is irrelevant, the child born a Jew will be considered a Jew, the child born a Gentile remains a Gentile...If it is not quite right to say that “biology is everything” in Judaism, it is true that the natural tie has profound and continuing effects. “For a people which intuitively perceives the importance of generations of connectedness, through blood and mutual history, it can,” Shelley Kapnek Rosenberg writes, “be emotionally difficult to bestow full membership on one who does not share that connectedness.” One wonders, though, whether this can do justice to the feelings adoptive Jewish parents are likely to have toward their adopted children. As one such father writes: “The notion that I am doing a deed of kindness to a stranger is not what I feel; I feel him, unequivocally, to be my own son.” He experiences in his life the difficulties of relating nature and history.

To bring a practical aspect to many of the ideas and ideals that have been offered throughout the previous excerpts, I want you to imagine a Jewish couple in their mid-30s, very engaged in ritual practice and fully ensconced within an observant Conservative Jewish community, who have been striving to become parents, and after years of medical consultation and much soul-searching, they have decided that they will create their family through adoption. Through the advocacy of an adoption attorney, they locate a birth mother (non-Jewish) who is weeks away from giving birth, and they suddenly and joyfully anticipate the impending birth of their first child—a son! They are elated, nervous, exhausted, overwhelmed, and are looking to cherished Jewish rituals and traditions to provide them with an inspirational framework as they welcome their child into their Jewish-centric world. What does tradition offer to them to mark this incredibly transformative moment of bringing their first-born son into the world?

---

<sup>39</sup> Gilbert C. Meilaender, “Nature and History,” in *Not by Nature but by Grace: Forming Families through Adoption* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016): 16-18, available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctvpj7c9c.4>

From a traditional ritual perspective, there are a number of hurdles, real and perceived, that limit what families can and will do over the next number of days and weeks. They consult with their Rabbi, who reminds them that even though their child will not be Jewish at birth, they can proceed with *Brit Milah* on the eighth day as a first step toward conversion (necessary because of a non-Jewish birth mother), with an opportunity for *Mikveh* immersion in the presence of a *Bet Din* after their legal adoption is finalized. They are grateful for their child, grateful to welcome him into the covenant, and yet it has become a bittersweet moment. Aside from the normal angst of new parenthood, and the discomfort and expected multiple social stigmas associated with adoption, they will suddenly be both conditionally accepted through ritual (*Brit Milah*), and yet separated from ritual (*Pidyon Haben*) in the process of bringing this new life into their world. Had this child been a first biological son, they would have had the opportunity to experience yet another level of engagement in affirming their Jewish connection, continuity, and commitment through the ritual of *Pidyon Haben*. What more could have been done to affirm their active choice to become Jewish parents? What active role could they have had that would have connected their mode and path of parenthood with their commitment to living an intentionally Jewish life?

Societal stigmatization is not unique to Jewish adoption, but certainly it becomes intensified within the Jewish community as a result of halakhic considerations regarding who is a Jew and other issues of Jewish status. That false narrative pervades the literature, and creates a level of tension that adds to the already inherent challenges of being a new parent, intent upon bringing a new child into one's family. In Michael Fessler's remarks on the need for sensitivity when speaking with or about adoptive parents, he notes:<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Michael Fessler, "Adoption and Jewish Families: A Proposal," *The Reconstructionist* 66/1 (Fall 2001): 52, available at <http://therra.org/Reconstructionist/Fall2001.pdf>

Legal incorporation into the adopting family is critical to most adoptive parents' understanding of their parental role and their family. They see their new child as their "real child," beyond question, and are sensitive to messages that seem to delegitimize their parental bond to their adopted child.

In their discussion of the social context of adoption, Karen March and Charlene Miall also address the sense of stigmatization that may be felt by families:<sup>41</sup>

There has been a tendency in the clinical, research and social policy literature to view adoption as pathological by starting with the assumption that adoptive family ties are "second best" and adoptive children are "second choice". Both adoptive parents and adult adoptees have revealed their sense of being socially stigmatized by others who question the strength of their adoptive family ties.

...Adoption, in many if not most cases, arises out of loss which like all tragedies, holds "the potential for transformation and rebirth". Yet a focus on the potential negatives of adoption, based on preconceptions about the importance of the biological tie, has cast adoption as a problematic family form rather than the successful alternate family form that it is.

In his discussion of the scope and effects of adoption stigmatization, Leon G. Iving notes:<sup>42</sup>

Several adoption and infertility researchers suggest that stigmatization may be underestimated as causing adoption-related stress. The societal definition of parenthood, ultimately, in terms of blood bonds may continually challenge the adoptive parents' sense of entitlement to parent even after the losses associated with not having a biological child have been substantially grieved. The exaggerated attribution of psychopathology among adoptees and adoptive parents may also be due to stigmatization. Stigmatization may thus both cause actual challenges to emotional and role functioning as well as inaccurately denigrate adequate adaptation.

In her exploration of the societal status of adoptive parents, Charlene E. Miall notes that these families often bear society's stigma:<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Karen March and Charlene Miall, "Adoption as a Family Form," *Family Relations* 49/4 (Oct. 2000): 259, 362, available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/585830>

<sup>42</sup> Irving G. Leon, "Adoption Losses: Naturally Occurring or Socially Constructed?," in *Child Development* 73/2: 656, available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/3696380>

<sup>43</sup> Charlene E. Miall, "The Stigma of Adoptive Parent Status: Perceptions of Community Attitudes toward Adoption and the Experience of Informal Social Sanctioning, in *Family Relations* 36/1 (Jan. 1987): 34-35, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/584644>

Childlessness, whether voluntary or involuntary, is considered a form of deviant behavior in that it is statistically unusual and violates prevailing norms of acceptable conduct. In a society that values fertility, childlessness becomes an attribute of the individual which can be discrediting or stigmatizing...Although an infertile couple may approach adoption as a means of obtaining children of the “own” to raise, society conveys the message that adoptive parents are not, in fact, real parents...In a society that values biological kinship ties, the lack of a blood tie between a mother and her children may be an attribute which is discrediting or stigmatizing to her

Katarina Wegar confirms the societal challenges that often face adoptive families: “...adoption in this society is viewed by many as a form of cultural deviance...”<sup>44</sup>

Eve M. Brank continues with the idea that stigmatization can reinforce societal biases that may alienate adoptive families:<sup>45</sup>

Some scholars suggest that even the language we use to describe adoption may be creating an unnecessary and damaging stigma for those involved in the process...Yet, even with the scholarly language shift, adoptees are still likely to get asked about their “real parents.”

Although this study is meant to explore adoption as a lens through which we might build and affirm Jewish families via the ritual of *Pidyon Haben*, I would be remiss if I did not convey one commonly-held view of adoption as a process that involves not only the adoptive parents and their intentions, but also the other two elements of what is often called “The Adoption Triangle”—the unbreakable relationship that exists between birth parents, adoptive parents, and an adopted child. In her 1996 article, Ruth Fasht explores this topic through a psychological lens:<sup>46</sup>

The Adoption Triangle - what is it? It is a currently fashionable way of describing the adoption process by emphasizing equally the major players—the birth parents, the new/adoptive parents, and the child, and seeing them each as a point on a triangle—each endowed with the same importance, irreversibly interlinked and what is more important—*forever*.

---

<sup>44</sup> Katarina Wegar, “Adoption, Family Ideology, and Social Stigma: Bias in Community Attitudes, Adoption Research, and Practice,” in *Family Relations* 49/4 (October 2000): 367, available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/585831>

<sup>45</sup> Eve M. Brank, “Becoming a Parent and ‘Making’ a Family,” in *The Psychology of Family Law* (New York: NYU Press, 2019): 67, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv12pnnmm.8>

<sup>46</sup> Ruth Fasht, “The Adoption Triangle,” in *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, 29/1 (Spring 1996): 93-94, 99, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41444499>

I would like to highlight the experiences of those on the points of this triangle. I cannot emphasize sufficiently the following point—whenever you discuss the subject of adoption and from whatever angle, you are fairly and squarely facing the subject of deep, searing loss. For the child there is the loss of his or her heritage, the wounding trauma of the break with the birth parents. For the birth parents the loss is with their growing and developing child, this specific link with the future and their impact upon it. Finally, for the adoptive parents, their infertility and inability to create life out of this specific relationship...These are all deep and fundamental losses...The commonly held hope that once a child is adopted, then all the hurts for everyone involved are healed and then they can live happily ever after *or the reverse*, often seen in professionals, that adoption never truly works in the context of mental health, so let us view it as a pathological process and see everyone involved in terms of their pathology. Either view seeks to avoid confrontation with the real pain...”

“...Finally, we come to the adopted person whose task it is to integrate their past and previous heritage into the present and future. In order to fulfil this task successfully they need the help of their new parents and birth parents...Their conflict can fester silently within...Who am I? Who do I belong to? ...These searches for an identity can be resolved if not answered by open and honest reflection.”

Fasht’s reflections could be important when considering the many facets of and potential sensitivities within adoptive families. In terms of the purview of this study, I do not consider these critical to my exploration of *Pidyon Haben*. Still, those who interact with adoptive families within the Jewish community should be cognizant of the subject, and aware that in those interactions, there are multiple layers to be considered in the affirmation of identity.

Even with all of the preconceived ideas of the challenges that persist with adoption as part of the Western cultural narrative, there are many opportunities to create positive, affirming paths to support the normalization of adoption, and total inclusion into our general Jewish consciousness. After all, for families who cannot, or choose not, to have biological children, if not through the process of adoption, how will they strive to fulfill the *mitzvah* of creating a family (to be fruitful and multiply, *p’ru u’rvu*)? Perhaps the beauty of the power of “nurture” demonstrated by those within the Jewish community who embrace adoption can be actualized, as envisioned by David Fine. In his discussion of

marriage in *The Observant Life*, Fine advocates for the acceptance adoption as a viable and valued path to creating Jewish families: <sup>47</sup>

Although adoption has not traditionally been deemed the technical fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of *p'riyyah u-r'viyyah*, it should be wholeheartedly embraced as a valid method for creating vibrant Jewish families by couples willing and able to open their hearts and their homes to adoptive children...Jewishness is a social construct rather than an inalienable part of anybody's genetic heritage, that converts to Judaism are just as Jewish as born Jews, and that newborn children are not merely fertilized ova, but rather the products of parenting, and of their parents' care and love."

The opportunity to embrace our commitment to Jewish life as a framework for affirmative practices lead us to search for positive opportunities for using and/or building rituals that include everyone who wants to partake of their beauty and power. When reflecting upon the advisability of a newly-created adoption ritual within the Conservative movement, Chaim Weiner suggests that meaningful rituals evolve to support spiritual connections to Jewish life.<sup>48</sup>

Jewish law is more than a set of prohibitions that accompany us through life. Jewish law is a way of thinking about the world. The role of Jewish ritual is to elevate our lives and bring a spiritual dimension to the significant things that we do. *Masorti halacha*...is about surrounding ourselves with rituals that emphasize that Jewish values are relevant at all stages of life. They apply the values of the *Torah* to new situations and ensure that our lives are always surrounded by the commandments.

---

<sup>47</sup> David J. Fine, "Marriage," in *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews*, edited by Martin S. Cohen and Michael Katz. (New York, The Rabbinical Assembly, 2012), 623-624.

<sup>48</sup> Chayim Weiner, "A New Ritual for Adoption?" (May 2019), available at <https://masorti.org.uk/a-new-ritual-for-adoption/#.XwuD9ihKhPY>

## Expanding *Pidyon Haben*: Inclusive rituals and practices

The traditional practice of *Pidyon Haben* is a halakhically-defined solution to the question of how to fulfill a *mitzvah* of redeeming a first-born son as articulated in the *Torah*. If one only looks at the performance of this ritual as a necessary obligation, created to release a narrowly-defined class of newborn children from a life of service to God through the *kohanim*, then the traditional halakhic determinations of who should participate in *Pidyon Haben* remain unchanged. If however, one accepts that there is inherent value in acknowledging the creation of a Jewish family through the birth of a child, regardless of gender, and/or whether that child meets the traditional halakhic definition of being a mother's *peter rechem*, we must explore other paths to embrace that transformative moment of parenthood, and find a way to frame it in a Jewish context.

The following sources include an assortment of creative and inclusive rituals, all based upon *Pidyon Haben*, which strive to imbue tradition with meaning, and give voice to any family's desire to be immersed in the expression of their Jewishness through active engagement and participation.

In Sandy Sasso's 1973 "Consecration" ceremony, *Seder Kedushat Hayei Hamishpacha*, she presents a unique, creative transformation of the traditional *Pidyon Haben* ritual in a number of ways.<sup>49</sup> She suggests replacing the notion of the "redemption" of a child to an acknowledgement of a family's dedication to Jewish living through the birth of their child. In Sasso's incarnation, she offers a celebration of a family's first-born child of either gender, dispensing with the halakhic limitation of a mother's *bechor* who is also her *peter rechem*. Although Sasso implies that the child who is being celebrated is a family's biological firstborn, with very slight modifications it could easily be employed to

---

<sup>49</sup> Sandy Sasso, *Call Them Builders: A Resource Booklet About Jewish Attitudes and Practices on Birth and Family Life* (New York, Reconstructionist Federation of Congregations and Havurot, 1977), 11-13.

acknowledge an adopted family's dedication to Jewish living through the welcoming of their child into the world.

Sasso: *Seder Kedushat Hayei Hamishpacha* (1973)

SEDER KEDUSHAT HAYE HAMIŠPAHA

A Ceremony of Consecration to Family Life

An Introduction

The symbolism of redemption behind the traditional Pidyon Haben is fraught with difficulties for many modern Jews. Yet the underlying notions of the consecration of first life and the sanctity of life as given expression in the historical consciousness of Israel through the Exodus experience calls for celebration.

To affirm the sacredness of life is to say that life is worthwhile, that it is of transcendent importance, of supreme value.

...there is something in the nature of life which expresses itself in the human personality, which evokes ideals, which sends men on the quest of personal and social salvation. By identifying that aspect of reality with God we are carrying out in Modern times the implications of the conception that man is created in God's image.

(Mordecai M. Kaplan, Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion, p. 89)

Life's sacredness is sensed in a deeply personal way at the birth of the first child, the first fulfillment of the potential for life. This ceremony translates the concept of the sanctity of life into ceremonial celebration. Rather than "redeeming" the child, it calls for a dedication of the family to Jewish living, to those ideals which make for personal and social creativity and responsibility.

The ceremony should be performed on the thirty-first day after the child's birth, the age of viability according to Jewish tradition. Although Pidyon Haben is performed only for the first-born who "opens the womb" excluding those delivered by cesarian section and those born following an initial miscarriage, Seder Kedushat Hayei Hamishpacha may be used for any first-born child.



SEDER KEDUSHAT HAYE HAMISHPAHA

How joyous are we!  
How good is our portion!  
How pleasant our lot!  
How beautiful our heritage!

אֲשֶׁר יָנוּחַ  
מֵהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה  
וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִרְשָׁתוֹ  
וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִרְשָׁתוֹ

זֶה בְּנוֹנוֹ בְּכוֹרְנוֹ הוּא (זֹאת בְּתוּלָתוֹ בְּכוֹרְתָנוּ הִיא) פֶּסֶד רַחֵם לְאִמּוֹ  
(אִמָּה). וְנֹאמַר: קִדַּשׁ לִי כָּל־בְּכוֹר, פֶּסֶד כָּל־רַחֵם בְּבִנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

This is our son (daughter), our first-born, who opened the womb of his (her) mother. As it is written: Consecrate to Me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel (Exodus 13:2)

Having been privileged to realize the fulfillment of the potential for life within us, may our sense of reverence for the sanctity of all life be awakened.

חֲכִיב אָדָם שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצֶלֶם תְּבִיָּה יִתְרָה נִוְדַעַת לוֹ שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים  
שֶׁנֹּאמַר: כִּי בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם. (פְּרָקִי אֲבוֹת ג':יח)  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ זִכְרֵנוּ לְחַיִּים בְּרַחֲמִים.

Beloved are man and woman for they are created in the image of God. It is a sign of special love that we are aware of the moral responsibility this places upon us.

Praised are You, Eternal, who in love remembers Your creatures unto life.

The consecration of the first-born also serves as a recollection of the Exodus from Egypt.

It is written: And when in time to come your child asks you 'What does this mean?' you shall say, 'By strength of hand the Eternal brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage.'

(Exodus 13-14)

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְהָ בְּנֵה מִתָּר לֵאמֹר מַה־זֹּאת וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּחֹזֶק יָד  
הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְיָ מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים.

The experience of the Exodus from Egyptian bondage has ever sensitized our people to the values of human freedom and dignity. May we exemplify these values in our growing together as a family, creating a home where love of Torah, awareness of God and compassion for humanity always abide; where the hearts of the parents and the children shall always be turned to one another.

וְהִשִּׁיב לְבֵי־אֲבוֹת עַל בְּנֵים וְלֵב בְּנֵים עַל אֲבוֹתָם. (מְלָאכֵי ד:ו)

In honor of the birth of our child \_\_\_\_\_ bat/ben  
 \_\_\_\_\_ v' \_\_\_\_\_ we present a gift of tzedaka.  
 May it be a symbol of his/her commitment to Torah, to involvement in  
 the life of our people, and to the upholding of those values which make  
 for human dignity, fellowship, and peace.

ויפנס זה הפן (ותפנס זאח תפח) לתים, לתורה וליראת  
 שמים. יהי רצון ששם שפנס (שפנסה) לפריה פן פנס  
 (תפנס) לתורה ולחפה ולמעשים טובים.

May our son (daughter) enter into life, Torah, and service to God.  
 As he (she) has entered into the covenant, so may he (she) grow into  
 a life of Torah, marriage and good deeds.\*

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיינו  
 לזמן הזה.

Praised are You, Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, who has kept  
 us in life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this day.

As we partake of wine and dip hallah into honey we recite the tradi-  
 tional blessings as our expression of trust in the enduring value of all  
 that sanctifies life.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן.

Praised are you, Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe who creates  
 the fruit of the vine.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם המוציא לחם מן הארץ.

Praised are You, Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings  
 forth bread from the earth.

\*Alternative: Some may wish to say ... a life of Torah, service, joy  
 and good deeds.

כשם שפנס (שפנסה) לפריה פן פנס (תפנס) לתים על תורה  
 ועבודה על שמה ומעשים טובים.

May God bless you as He blessed  
Ephraim and Manasseh (Sarah  
Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.)

יְשִׁימָה אֱלֹהִים פְּאֶרְיִים וּמְנַשֶּׁה  
(יֵשׁוּבָה אֱלֹהִים פְּטִירָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל וּלְאָה.)

May God bless you and keep you.  
May God be with you and be gracious  
unto you.  
May God show you kindness and  
give you peace.

יְבָרְכֶה יי וְיִשְׁמְרֶה  
יָאֵר יי פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיַחֲנֶנֶה  
יִצְאָ יי פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיַשֵּׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

The Eternal is your Guardian,  
your shade upon your right  
hand. May He grant you  
length of days, years full of  
life and peace. May He guard  
you from every evil and protect  
your soul. Amen.

יי שׁוֹמְרֶה,  
יי צֶלֶה עַל יַד זְמִינָה.  
כִּי אֲרֵךְ יָמִים וְשָׁנוֹת חַיִּים  
וְשְׁלוֹם יוֹסִיפוּ לָךְ. יי יִשְׁמְרֶה  
מִכָּל רָע, יִשְׁמֹר אֶת נַפְשְׁךָ. אָמֵן.

In their 2003 *Pikdon Haben/Bat liturgy*, Margaret Jacobi and David Ehrlich reframed and repurposed the traditional *Pidyon Haben* ceremony for daughters.<sup>50</sup> Here they emphasized that each and every child born to a family is equally worthy of celebration, regardless of birth order or gender. They argued that celebrating the joys and responsibilities of parenthood need not be restricted to a first-born child who was in need of redemption (*pidyon*), but rather a celebration that all parents receive remarkable gifts from God—children with whom they are being entrusted (*pikdon*) as a sign of God’s ever-presence in the world. This ceremony could easily be used as an extremely meaningful acknowledgement of any child, biological or adopted, regardless of birth order or gender.

Margaret Jacobi and David Ehrlich: *Pikdon Haben/bat* (2003)

**Parents:** In the days of the Temple, a first-born son would be redeemed for five *shekalim* from the High Priest, as it is said: ‘*Ufeduyav miben chodesh tifdeh* - And those who are to be redeemed shall be redeemed at a month old.’ [For firstborn add: And it is said: ‘*Kadesh li kol bechor... li hu* - Sanctify for me all the first-born, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both human and animal: it is mine’ (Ex.13:2)]. We now publicly acknowledge that our child is a precious gift from God, entrusted to us to care for.

*For first time parents:*

[As we stand before you as new parents, we acknowledge the responsibility of having children. Sometimes we may feel overwhelmed and exhausted. At such times, help us to remember the privilege of being parents and the joy that children bring. Help us to adapt to our new lives with patience and gratitude. May we use our responsibility wisely and with love, so that we may bring up our child to be loving and caring, a blessing to his/her family, his/her people, and all humankind].

As a symbol of our pledge to bring up our child dedicated to God’s service, we give our symbolic five *shekalim* to *Tsedakah*, [so that other children may also be cared for/ for the education of children in our community]. May we in our lives teach our children by example the values of *tsedakah* and *gemilut chasidim*, care for others and kindness, and may we be privileged to see him/her come to *Torah*, *Chuppah* and *Ma-asim Tovim*, study of *Torah*, a loving and enduring relationship and good deeds.

---

<sup>50</sup> Margaret Jacobi, personal email communication, October 25, 2020, excerpted from her unpublished article, “*Pidyon Haben – A Progressive Reevaluation*,” 2003.

*Nevarech et eyn hachayim, asher hifkidanu et ha-yeled hazeh/hayaldah ha-zot kemorashah yekarah ve-ahuvah.*

We bless the source of life, who entrusted this child to us as a precious and beloved inheritance.

**Friend or relative:** Children are an inheritance of the Eternal One.. (Ps. 127:3)

**All:** Your children shall be like young olive trees around your table (Ps. 128:3)

*Baruch ... shechecheyanu...*

**Reader:** ‘When God asked Israel.... (SLC p. 318, *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayiggash 2*)

**Reader:** Kahlil Gibran (SLC p. 319)

Those present may add their own personal blessings.

**Parents:** As this child is entrusted to us to love and care for, so we acknowledge that we and our children are dependent on the Source of All Life, and that our souls and our bodies are entrusted to God’s care. So, we conclude with the words of *Adon Olam*, which have given strength and comfort to the Jewish people for generations past:

*The Adon Olam is sung.*

In their 1973 “Ceremony of Redemption and Hallowing of a Daughter,” Daniel and Myra Leifer put forth an egalitarian response to the traditional framework of *Pidyon Haben* as an overt statement that the value of the birth of a daughter should be perceived exactly the same as the value of the birth of a son.<sup>51</sup> It also broke the traditional bonds of redemption as a release from service to the *kohanim*, but rather transformed the transaction to one of *tzedakah*, a feature that was later seen in other non-traditional *Pidyon Haben*-based ritual adaptations. This excerpt highlights their intent:<sup>52</sup>

“We wished to retain the awe and gratitude for a *peter rehem* (womb-opening) child which is reflected in the traditional ceremony. We also wished to emphasize, as does the traditional ceremony, the dedication of the parents to rear their child for a Jewish life of “*Torah, huppah* (marriage), and good deeds.” However, we wished to shift the latter emphasis to include the broad range of values, traditional Jewish and nontraditional Jewish and humanitarian values, with which we hoped to imbue our daughter. Thus, we eliminated the role of the priests, and the five *shekelim*.... Instead we chose to donate a sum of eighteen dollars (the numerical value of the Hebrew letters of the word *hai*, life, is eighteen) in Ariel's name to three Jewish and three

---

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Leifer, Myra Leifer, “On the Birth of a Daughter,” in *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*, edited by Elizabeth Koltun (New York, Schocken Books, 1987), 21-30.

<sup>52</sup> Leifer, 25-26.

non-Jewish organizations which are engaged in [causes that represent] values we affirm and hope to convey to her.”

The following is an egalitarian adaptation of the Leifers’ original ceremony, cited in 2018 by Rona Shapiro, in which she includes both first-born daughters or sons.<sup>53</sup> Although there is nothing within Shapiro’s adaptation that specifically acknowledges a family created through adoption, it could easily be used in this context without any additional modifications.

### **1. Introduction**

Mother reads a poem. Father explains origin of the ritual. Selected guests of honor read from some or all of the passages below.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel instead of all the firstborn who open the matrix among the people of Israel; therefore the Levites shall be mine; Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I consecrated to me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast; mine shall they be; I am the Lord.

—*Numbers 3:11–13*

And whatever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring to the Lord, shall be yours; everyone who is clean in your house shall eat of it. Everything devoted in Israel shall be yours. Everything that opens the womb in all flesh, which they bring to the Lord, whether it is of men or beasts, shall be yours; nevertheless, the first born of man shall you surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shall you redeem. And those who are to be redeemed from a month old shall you redeem, according to your estimation, for the money of five shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs.

—*Numbers 18:13–16*

When Israel stood to receive the Torah, the Holy One said to them: "I am prepared to give you My Torah. Present to Me good guarantors that you

---

<sup>53</sup> Rona Shapiro, “*Pidyon ha-Bat/ha-Ben* (Redemption of the Firstborn),” 2018, available at <https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/pidyon-ha-bat-ha-ben-redemption-firstborn>

will observe and study the Torah and I shall give it to you." They said: "Our ancestors are our guarantors."

The Holy One said: "Your ancestors are not sufficient guarantors. Bring Me good guarantors, and I shall give you the Torah."

They said: "Our prophets are our guarantors."

The Holy One said: "The prophets are not sufficient guarantors. Bring Me good guarantors and I shall give you the Torah."

They said: "Indeed, our children will be our guarantors."

The Holy One said: "Your children are good guarantors. For their sake I give the Torah to you."

—*Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah 1, 24*

You stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, Your little ones, your wives, and your stranger who is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water; That you should enter into covenant with the Lord your God, and into his oath, which the Lord your God makes with you this day; That he may establish you today for a people to himself, and that he may be to you a God, as he has said to you, and as he has sworn to your fathers, to *Abraham*, to *Isaac*, and to *Jacob*. And not with you alone will I make this covenant and this oath; But with him who stands here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him who is not here with us this day;

—*Deuteronomy 29: 9–14*

## 2. The Ritual

A cup of wine and a loaf of challah are present.

### **Parents:**

זאת בתנו (זה בגנו) היא (הוא) פטר רחם לאמה (לאמו)

קדש היא (הוא) להי כפיתוב "קדש לי כל בכור פטר כל רחם בבני ישראל באדם ובבהמה לי הוא" וטוב  
בעינינו לפדותה (לפדותו) והנה קסף פדיונה (פדיונו) וקדושה (וקדושו)

Zot biteynu (zeh bineynu) hi (hu) peter rekhem l'imah (l'imo). Kaddesh hi (hu) L'Adonay, kakatuv "kaddesh li khol b'k'hur peter kol rekhem bivney yisrael ba-adam u'va-b'heymah li hu" v'tov b'eyneynu lifdotah (lifdoto) v'hiney kesef pidyonah (pidyono) v'kidushah (v'kidusho).

This is our firstborn son/daughter. S/he opened, freed and liberated the womb of her/his mother. Holy is s/he to Adonai, as it is written, "Consecrate to Me every firstborn, man and beast, the first issue of every womb among the Israelites, is Mine." (Ex. 13:1)

Now it is good in our eyes and our desire to redeem her/him. And here is the money of her/his redemption and hallowing.

Money is set aside for tzedakah in the name of the baby.

**Parents:**

ברוך אתה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהִכְנִיסָהּ (לְהִכְנִיסוֹ) בְּבְרִיתוֹ שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל

Barukh attah Adonay, Eloheynu melekh ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hakhnisah (l'hakhniso) biv'rito shel yisrael.

ברוכה את יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוֹחַ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁתָנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיהָ וְצִוָּתָנוּ לְהִכְנִיסָהּ (לְהִכְנִיסוֹ) בְּבְרִיתוֹ שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל

B'rukha at Yah, Sh'khinah, Eloheynu ruakh ha-olam, asher kidshatnu b'mitzvotaha v'tzivatnu l'hakhnisah (l'hakhniso) biv'rito shel yisrael.

Praised are you, Adonai, our God, Lord of the Cosmos, who has made us holy through your Commandments and commanded us to bring our son/daughter into the covenant of the People of Israel.

ברוך אתה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל פְּדִיּוֹן כָּל בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר רַחֵם בְּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Barukh attah Adonay, Eloheynu melekh ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al pidyon khol bakhur peter rekhem biv'ney yisrael.

זֶה תַּחַת זְאֵתָא זֶה

זֶה חִלוּף זְאֵתָא זֶה

זֶה מַחוּל עַל זְאֵתָא זֶה

וְתַכְנֵס זְאֵת הַבֵּתָא וְיַכְנֵס זֶה הַבֵּן \_\_\_\_\_ בֵּת אֲבִין \_\_\_\_\_ לְחַיִּים לְתוֹרָה וּלְיִרְאֵת שָׁמַיִם

Zeh takhat zot (zeh). Zeh khiluf zot (zeh).

Zeh makhul al zot (zeh).

V'tikanes zot ha-bat (v'yikanes zeh ha-ben) \_\_\_\_\_ bat/ben \_\_\_\_\_ l'hayim, l'torah, ul'yirat shamayim.

This tzedakah instead of this child, this in exchange of that, this money redeems this first born. May this son/daughter, \_\_\_\_\_ son/daughter of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, enter into Life, Torah and the awe of the Divine. May it be God's will that just as s/he has entered into



Redemption, so may s/he enter into the study of Torah, the marriage canopy and into the doing of good deeds.

For a girl:

אָחֻתְנוּ אַתְּ הִי לְאַלְפֵי רִבְבָה

*Akhoteynu at hayi l'alfei r'vavah.*

O sister! May you grow into thousands of myriads (Gen 24:60).

May God make you as our Mothers *Sarah*, *Rivka*, *Rachel* and *Leah*.

יְשִׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּשָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה

יְבָרֵךְ אֲדֹנָי וְיִשְׁמְרֵךְ

יֵאָר אֲדֹנָי פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וְחַנּוּךְ

יֵשָׂא אֲדֹנָי פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

*Yismeikh Elohim k'sarah, rivkah, rachel, v'leah.*

*Y'vorekh Adonay v'yishmereikh*

*Yaer Adonay panav eilayikh vi'hunayikh*

*Yisa Adonay panav eilayikh v'yasem lakh shalom*

For a boy:

יְשִׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה

יְבָרֵךְ אֲדֹנָי וְיִשְׁמְרֵךְ

יֵאָר אֲדֹנָי פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיַחְנֵךְ

יֵשָׂא אֲדֹנָי פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

*Y'sm'kha Elohim k'efraim u-khim'nasheh.*

*Y'varekh'kha Adonay v'yishm'rekha.*

*Yaer Adonay panav eilekha vikhunekha.*

*Yisa Adonay panav eilekha v'yasem l'kha shalom.*

May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe.

Adonai bless you and keep you.

Adonai make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

Adonai lift up his face to you and grant you peace.

Over wine:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ: מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן

*Barukh attah Adonay Eloheynu, melekh ha-olam borey p'ri ha-gafen.*

ברוכה את יה אלהינו רוח העולם בוראת פרי הגפן

*B'rukhhah at Yah Eloheynu ruakh ha-olam boreyt p'ri ha-gafen.*

Praised are you, Adonai, our God, Lord of the Cosmos, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Over bread:

ברוך אתה אדני אלהינו מלך העולם המוציא לחם מן הארץ

*Barukh attah Adonay Eloheynu, melekh ha-olam ha-motzi lekhem min ha-aretz.*

ברוכה את יה אלהינו רוח העולם המוציאה לחם מן הארץ

*B'rukhhah at Yah Eloheynu ruakh ha-motziah lekhem min ha-aretz.*

Praised are you, Adonai, our God, Lord of the Cosmos, who brings bread out of the earth.

The ceremony can conclude with an additional reading or song. One possibility is to create a unique acrostic for your child based on the letters of his/her name (see "Verses, Midrashim, and Acrostics") The song, "On Children," written by Kahlil Gibran and set to music by Sweet Honey in the Rock echoes many of the themes of this ritual. See "On Children" to read the lyrics and hear the music. The ceremony concludes with a festive meal.

In Rami Shapiro's 2018 creative adaptation of a *Pidyon* ceremony, he transforms the notion of redemption from priestly service to an affirmation of a life filled with possibilities of endless discovery, autonomy, and freedom leading to learning, passion, and joy.<sup>54</sup> The ceremony is universally inclusive of any child, regardless of gender, birth order, and/or biological ties to its parents.

Rami Shapiro: *Pidyon: A Ceremony of Redemption* (2018)

*(Read responsively:)*

Universe unfolds as a rose in spring  
spilling forth a fragrant bouquet of  
stars and planets,  
grasses and herbs,  
beasts and people.

*We celebrate the unfolding of life  
with this act of redemption.*

---

<sup>54</sup> Rami Shapiro, "Pidyon: A Ceremony of Redemption," 2018, available at <https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/pidyon-ceremony-redemption>

Our greatest joy is walking in tune with universe,  
in touch with life  
and its myriad patterns and powers.  
Yet to walk to the rhythm of life  
we must be free  
to walk at our own pace  
in our own way.

*We acknowledge this need  
with this ceremony of redemption.*

In ancient time we consecrated our first born  
to priesthood, to choir, to Temple service.

*Today we consecrate all our children  
to life, wisdom, passion and peace.*

May this child find wisdom  
in every blade of grass,  
knowledge in every clump of earth.

May s/he see the value of human striving  
and the worth of human travail.

May s/he find health and happiness, wisdom and joy  
in the world around and within her/him.

We hope for the welfare of this child  
and celebrate the unfolding of this new life venture.

*(Parents bring the child to the rabbi and say:)*  
This is the child who to be redeemed that s/he might  
be free to walk her/his own path in her/his own way.

*(Rabbi cradles the child with one arm and lifts five silver dollars with the  
other:)*

Which will you choose: certainty or risk?

Which will you do:  
tie this child to the supposed surety  
of a life mapped out,  
or redeem her/him from surety.  
allowing her/him the joy of discovery,  
the pain of mistake,  
the labors of freedom.  
and the risk of love?

*(Parents respond:)*

We choose to share in the growth of our child.

We choose the uncertainty of freedom to a road well-trod.

*(The rabbi returns the child to the parents:)*

This for that, surety for life.

May this child and her/his family never regret this moment when they choose to redeem her/him from a false security, preferring instead the awesome path of autonomy and freedom.

It is our fervent hope that s/he will enter into a healthy life full of learning, passion and joy.

May the life s/he will eventually lead be a blessing to all who know her/him.

May we who celebrate this ceremony of redemption continue our own redemption as well.

Redemption from habit and ignorance,  
redemption from injustice and injury,  
redemption from thoughtless behavior  
and all manner of needless suffering.

And may we add our blessing to this family  
that they may grow and prosper,  
partaking fully of the joys and sorrows of growing up.

Mark Golub and Norman Cohen's 1973 ceremony, *Kiddush Peter Rechem* focuses on the responsibility incumbent upon parents to affirm their family's Jewish journey through the birth of their first child.<sup>55</sup> It transforms the transactional nature of *Pidyon* through a formal, symbolic gift of 18 silver dollars as the child's first public act of *tzedakah*—a gift to the Jewish people, as well as the family's commitment to living a life imbued with Jewish values. Although their ceremony is specifically crafted for a first-born child (regardless of gender), and though its language seems dated and overly formal, there is nothing within it that would exclude an adoptive family from considering its use as another vehicle to affirm their child's path within the Jewish community.

---

<sup>55</sup> Mark S. Golub and Norman Cohen, "An Alternative to *Pidyon Haben*," Central Conference of American Rabbis, in *The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 1973), 74-78.

## קְדוּשַׁת פֶּטֶר רַחֵם

### *The Sanctification of the First-born Child<sup>1</sup>*

#### *Rabbi*

(First Names of the Parents), YOU HAVE BEEN BLESSED WITH THE PRECIOUS GIFT OF NEW LIFE AND THE PRIVILEGE OF PARENTHOOD, WHICH HAVE ENABLED YOU TO SHARE IN THE MIRACLE OF CREATION.

THE JOY OF BEARING A CHILD, HOWEVER, SOON GIVES WAY TO THE AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY OF RAISING IT TO ADULTHOOD. AS NEW PARENTS, YOU ARE CONFRONTED FOR THE FIRST TIME WITH THE TASK OF GUIDING A CHILD'S LIFE — DETERMINING, AT LEAST IN PART, THE VALUES BY WHICH HE/SHE WILL LIVE AND THE IDEALS TOWARD WHICH HE/SHE WILL STRIVE.

WITH THE BIRTH OF YOUR FIRST-BORN CHILD, YOU ARE ASKED TO DEVOTE THE WHOLE OF YOUR BEINGS TO RAISING HIM/HER AS A PRACTICING, KNOWLEDGEABLE AND COMMITTED JEW/JEWESS AS WELL AS A SENSITIVE HUMAN BEING.

IN ANCIENT DAYS, EVERY FIRST-BORN SON SERVED GOD AS A PRIEST, AND THE RITUAL OF THE REDEMPTION OF THE FIRST-BORN SON REMINDED US OF THE ETERNAL TRUTH THAT WE MUST ALL BE GOD'S SERVANTS, SANCTIFYING OUR LIVES WITH DEEDS OF SELFLESSNESS.

AS YOU STAND HERE TODAY WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND IN GOD'S PRESENCE, YOU TOO ARE REMINDED THAT YOURS IS THE TASK TO REAR YOUR SON/DAUGHTER TO ADULTHOOD IMBUED WITH LOVE OF *TORAH* AND THE PERFORMANCE OF GOOD DEEDS.

MAY IT BE GOD'S WILL TO GRANT YOU HEALTH AND LONG LIFE, TO ENABLE YOU TO RAISE YOUR FIRST-BORN CHILD TO *TORAH*, TO *CHUPAH*, AND TO A LIFE OF LOVE AND PEACE.

בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יי יוצֵר הָאָדָם. BLESSED ART THOU, O LORD, CREATOR OF MAN. *AMEN*.

### *Reading of Torah Passages*

I. AND MOSES SAID UNTO THE PEOPLE: REMEMBER THIS DAY IN WHICH YE CAME OUT FROM EGYPT, OUT OF THE HOUSE OF BONDAGE, FOR THE STRENGTH OF THE HAND OF THE LORD BROUGHT YOU OUT FROM THIS PLACE. . . . AND IT SHALL BE WHEN THE LORD SHALL BRING THEE INTO THE LAND OF THE CANAANITE, AS HE SWORE UNTO THEE AND TO THY FATHERS, AND SHALL GIVE IT TO THEE, THAT THOU SHALT SET APART UNTO THE LORD ALL THAT OPENETH THE WOMB (*Exodus* 13:3, 11-12).

II. FOR ALL THE FIRST-BORN AMONG THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL ARE MINE, BOTH OF MAN AND OF BEAST. ON THE DAY THAT I SMOTE ALL THE FIRST-BORN IN THE LAND OF EGYPT, I SANCTIFIED THEM FOR MYSELF (*Numbers* 8:17).

III. AND THE LORD SPOKE UNTO AARON: EVERY THING DEVOTED IN ISRAEL SHALL BE THINE. EVERY THING WHICH OPENETH THE WOMB,

OF ALL FLESH, WHICH THEY OFFER UNTO THE LORD, BOTH OF MAN AND BEAST, SHALL BE THINE. THE FIRST-BORN OF MAN, HOWEVER, SHALT THOU SURELY REDEEM. . . . FROM A MONTH OLD SHALT THOU REDEEM THEM, AND THEIR REDEMPTION MONEY SHALL BE ACCORDING TO THY VALUATION, FIVE *SHEKELS* OF SILVER, AFTER THE *SHEKEL* OF THE SANCTUARY (*Numbers* 18:8, 14-16).

IV. AND THE LORD SPOKE UNTO MOSES, SAYING: AND I, BEHOLD I, HAVE TAKEN THE LEVITES FROM AMONG THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL INSTEAD OF EVERY FIRST-BORN THAT OPENETH THE WOMB AMONG THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. . . . FOR ALL THE FIRST-BORN ARE MINE. ON THE DAY THAT I SMOTE ALL THE FIRST-BORN IN THE LAND OF EGYPT, I HALLOWED UNTO ME ALL THE FIRST-BORN IN ISRAEL, BOTH MAN AND BEAST. MINE THEY SHALL BE: I AM THE LORD (*Numbers* 3:11-13).

v. וַיְדַבֵּר יי אֵל מֹשֶׁה לְאָמֵר קְדֹשׁ-לִי כָּל בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר כָּל רֶחֶם וַיֹּאמֶר יי הוּא בְּבֹנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. בְּאֲדָם וּבְבִתָּהּ לִי הוּא מֹשֶׁה, SAYING: SANCTIFY UNTO ME ALL THE FIRST-BORN, WHATSOEVER OPENETH THE WOMB AMONG THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, BOTH OF MAN AND OF BEAST, IT IS MINE (*Exodus* 13:1-2).

#### *Parents' Response*

OUR GOD, AND GOD OF OUR FATHERS, AT THE MOMENT OF BIRTH OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE, WHEN THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL STOOD READY TO EXODUS FROM EGYPT ON THEIR WAY TO MT. SINAI AND THE PROMISED LAND, THEY PLEDGED TO SANCTIFY ALL THEIR FIRST-BORN UNTO THEE. IT IS IN THIS SPIRIT, O GOD, THAT WE ASK THAT OUR FIRST-BORN CHILD, (Child's Name), BE SANCTIFIED IN THE PRESENCE OF THIS GATHERING, THAT WE GIVE THANKS FOR THE WONDER AND JOY OF PARENTHOOD, AND RE-AFFIRM THE NEED TO DEVOTE OUR LIVES AND THE LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN TO THE SERVICE OF THEE AND OUR PEOPLE.

בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יי מְשֻׁמֵּחַ הַיּוֹרִים עִם הַיְלָדִים WHO CAUSES PARENTS TO REJOICE WITH THEIR CHILDREN. AMEN.

#### *Rabbi*

(First Names of Parents), IN THE PRESENCE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS, MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, DO YOU RECOGNIZE THAT YOUR EFFORTS AS PARENTS ARE TO BE DIRECTED TOWARD THE FULFILLMENT OF THE TRUST THAT GOD HAS PLACED UPON YOU WITH THE GIFT OF YOUR FIRST-BORN CHILD? ARE YOU PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CONSECRATING (Child's Name)'S LIFE TO ONE OF THE STUDY OF *TORAH*, TO *CHUPAH*, AND TO GOOD DEEDS?

*Mother*

YES, WE DO RECOGNIZE THE TRUST THAT GOD HAS PLACED UPON US AS PARENTS WITH THE GIFT OF OUR FIRST-BORN CHILD;

*Father*

AND WE ARE PREPARED TO CONSECRATE (Child's Name)'s LIFE TO ONE OF THE STUDY OF *TORAH*, TO *CHUPAH*, AND TO GOOD DEEDS.

(Child Is Passed to the Mother)<sup>3</sup>

*Father*

WE PRESENT IN THE NAME OF OUR SON/DAUGHTER, (Full Name of Child), *CHAI* (*Eighteen Silver Dollars Are Presented to the Rabbi*) — AS A TOKEN OF HIS/HER FIRST CONTRIBUTION TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE. MAY IT BE A SYMBOL OF HIS/HER EVER GROWING COMMITMENT TO THE VALUES OF OUR TRADITION, AND OF HIS/HER CONTINUING PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF HIS/HER PEOPLE. *AMEN*.

*Priestly Benediction (Rabbi)*

יְבָרֶכְךָ יי וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ (G)                      יְבָרֶכְךָ יי וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ (B)

MAY THE LORD BLESS THEE AND KEEP THEE.

יָאֵר יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנֶּךָ (G)                      יָאֵר יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנֶּךָ (B)

MAY THE LORD LET HIS COUNTENANCE SHINE UPON THEE AND BE GRACIOUS UNTO THEE.

יִשָּׂא יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם (G)                      יִשָּׂא יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם (B)

MAY THE LORD LIFT UP HIS COUNTENANCE UPON THEE, AND GIVE THEE PEACE. *AMEN*.

*Kiddush*

*Shehecheyanu*

---

<sup>1</sup> In keeping with the traditional idea that the ceremony for the first-born should occur when the child is deemed a "viable" human being (that is, on the thirtieth day of life), it is suggested that the *קדוש בטר רחם* be held on the thirtieth day of the child's life. An alternative idea would be to hold The Sanctification of the First-born Child on the first *Shabbat* after the thirtieth day of the child's life, in which case the ceremony could be performed Friday evening or Saturday at the parents' home or at the synagogue.

<sup>2</sup> The five *Torah* passages may be read by five of the assembled friends who represent the Jewish community as a whole at the ceremony.

<sup>3</sup> The child is passed to the mother by a woman friend who has been holding the baby since the start of the ceremony on behalf of the Jewish community.

Anita Diamant's "Pidyon Ceremony" is a brief, inclusive adaptation that emphasizes the redemption of all life as a universal affirmation of God's presence in the world as being in partnership with humanity.<sup>56</sup> This ritual is fully egalitarian and could be used by adoptive families without any need for modifications.

## Pidyon Ceremony

Parent/s:

This is our son/daughter, our firstborn, who opened the womb of his/her mother. As it is written: Consecrate to Me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel. (Exod. 13:2)

Having been privileged to realize the fulfillment of the potential for life within us, may our sense of reverence for the sanctity of all life be awakened.

The consecration of the firstborn also serves as a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt. It is written: And when in time to come your child asks you, "What does this mean?" you shall say, "By strength of hand the Eternal brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (Exod. 13:14)

The experience of the Exodus from Egyptian bondage sensitized our people to the values of human freedom and dignity. May we exemplify these values as we grow together as a family, creating a home where love of Torah, awareness of that which is godly, and compassion for humanity always abide; where the hearts of the parents and the hearts of the children shall always be turned to one another.

Rabbi or leader:

Blessed with the sacred trust of new life, will you dedicate yourselves to the redeeming of life?

Parent/s:

I/we desire that the birth of my/our son/daughter inspire us all to work for the redemption of all life. We express our partnership with that which is godly in the process of *tikkun olam*, world redemption, as we, in honor of the birth of our

---

<sup>56</sup> Anita Diamant, *The New Jewish Baby Book: Names, Ceremonies & Customs, A Guide for Today's Families*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, foreword by Rabbi Norman J Cohen, with preface by Rabbi Amy Eilberg (New York, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 207-208.



## Pidyon Ceremony

child \_\_\_\_\_, *bat/ben* \_\_\_\_\_ ו'  
\_\_\_\_\_, present a gift of *tzedakah*. May it be a  
symbol of my/our and his/her commitment to Torah, to involve-  
ment in the life of our people, and to the upholding of those val-  
ues that make for human dignity, fellowship, and peace.

Blessed by the presence whose sanctity fills our lives, we  
redeem every firstborn and engage in *tikkun olam*.

Parent/s present a gift of *tzedakah* and say:

*For a son:*

זֶה תַּחַת זֶה, זֶה חֶלּוֹף זֶה, זֶה מְחוּל עַל זֶה.

*Zeh ta-chat zeh, zeh cha-luf zeh,  
zeh ma-chul al zeh.*

*For a daughter:*

זֶה תַּחַת זֹאת, זֶה חֶלּוֹף זֹאת, זֶה מְחוּל עַל זֹאת.

*Zeh ta-chat zot, zeh cha-luf zot,  
zeh ma-chul al zot.*

This *tzedakah* instead of greed,  
This gift in place of selfishness,  
This commitment because of the blessing of  
new life.

May my/our son/daughter enter into life, Torah, and a com-  
mitment to all that is godly. As he/she has entered into the  
covenant, may he/she grow into a life of Torah, *huppah*, and  
good deeds.

Parents and guests recite the *Sheheheyanu*, the prayer for  
new blessings. After *Kiddush*, the blessing over wine, and  
*Motzi*, the blessing over bread, which is dipped in honey for  
a sweet life, the *s'udat mitzvah* is served.<sup>8</sup>

In this, the last example of adapted rituals, Eric Mendelsohn offers a narrative of a universal *Pidyon Haben/Habat* ceremony framework that could be inclusive of all families, regardless of how they have been created.<sup>57</sup>

When the child is one month old or the final adoption papers are valid for one month, the parents bring the child before the congregation (or a group of ten friends) just before or just after *Shabbat*. (Among this group of friends there is likely to be a *kohen*, or if no *kohen*, a *levi*, or if no *levi*, a firstborn.) One of them asks, “Is this your first child, the start of a new generation amongst the Jewish people? Do you wish to assign this child to lifelong service to the community or wish to redeem him/her?” The parents respond, “I wish to redeem him/her so he/she can be educated by us and decide him/herself how much of him/herself, he/she wishes to dedicate to the value of community service which we hold dear.” The parents then recite the traditional blessings (adapting them for daughters as well as sons). The designated person then accepts tangible assets worth at least 117 grams [sic] of silver which is donated to a social justice cause. Then in true Jewish tradition — everybody shouts *mazal tov* and eats. In this way, an adapted *Pidyon Ha-ben/bat* ritual can be transformed from an outdated and problematic rite to a newly revalued milestone in the life of a family and a community.

---

<sup>57</sup> Eric Mendelsohn, “*D’var Torah for Tetzaveh: Reconstructing Judaism*,” March 2017, available at <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/dvar-torah/dvar-torah-tetzaveh>.

## Conclusion

The exploration of the halakhic context for *Pidyon Haben*, along with reflections on how its practice has been considered over time, have provided a rich context for understanding its traditional purpose, practical and spiritual interpretations, as well as the ritual's potential to become expanded and transformed as an inclusive and meaningful affirmation of Jewish identity for those who may choose to engage with it. To consider the benefits of such a metamorphosis, one would need to be open to the universal aspects of the ritual's intent beyond the fulfillment of halakhic obligation, and be willing to create and/or synthesize new structures for all growing families to embrace yet another opportunity to affirm their collective Jewish identities. The numerous cited examples of the adapted and transformed *Pidyon* rituals could serve as models for additional creativity in the future, adding to the ever-evolving needs of all types of family units and their children. For many, it is still true that "the ceremony of ... *Pidyon Haben*, is one of the least understood rites of passage in Judaism, yet it can nevertheless be used creatively to strengthen the family ties and the emotional bond to Jewish tradition of those who participate in it."<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Carl N Astor, "The Jewish Life Cycle," in *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews*, edited by Martin S. Cohen and Michael Katz (New York, The Rabbinical Assembly, 2012), 249.

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 'Adoption and Jewish Life—Resource Guide for Clergy." Jewish Social Service Agency. July 2015. Available at <http://bjep.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Adoption-and-Jewish-Life-Clergy-Resource-Guide.pdf>
- Affirmations of Liberal Judaism*. Rabbinic Conference of Liberal Judaism. Revised edition. 2006. No. 27. Available at <https://www.liberaljudaism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Affirmations-of-Liberal-Judaism-Booklet-MAR-2020.pdf>
- Alhatorah.org. 2020. *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 305 | Alhatorah*. [online] Available at [https://shulchanarukh.alhatorah.org/Main/Yoreh\\_Deah/305.28#m7e1n6](https://shulchanarukh.alhatorah.org/Main/Yoreh_Deah/305.28#m7e1n6)
- "A Pidyon Haben and Kohamin." *New American Reform Responsa (NARR) 191 121 (June 1990)*. Available at <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/narr-191/>
- Astor, Carl N. "The Jewish Life Cycle." In *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews*. Edited by Martin S. Cohen and Michael Katz. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2012. Pp. 239-304.
- Brank, Eve M. "Becoming a Parent and 'Making' a Family." In *The Psychology of Family Law*. New York: NYU Press, 2019. Pp. 4-78. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv12pnnmm.8>
- Cedarbaum, Daniel. "Reconstructing Halakha." *Reconstructing Judaism*. May 6, 2016. Available at <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/article/reconstructing-halakha>
- Chabad.org. 2020. *Mishneh Torah*. Translated by Eliyahu Touger. Chabad—Text and Writings [online], available at [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/1002537/jewish/Bikkurim-Chapter-11.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1002537/jewish/Bikkurim-Chapter-11.htm)
- Crane, Nate. "Adoption." Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards. *Hoshen Mishpat*, CJLS HM 290/1 (2018). Available at [https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/adoption\\_-\\_rabbi\\_nate\\_crane\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/adoption_-_rabbi_nate_crane_-_final.pdf)
- "Customs of Pregnancy and Birth; Chapter 5—*Pidyon Haben*." Compiled by Avraham Yeshaya Holtzberg; translated by Shimon Neubort, November 10, 1999. Available at [https://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article\\_cdo/aid/72320/jewish/Pidyon-HaBen.htm](https://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/72320/jewish/Pidyon-HaBen.htm)
- Dembroski, Betty Giles and Dale L. Johnson. "Dogmatism and Attitudes toward Adoption." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 31/4 (November 1969), 788-792. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/349325>
- Diamant, Anita. *The New Jewish Baby Book: Names, Ceremonies & Customs, A Guide for Today's Families*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Foreword by Rabbi Norman J Cohen. Preface by Rabbi Amy Eilberg. New York: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008.

- Dorff, Elliot N. "Hayyei Min u'Mishpahah: Moral Guidance on Sex and Family Life." In *Modern Conservative Judaism: Evolving Thought and Practice*. Jewish Publication Society. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. Pp. 274-308. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctt22zmb4x.16>
- Dorff, Elliot N. "Caring for the Needy." In *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews*. Edited by Martin S. Cohen and Michael Katz. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2012. Pp. 806-830.
- Fasht, Ruth. "The Adoption Triangle." *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 29/1 (Spring 1996), 93-100. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41444499>
- Fessler, Michael. "Adoption and Jewish Families: A Proposal." *The Reconstructionist* 66/1 (Fall 2001), 52-59. Available at <http://therra.org/Reconstructionist/Fall2001.pdf>
- Fine, David J. "Marriage." In *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism for Contemporary Jews*. Edited by Martin S. Cohen and Michael Katz. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2012. Pp. 611-631.
- Fisher, Allen P. "Still 'Not Quite as Good as Having Your Own'? Toward a Sociology of Adoption." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003), 335-361. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/30036971>
- Freehof, Solomon B. "Two Adoption Problems." In *Reform Responsa for Our Time*. Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1974.
- . "Possible Pidyen of Second Son." In *Reform Responsa for Our Time*. Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1971, 266.
- . "Quarreling Family and Bar Mitzvah." In *Reform Responsa for Our Time*. Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1974, 136.
- Gager, Kristin Elizabeth. "Adoption Laws from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period." In *Blood Ties and Fictive Ties*. [e-book] Princeton University Press, 1996. Pp. 37-70. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zvj3x.7>
- Gilman, Neil, contr. *Guide to the Pidyon HaBen Ceremony*. New York: Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, 1993.
- Gold, Michael. "Adoption: The Jewish View." *Adoption Quarterly*, 3/1 (1999-2000), 3-13. Available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoption\\_in\\_Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoption_in_Judaism)
- . *And Hannah Wept: Infertility, Adoption, and the Jewish Couple*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988.

- Goldberg, Abbie. "Stigmas about Adoption Remain, and Hurt Families: Myths about adoption, and How to Confront Them." May 2012. Available at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/beyond-blood/201205/stigmas-about-adoption-remain-and-hurt-families>
- Goldberg, Abbie, Lori A. Kinkler, Denise A. Hines. "Perception and Internalization of Adoption Stigma among Gay Lesbian, and Heterosexual Adoptive Parents." *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 7/1 (February 2011), 132–154. Available at <https://wordpress.clarku.edu/agoldberg/files/2012/03/GOLDBERG-KINKLER-HINES-2011.pdf>
- Golinkin, David. "Calling Adopted Children to the *Torah*???" Responsum by Rabbi David Golinkin. March 2013. Available at <https://masorti.org.uk/newsblog/newsblog/news-single/article/calling-adopted-children-to-the-torah.html#.Xv9d2ChKhPY>
- Golub, Mark S. and Norman Cohen. "An Alternative to *Pidyon Haben*." Central Conference of American Rabbis. In *The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 1973).
- Grotevant, Harold D., Nora Dunbar, Julie K. Kohler, Amy M. Lash Esau. "Adoptive Identity: How Contexts within and beyond the Family Shape Developmental Pathways." *Family Relations* 49/4 (Oct. 2000), 379-387. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/585833>
- Handler, Howard. "*Pidyon Haben* and Caesarean Sections." Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards. *Yoreh Deah*, CJLS YD 305/24 (1991). Available at [https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/handler\\_pidyon.pdf](https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/handler_pidyon.pdf)
- "How does Reconstructionism regard *Halakah*/Jewish law and Jewish tradition?," Jewish Reconstructionist Communities, in association with the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, 2016. Available at <https://archive.jewishrecon.org/resource/faqs-reconstructionist-approaches-jewish-ideas-and-practices>
- Jacob, Walter. "A *Pidyon Haben*." *CCAR Responsa*. Available at <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/jrj-winter-1989-87-88/>, accessed 28 July 2020.
- Jacobi, Margaret. Personal email communication, taken from her unpublished article, "*Pidyon Haben – A Progressive Reevaluation*," 2003, by Margaret Jacobi with David Ehrlich [includes unpublished ceremony to which original *Liberal Judaism* article refers, October 25, 2020].
- Klein, Isaac. *A Guide to Jewish Religions Practice*. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1979.
- Klein, Michelle. *A Time to be Born: Customs and Folklore of Jewish Birth*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1998.
- "Koltun, Elizabeth, ed. *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.

- Kurtz, Vernon H. "Delay of *Pidyon Haben*." Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards. *Yoreh Deah*, CJLS YD 305/II (1995). Available at [https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/kurtz\\_pidyon.pdf](https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/kurtz_pidyon.pdf)
- Leifer, Daniel and Myra Leifer. "On the Birth of a Daughter." In *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*. Edited by Elizabeth Koltun. New York: Schocken Books, 1987. Pp. 21-30.
- Leon, Irving G. "Adoption Losses: Naturally Occurring or Socially Constructed?" *Child Development* 73/2 (April 2002), 652-663. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/3696380>
- Lockerbie, Stacy. "Infertility, Adoption and Metaphorical Pregnancies." *Anthropologica* 56/2 (2014), 463-471. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/24467319>
- Lustenberger, Sibylle. "Conceiving Judaism: The Challenges of Same-Sex Parenthood." *Israel Studies Review*, 28/2 (Winter 2013), 140-156. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43771867>
- March, Karen and Charlene Miall. "Adoption as a Family Form." *Family Relations* 49/4 (Oct. 2000), 359-362. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/585830>
- Matmon, Avi. "D'var Torah on Ki Tavo." *Spark of Jewish Experience*. September 17, 2013. Available at <http://sparkofjewishexperience.com/category/mitzvot-and-traditions/pidyon-haben/>
- Meilaender, Gilbert C. "Nature and History." In *Not by Nature but by Grace: Forming Families through Adoption*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016. Pp. 5-24. [ebook]. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctvpj7c9c.4>
- Mendelsohn, Eric. "D'var Torah for Tetzaveh." *Reconstructing Judaism*. (March 2017). Available at <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/dvar-torah/dvar-torah-tetzaveh>
- Miall, Charlene E. "The Stigma of Adoptive Parent Status: Perceptions of Community Attitudes toward Adoption and the Experience of Informal Social Sanctioning." *Family Relations* 36/1 (Jan. 1987), 34-39. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/584644>
- . "The Social Construction of Adoption: Clinical and Community Perspectives." *Family Relations* 45/3 (July 1996), 309-317. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/585503>
- Millunchick, Mordechai. *Pidyon Haben – Midarkai Hapidyon: A Halachic Guide and Weekly Parshah Reader*. Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2016.
- Nevens, Daniel. "Choosing Your Child." The Jewish Theological Seminary. July 2016. Available at [www.jtsa.edu/choosing-your-child](http://www.jtsa.edu/choosing-your-child)
- Ochs, Vanessa L. *Inventing Jewish Ritual*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2007.
- Orlian, Meir. "Can a Kohen Return *Pidyon Haben* Money?" The Jewish Press. May 2020. Available at <https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/halacha-hashkafa/can-a-kohen-return-pidyon-haben-money/2020/05/22/>

- Phillips, Lauren. "How a Rare Jewish Ritual Added Meaning to Our Family." *Reform Judaism*. April 2018. Available at <https://reformjudaism.org/blog/2018/04/02/how-rare-jewish-ritual-added-meaning-our-family>
- "Pidyon Haben." *Halachipedia*. July 2020. Available at [https://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Pidyon\\_Haben](https://halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Pidyon_Haben)
- "Priestly and Levitical Status in Reform Judaism." *Responsa by the CCAR Responsa Committee 5771.4 (2010)*. Available at <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/priestly-levitical-status-reform-judaism/>
- "Redemption of the First Born." *CCAR Responsa for Pidyon Haben*. Available at <https://www.ccarnet.org/responsa-topics/pidyon-haben-redemption-of-the-first-born-son/>, accessed 28 July 2020.
- "Renewing Ritual: Margaret Jacobi and David Ehrlich Suggest a New Ceremony, a Month after Birth, to Mark the Arrival of a Child." *Liberal Judaism* 32/4 (July/August 2005), p. 3.
- Retter, Daniel. *HaMafteach (Talmud Bavli Indexed Reference Guide)*. Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, Ltd., 2014.
- Rosenberg, Shelley Kapnek. "Adoption and the Jewish Community: Like a Branch Transplanted." *The Reconstructionist* 26/2 (Spring 2000), 16-22. Available at <https://www.bjpa.org/content/upload/bjpa/adop/Adoption%20and%20the%20Jewish%20Community.pdf>
- Rosenfeld, Azriel. "Generation, Gestation, And Judaism." *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, 12/1 (Summer 1917), 78-87. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/23256217>
- Rosenstein, Marc. "Childhood." In *Ksharim*. Jerusalem: Makom – The Israel Education Lab of the Jewish Agency for Israel. Pp. 307-307. Available at <https://makomisrael.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/ksharim.pdf>, accessed 28 October 2020.
- Rubenstein, Richard L. "What Was at Stake in the Parting of the Ways Between Judaism and Christianity?" *Shofar* 28/3 (Spring 2010), 78-102. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5703/shofar.28.3.78>
- Rubin, Nissan. "Coping with the Value of the *Pidyon Ha'ben* Payment in Rabbinic Literature: An Example of a Social Change Process." *Jewish History* 10/1 (Spring 1996), 39-61. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20101250>



- Sartori, Jennifer and Jayne K. Guberman. "Boundaries of Identity: Jewish Families in an Era of Transnational, Transracial, and Open Adoption." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 89/1 (Fall 2014), 46-54. Available at [https://adoptionandjewishidentity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Boundaries\\_of\\_Identity\\_Jewish\\_Families\\_in\\_an\\_Era\\_of\\_Transnational\\_Transracial\\_and\\_Open\\_Adoption.pdf](https://adoptionandjewishidentity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Boundaries_of_Identity_Jewish_Families_in_an_Era_of_Transnational_Transracial_and_Open_Adoption.pdf)
- Sasso, Sandy Eisenberg. *Call Them Builders: A Resource Booklet About Jewish Attitudes and Practices on Birth and Family Life*. New York: Reconstructionist Federation of Congregations and Havurot, 1977.
- Schoenberg, Carl. "Adoption: The Created Family." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 355 (September 1964), 69-74. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/1036644>
- Sefaria.org. 2020. *Mishnah* | Sefaria. [online] Available at <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Mishnah>
- . *Mishneh Torah* | Sefaria. [online] Available at <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Halakhah/Mishneh%20Torah>
- . 2020 *Sefer HaChinukh 392* | Sefaria. [online] Available at [https://www.sefaria.org/Sefer\\_HaChinukh.392?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Sefer_HaChinukh.392?lang=bi)
- . 2020. *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 305* | Sefaria. [online] Available at [https://www.sefaria.org/Shulchan\\_Aruk%2C\\_Yoreh\\_De'ah.305?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Shulchan_Aruk%2C_Yoreh_De'ah.305?lang=bi)
- . 2020. *Talmud* | Sefaria. [online] Available at <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Talmud>
- . 2020. *Tanakh* | Sefaria. [online] Available at <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Tanakh>
- Shapiro, Rami. "Pidyon: A Ceremony of Redemption." 2018. Available at <https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/pidyon-ceremony-redemption>
- Shapiro, Rona. "Pidyon ha-Bat/ha-Ben (Redemption of the Firstborn)." 2018. Available at <https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/pidyon-ha-bat-ha-ben-redemption-firstborn>
- Siegel, Sharon R. "Jewish Welcoming Ceremonies for Newborn Girls: The Modern Development of a Feminist Ritual." *Modern Judaism* 32/3 (October 2012), 335-358. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/23361649>
- Skolnik, Gerald. "Should there be a Special Ceremony in Recognition of a First-Born Female Child?" Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards. *Yoreh Deah*, CJLS YD 305/I (1993). Available at [https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/skolnik\\_firstfemale.pdf](https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/assets/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/skolnik_firstfemale.pdf)

- Terrell, John and Judith Modell. "Anthropology and Adoption." *American Anthropologist*, 96/1 (March, 1994), 155-161. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/682656>
- Watkins, Mary and Susan Fisher. "Adoption and the World of the Parent." In *Talking with Young Children about Adoption*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Pp. 11-24. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctt1cc2mkc.5>
- Watkins, Mary and Susan Fisher. "Adoption Research." In *Talking with Young Children about Adoption*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Pp. 25-56. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctt1cc2mkc.6>
- Wegar, Katarina. "Adoption, Family Ideology, and Social Stigma: Bias in Community Attitudes, Adoption Research, and Practice." *Family Relations* 49/4 (October 2000), 363-370. Available at <http://www.jstor.com/stable/585831>
- Weiner, Chayim. "A New Ritual for Adoption?" May 2019. Available at <https://masorti.org.uk/a-new-ritual-for-adoption/#.XwuD9ihKhPY>
- "Withholding Paternity Information from a Father." *CCAR Responsa*, RR21 NO. 5760.8 (2000). Available at <https://www.ccarnet.org/responsa-topics/pidyon-haben-redemption-of-the-first-born-son/>
- Yarden, Ophir. "Adoption in Judaism." *A Journal of Theology* 51/4 (Winter 2012), 276-283. Available at [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ophir\\_Yarden/publication/263412066\\_Adoption\\_in\\_Judaism/links/5d0c8de7458515c11ceaf789/Adoption-in-Judaism.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ophir_Yarden/publication/263412066_Adoption_in_Judaism/links/5d0c8de7458515c11ceaf789/Adoption-in-Judaism.pdf)
- Zakutinsky, Avi. "The Mitzvah of Pidyon Haben." OU Torah – Practical *Halacha*. Available at <https://outorah.org/p/27214>, accessed 4 June 2020.