

NEW YORK

OCTOBER 26, 2009

BODY

Doctor vs. Mohel

How to choose wisely, and find the best possible practitioner in either case.

➔ The Pro-Doctor Argument

The hospital-circumcision contingent believes that a medical facility is the only appropriate place for surgery. If something goes wrong—excessive bleeding, infections, an accident—a hospital has options that a synagogue's sanctuary (not to mention a dining-room table) does not. In New York, the doctor who performs the procedure is virtually always the mother's obstetrician, though in very rare cases, when the procedure seems like it might turn complicated, the obstetrician may refer the case to a urologist. Whomever you wind up with, what you want is someone who has done hundreds of circumcisions. When you're choosing an obstetrician at the beginning of pregnancy, ask how many of the procedures he or she has performed.

➔ The Pro-Mohel Argument

It boils down to a preference for ritual and tradition over sterility and convenience. Since mohels use only topical anesthetics or none at all, a bris goes faster, which can be less stressful for the baby. In a hospital, the boy is usually strapped to a backboard; in a traditional bris, a parent, loved one, or rabbi holds the child on a soft cushion. Some mohels take steps to create a sterile field, just as surgeons do (the tradition of cleaning the cut with a mouthful of wine is no longer practiced by most reputable mohels). Bear in mind that training varies widely for mohels. Some are also doctors, whereas others have undergone apprenticeships in this one procedure. Most insurance providers will

cover the cost of a circumcision done in the hospital, whereas a mohel's services usually cost between \$650 and \$850. If you choose to go with a mohel, you'll have to make up your mind fairly early. Plan for a month before the baby's due date to ensure you can book the mohel you want. A traditional bris takes place on the eighth day of life.

➔ Picking Your Mohel

Most mohels are found through word of mouth; ask friends, family, an obstetrician-gynecologist, fellow synagogue members, or a rabbi for recommendations. Chat sites like urbanbaby.com offer reviews. Web sites like findthemohel.com and organizations such as the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan (646-505-4444), and the National Organization of American Mohalim (beritmila.org) offer lists of mohels that meet your religious preferences (Orthodox, Reform, etc.). Once you've got a list, seek out a mohel whose values and techniques suit you. Some mohels refuse to perform services for interfaith, same-sex, or other nontraditional couples; others are open to anyone, including non-Jews. Some mohels are traditional and solemn; others are folksy and lively. Some use topical anesthesia; others have the baby suck on cloth dipped in wine or sugar water as a mild form of sedation. Once you've narrowed down your list of candidates, ask your top picks to provide references. And if they'll allow it, quietly observe one of their ceremonies.

CHRISTOPHER BONANOS AND BETH SHAPOURI



STEADY HANDS

A short list of mohels recommended by local synagogues, Jewish community organizations, and parents.

Cantor Philip Sherman

One of the most prolific mohels in the city, Sherman often packs in several ceremonies a day. Popular partly because of his openness to nontraditional families—including those outside the Jewish faith (917-448-2747).

Dr. Emily Blake

A obstetrician-gynecologist widely touted for her willingness to personalize ceremonies. Often includes English prayer translations and looks for ways to include extended-family members in the ceremony (917-405-0696).

Rabbi Paysach Krohn

A renowned speaker; his ceremonies are often described as exceptionally spiritual and inspirational (718-846-6900).

Dr. Dorothy Greenbaum

A pediatrician known for her warm demeanor and gentle methods, which include anesthesia (800-600-3022).

Dr. Jeffrey Mazlin

Obstetrician-gynecologist is touted for his vast experience, spanning over 30 years. Uses anesthesia and will travel to all five boroughs (212-517-9048).

Dr. Eric Diamond

The Long Island-based urologist performs all over the metropolitan area; touted for his quick and efficient technique and use of anesthesia (516-677-9672).

Rabbi Gerald Chirmomas

A Conservative mohel trained at Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem; has performed thousands of ceremonies throughout the region (973-334-6044).

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Friedman

An Orthodox mohel and member of the executive committee of the American Board of Ritual Circumcision; popular for his calming, upbeat presence (347-992-0306). R.S.