

Discussion Guide

The story of a traveling Jewish ritual circumciser



A documentary by Moti Krauthamer



When we think of America, we tend to measure things in terms of years or maybe tens of years. If we bother to scratch the surface, we will find an America rich with traditions and cultures dating back hundreds and even thousands of years. The documentary *Moyl* (rhymes with oil) is a glimpse of one such tradition; a thread that is part of the American fabric.

Moyl is about the joy, anxiety, spirituality, laughter, and sense of belonging experienced by a community of people in America still performing the nearly 4000 year old ritual of circumcision. The ceremony is more than just a circumcision; it is the continuation of an ancient tradition of welcoming a baby into the community. This ritual is observed by more Jews than any other Jewish religious practice.

The film follows a traveling 'moyl' (ritual circumciser), David Bolnick, from family to family and community to community as he helps parents initiate their sons into this ancient Jewish rite.

The film also delves into the more modern aspects of ritual circumcision, from maintaining the ritual even when corrective surgery preempts the traditional ceremony, to fathers choosing to make the 'cut' themselves. The film even acknowledges the circumcision jokes that have become part of American culture.



National Film Network

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A Jewish Name is given immediately following milah (the circumcision). Up to this point the child has no Jewish name. Most parents name their child after a deceased loved one; this adds a powerful component to the bris ceremony. Other parents name their child after living relatives or pick names of people who had an impact in their lives. Some simply pick names they like that have no connection to the past or present. The key in Jewish culture is that the name is an important representation of the child in both the physical and spiritual world. In many communities, therefore, it is a custom to give a little explanation about the origin of the child's Jewish name and namesake.

Jewish names are composed of a first/middle name followed by the name of the father; e.g., the mo'yl's Jewish name is: Dovid Avraham ben Yehuda Leib halevi. The word 'ben' means son of; 'bot' for a girl. In many communities, the mothers name is also included. This name written in Hebrew would look like this: דוד אברהם בן יהודה לייב הלוי

We celebrate a bris milah with joy. The Talmud states that since Jews accepted bris milah with joy, it is celebrated with joy-singing, dancing, and most importantly, a festive meal. To honor the parents and their new baby, a nice custom, seen in the film, is to dance around them while singing 'simon tov u'mazel tov' (a good sign and good luck).

Activities

The student should understand what male circumcision is before viewing this documentary. This will help the student better focus on the cultural aspects of "Mo'yl."

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT / THOUGHT PROVOKING QUESTIONS

Are there any traditions in your family? How old are they? How do you feel about them?

What role can extended family and community play for new parents?

Have you ever attended a bris? What did you think about it?

After seeing this film what do you think is the difference between a medical circumcision and a bris?

What did you think about the fathers who made the "cut" themselves?

What role do ancient customs play in modern times?

What role do rituals play in defining a people?

Why do you think this tradition has lasted for nearly 4,000 years?

Is a bris a family event or a community event?

Does humor have a role in ritual? In this ritual?

Is this a ritual for the parents or the child or the community?

Do you think mothers and fathers react differently to this ritual?

How does this tradition fit into the American culture?

Why do you think Jews today still give their children Jewish names?

Are you named after someone? If so, who? Why were you named after him or her? What do you know about that person?

Note..

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OTHER RESOURCES

Internet:

www.brismilah.com/
David Bolnick, Certified Mohel

www.thumbprint.tv/moyl/
Thumbprint Inc. Moyl Documentary

Books:

Guide to Ritual Circumcision and Redemption of the First-Born Son (1984) by Rabbi Eugene J. Cohen, Ktav Publishing House, Inc.

Bris Milah – Circumcision - The Covenant of Abraham (1985) by Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn; Mesorah Publications, Ltd.

Berit Mila in the Reform Context (1990) by Lewis M. Barth (editor); Berit Milah Board of Reform Judaism.

Circumcision – A Pictorial Atlas of its History, Instrument Development and Operative Techniques (1982) by Elliot A. Grossman, M.D., Todd & Honeywell, Inc.

Comments and suggestions:

A Thumbprint Inc. Production
www.thumbprint.tv/moyl/
Produced/Directed by: Moti Krauthamer
Music by: David Perkins
Shelf life: Indefinite
Genre: Documentary, Cultural
Duration: 50 minutes



Note..

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