"Pidyon Haben"

Frequently Asked Shaylos

Rabbi Ya'akov Trump

Who needs to do a pidyon haben?

It is a mitzvah for a father to redeem his son who is a first born from a Jewish wife.[1]

Shulchan Aruch YD 305:1

מצות עשה לפדות כל איש מישראל בנו שהוא בכור לאמו הישראלית בה' סלעים שהם ק"כ מעים שהם שלשים דרהמים כסף מזוקק:

Who cannot do a pidyon haben?

A children born via a caesarian birth or a child born afterwards does not have a pidyon haben.

Mishna, Bechoros 47b -A child born after a miscarriage does not have a pidyon haben.

Mishna, Bechoros 46a - Kohanim and Leviim are also exempted from pidyon haben on their children.

Mishna, Bechoros 13a - This is true even for a bas kohen or a bas levi.

TB Bechoros 47a - For a miscarriage, how far along must it be for the next child's pidyon haben to be exempted?

The Shulchan Aruch[2] explains that if a woman miscarries after 40 days from conception, any child born after that is not obligated in a pidyon haben. Rav Schachter follows this even not to do a pidyon without a bracha.

When must it be done?

The pidyon haben can only take place after a month. is based on the pasuk Bamidbar 18:16

וּפְדוּיָו֙ **מִבֶּן־חֹ֣דֶשׁ תִּפְדֶּ֔ה** בְּעֶרְכְּךָ֖ כֶּ֣סֶף חֲמֵ֣שֶׁת שְׁקָלִ֑ים בְּשֶׁ֤קֶל הַקֹּ֙דֶשׁ֙ עֶשְׂרִ֣ים גֵּרָ֔ה הִ֖וא:

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 question is – what is a month?

The Shulchan Aruch[3] explains that a pidyon haben must take place after 30 days. So the pidyon must take place on the 31st day. However, other poskim understand the month means the time it takes for a lunar cycle which is 29 days, 12 hours and 793 chalakim. The pidyon must be after this. To avoid this dispute, it is recommended to make the pidyon on the morning of the 31st day.

It should be done as soon as possible after one is allowed to do the pidyon.

S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sh	

[1] Shulchan Aruch YD 305:1
[2] YD 305:23
[3] YD 305:11

			Baby Born! At 3:52pm				
				Day 30	Day 31		

Who can it be done with?

The pidyon haben should be conducted with a kohen who is a respected kohen with no questions about his lineage and has not married a divorcee. The

How does the money work?

The Shulchan Aruch tells us it much be 5 selaim of silver which is 30 dirham. The dirham is a unit of weight which has different measurements ranging from 2.8-3.2 grams.

If it is 3.2 grams. The cost of the pidyon haben is 96 grams of silver. The silver price can be checked for current rates. When one uses coins, one must ensure that the coins are worth more than that amount of cash value.

Why is it 5 selaim?

The Torah tells us that is the money used to redeem the first borns in place of the Leviim.

Bamidbar 3:46

וְלָקַחְתָּ חֲמֻשֶׁת חֲמֻשֶׁת שְׁקָלִים לַגֻּלְגֹּלֶת בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ תִּקָּח עֶשְׂרִים גֵּרָה הַשָּׁקֶל:
take five shekels per head—take this by the sanctuary weight, twenty *gerah*s to the shekel—

Rashi explains that that was how much the brothers sold Yosef for and Yosef was the first born of his mother.

חמשת שקלים לגלגלת; כָּךְ הָיְתָה מְכִירָתוֹ שֶׁל יוֹסֵף, עֶשְׂרִים כֶּסֶף, שָׁהָיָה בְּכוֹרָהּ שֶׁל רָחֵל (ב"ר פ"ד):

What is the format?

There is a dialogue between the father and the kohen:

This, my first born son,	אִשְׁתִּי בְּנִי בְּכוֹרִי
is the first issue of his mother's womb,	וְהוּא פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם לְאִמּוֹ,
and the Holy One, blessed is He	וְהַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא
has commanded to redeem him,	צִוָּה לִפְדּוֹתוֹ,
as it is said:	שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר,
And those that are to be redeemed of them,	וּפְדוּיָו
from a month old shall you redeem them,	מִבֶּן חֹדֶשׁ תִּפְדֶּה
according to your estimation,	בְּעֶרְכְּךָ
for the money of five silver shekalim,	כֶּסֶף חֲמֻשֶּׁת שְׁקָלִים
of the shekel of the Sanctuary	בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ
which is equal to twenty *geirah.*	עֶשְׂרִים גֵּרָה הוּא.
And it is said:	וְנֶאֱמַר,
Sanctify unto me all the firstborn,	קַדֶּשׁ לִי כָל בְּכוֹר
whatsoever opens the womb	פֶּטֶר כָּל רֶחֶם
among the Children of Israel,	בִּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
both of man and of beast is Mine.	בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה, לִי הוּא:

Rabbi Ya'akov Trump

Which do you prefer, to give me your firstborn son who is the first issue of his mother's womb, or would you rather redeem him for five shekalim, as you are required to do by the Torah?	מַה בָּעֵית טָפֵי לִיתֵן לִי בִּנְךָ בְּכוֹרֶךָ שֶׁהוּא פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם לְאִמּוֹ, אוֹ בָּעֵית לְפָדוֹתוֹ בְּעַד חָמֵשׁ סְלָעִים כְּדַמְחַיַּבְתָּ מִדְאוֹרַיְיתָא:
I wish to redeem my son and here is the value of his redemption which I am required to give according to the Torah.	חָפֵץ אֲנִי לִפְדּוֹת אֶת בְּנִי וְהֵילָךְ דְּמֵי פִדְיוֹנוֹ כְּדַמְחַיַּבְתִּי מִדְאוֹרַיְיתָא:
Blessed are You, Adonoy our God, King of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the redemption of the [firstborn] son. Blessed are You, Adonoy our God, King of the Universe, Who has kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this time.	בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל פִּדְיוֹן הַבֵּן: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ, לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה:
This is instead of that, this is in exchange for that, this is pardoned for that. May this child enter into life, into the [study of] Torah, chupah [the nuptial canopy] and good deeds. Amein.	זֶה תַּחַת זֶה זֶה חִלּוּף זֶה זֶה מָחוּל עַל זֶה. וְיִכָּנֵס זֶה הַבֵּן לְחַיִּים, לְתוֹרָה וּלְחֻפָּה וּלְמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים, אָמֵן:

Why do we need the dialogue?

The Chut Hashani[4] explains that really the father does not have the choice. It is not like he can leave his child with the kohen. The reason this is done so the father understands what he is doing. If he thinks he is just giving a gift to the kohen without understanding the import of this process, it could render the process invalid. It needs to be with the will of the parents.

What if the baby has not had a bris yet?

The pidyon haben can and should be done before the bris in such a case.

Why does the Torah mandate a pidyon haben?

Idea 1 – The Mistake of the First Borns

Most basic idea we know is because Hashem told Moshe to redeem to the remaining Leviim for money since there was a surplus of Leviim to first borns.

Bamidbar 3:45-48

קַח אֶת־הַלְוִיִּם תַּחַת כָּל־בְּכוֹר בִּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בְּהֵמַת הַלְוִיִּם תַּחַת בְּהֶמְתָּם וְהָיוּ־לִי הַלְוִיִּם אֲנִי יְהוָה:

[4] Siman 92

Take the Levites in place of all the male first-born among the Israelite people, and the cattle of the Levites in place of their cattle; and the Levites shall be Mine, יהוה's.

וְאֵת פִּדוּיֵי הַשִּׁלֹּשָׁה וְהַשִּׁבְעִים וְהַמָּאתָיִם הָעֹדְפִים עַל־הַלְוִיִּם מִבְּכוֹר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

And as the redemption price of the 273 Israelite male first-born over and above the number of the Levites,

וְלָקַחְתָּ חֲמֵשֶׁת שְׁקָלִים לַגֻּלְגֹּלֶת בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ תִּקָּח עֶשְׂרִים גֵּרָה הַשָּׁקֶל׃

take five shekels per head—take this by the sanctuary weight, twenty *gerah*s to the shekel—

וְנָתַתָּה הַכֶּסֶף לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו פִּדוּיֵ הָעֹדְפִים בָּהֶם׃

and give the money to Aaron and his sons as the redemption price for those who are in excess.

Why are the first borns being replaced?

Rashi Bamidbar 3:13

ואני הנה לקחתי. וַאֲנִי מֵהֵיכָן זָכִיתִי בָהֶן **מתוך בני ישראל** שֶׁיִּהְיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל שׁוֹכְרִין אוֹתָן לְשֵׁרוּת שֶׁלִּי? עַ"יְ הַבְּכוֹרוֹת זָכִיתִי בָהֶם וּלְקַחְתִּים תְּמוּרָתָם. לְפִי שֶׁהָיְתָה הָעֲבוֹדָה בַּבְּכוֹרוֹת, וּכְשֶׁחָטְאוּ בָעֶגֶל נִפְסְלוּ, וְהַלְוִיִּם שֶׁלֹּא עָבְדוּ עָ"זָ נִבְחֲרוּ תַּחְתֵּיהֶם (עי' זבחים קי"ב):

This is seen as a result of their not taking action when Moshe needed leadership at the sin of the golden calf.

Shmos 32:26

וַיַּעֲמֹד מֹשֶׁה בְּשַׁעַר הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לַיהוָה אֵלָי וַיֵּאָסְפוּ אֵלָיו כָּל־בְּנֵי לֵוִי׃

Moses stood up in the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for יהוה, come here!" And all the men of Levi rallied to him.

Idea 2 – The First Borns in Egypt

The problem with this theory is that the command to redeem the first born this incident.

Shmos 13:2

קַדֶּשׁ־לִי כָל־בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר כָּל־רֶחֶם בִּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה לִי הוּא׃

"Consecrate to Me every male first-born; human and beast, the first [male] issue of every womb among the Israelites is Mine."

This is just as Israel leaves Egypt. So why was there a command then?

Seforno, Bamidbar 3:13 – It was not as a function of the first borns sinning and the Leviim standing up. That was a once off problem which was solved in a once off trade. The redemption is as a function of Hashem killing all the first borns in Egypt and yet sparing the first borns of the Israelites, thereby sanctifying them for Him. That means there is a holiness imbued in them which would not allow them to be involved in mundane work unless redeemed.

ביום הכותי כל בכור בארץ מצרים הקדשתי לי כל בכור בישראל. אמנם במכת בכורות שהיו הבכורות ראויים ליענש בעון הדור מפני היותם היותר נכבדים ובהיותם בלתי ראוים להנצל ממכת מדינה כענין פן תספה בעון העיר. ואני הצלתים במה שהקדשתים לי בענין שיהיו אסורים להתעסק בעבודת הדיוט כמשפט כל הקדש שהוא אסור בגיזה ועבודה ולמען יהיו מותרים בזה הצרכתים פדיון, כמשפט כל הקדש היוצא לחולין כאמרו (ו) כל בכור בניך תפדה ולא בשביל זה הפדיון היו פטורים מן העבודה ועכשיו שחטאו מאסתים ולקחתי הלוים תחתיהם לפדיון **והיו לי הלויים** לעבודה׃

If this is in fact the case, why do we celebrate the occasion? Surely it is a sad time when we remove holiness from such a child?

Rav Ya'akov Kamenetsky explains that indeed this is fitting. One of the primary distinctions between the Jews and non-Jews, is the relationship between holy and mundane To the non-Jewish world, spirituality may exist, but in a silo. To achieve in the spiritual realm, a non-Jew must completely sublimate the physical. Spiritual success may only be

measured in some form of celibacy. However, the Jewish understanding is that the physical and spiritual are both necessary components of the human. In his every physical action, man has the ability to lift his sp. Rav Nachman of Breslov would say: some people eat so they may learn: I learn so that I may eat. Hashem sanctified the first borns as holy to bring them above the clutches of the destruction in Egypt, but living a totally Spiritual life, devoid of Physical activity , is not the way Hashem wanted man to be in this world. So, we rejoice as we make this redemption which allows the first born to be involved in activities of this world.

Idea 3 – The Gratitude for Success

The Sefer Hachinuch points out that it is not only the first-born Jewish boy that is redeemed; the Torah also requires the redemption of first-born donkeys and the sanctification and donation of first fruits and first-born kosher animals to the kohanim. A pattern emergees, that there can be a single explanation for the sanctification of anything first. Any success whether in produce, livestock, or children, may cause us to become overconfident, to claim ownership over our achievements. In response, the Torah commands us to give up or redeem the first of our success - to set the tone and remind us that our triumphs and defeats depend not on ourselves but Him.

Idea 4 – We Do Not Own Our Children

60. On the Commandment to Redeem the First-Born

The Reverend James S. Walsh (1907–1996) was assigned to the Park Street Catholic Information Center in Boston in 1947, serving there until 1952 and returning there from 1954 until 1958. While the Rav vigorously rejected any interfaith dialogue on religious matters, he was not averse to explaining the Jewish point of view on various topics to those who requested information and insight. The letter is not dated.

Rev. James S. Walsh
Director
Catholic Information Center
5 Park St.
Boston 8, Mass.

Dear Rev. Walsh:

I acknowledge receipt of your letter of June 19. Please excuse the delay in answering it.

The standard ceremonial of the redemption of the first-born son on the 31st day of his birth by his father to which the Pentateuch refers in Exodus 13:13, 15 and in Numbers 18:15, 16 is as follows (from the Hertz *Siddur* pp. 1035–6):

Only against this background we may understand the institution of consecration and redemption of the first-born son. Children are the greatest and most precious charge God has entrusted to man's custody without granting any property rights to them. Man, willy-nilly, must acknowledge this irrevocable though bitter truth; he must be ready to lose everything, if losing is what God demands. He must always answer the call summoning him to perform heroically the movement of withdrawal from the most tightly knit and natural community on earth – that of father and son, to retreat from positions, which psychologically speaking, man lacks the courage to abandon because a departure from these positions would mean to the ordinary, unredeemed person self-displacement and existential uprootedness.

The offering of Isaac is exemplary of this type of sacrificial service of God. Our midrashic scholars maintained that God, when he commanded Abraham to take his son and offer him on one of the mountains, did not will him to bring a physical sacrifice consisting of blood, burnt flesh and fat. All He willed Abraham to do is relinquish his son whom he showered with love that tore down all barriers separating two individual beings and united them both into one existence. He wanted Abraham to abandon all pretense of possessiveness, all claims of unity and identity, all hopes of self-perpetuation and immortalization through Isaac and return him to Whom he belongs. This sacrifice was to express itself not in extinction of the physical Isaac, not in separation of the child from his parents nor in actual consecration of Isaac to the Lord within a framework of a temple service in the manner foreshadowing Hannah lending Samuel to the Lord, but in the spiritual retreat of the father from his son for a short period of time. Abraham had to disengage himself for a while from his emotional involvement with his heir and son. Abraham made this movement of withdrawal and Isaac was returned to him. A new gift was bestowed upon Abraham or, to be more exact, a new charge was placed in his trust on the Mt. Moriah.

The ceremonial of redemption of the first born son re-enacts the drama of Abraham offering Isaac to the Lord, of the knight of faith (using Kierkegaard's term) giving unreservedly away his son to God. The presentation of the child to the *kohen* is symbolic of Abraham's performance when he bound Isaac and placed him on the altar. The father of today, as Abraham of old, acknowledges the absolute ownership of the child by God. He renounces all his illusory rights and urgent claims to this child; he makes the movement of withdrawal from the most important position in man's life – his relatedness to posterity. He retreats from an existential structure in which all – father, mother and child – are indissolubly united. It is an [act] of paradoxical self-transcendence, of knocking out the bottom of one's own existence, of revoking the irrevocable, and of making the leap into the realm of the absurd. God wills the consecration of the first-born son because

the emotional involvement of the parent with his first born is of the most intricate and intimate nature and the closer the relation and the more deep-rooted the commitment of the father to the child, the more sublime and hallowed is the sacrifice. When the *kohen* returns the child to the father and accepts the five shekels, he presents him on behalf of God with a new child; something precious is re-entrusted to him. The dialectical drama of Mt.