"Shalom Zachor"

Frequently Asked Shaylos

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What is the source for a Shalom Zachor?

The Shulchan Aruch notes that in addition to hosting a meal on the day of the bris, there is a special practice to host a seudas mitzva the first Friday night after a baby boy is born.

What is the reason we do this?

There a few suggested reasons.

Idea 1: Affirming the Mother

Rav Schachter, in Nefesh HaRav page 242, suggests that because a woman in the first week after birth is considered a cholah sheyesh bo sakana for which one may desecrate Shabbos, and we know that when it comes to such a person the sages should be the one to desecrate Shabbos first. Therefore, it was a moment that the community leaders would go to the house of new mother to affirm the importance of treating the being careful about sakanas nefashos. Once the leaders were going, then everyone else would go and make a party too.

Idea 2: Thanksgiving

The gemara in Bava Kamma 80a relates about a special feast called a Yeshua Haben which great sages would attend. What is the feast for? Tosfos, ad loc, explains that 'Yeshua' can mean salvation from the dangers of childbirth. This meal is an expression of thanksgiving for the safe arrival of this new child.

Idea 3: Greeting Shabbos before the Bris

The Taz YD 265 quotes a Midrash which expresses the idea as a parable. A King declared that no guest should appear before him before greeting his royal matron. So too, no male child should be brought in the covenant of mila without greeting Hashem's matron – the Shabbos first.

Idea 4: Time for Reconciliation

The gemara in Niddah 31b teaches that when a son is born, peace enters the world. There are those who suggest that a simcha presents an opportunity for those who were at odds with each other to make amends. The Shalom Zachor is a community function in which everyone is invited, so even those who may have had a disagreement, can come over to wish mazal tov and start anew.

Idea 5: Mourning the loss of perfection

The gemara in Niddah 30b teaches that when a child is in the womb they are immersed in a perfect environment and are taught the whole Torah. When the child emerges they lose all that Torah knowledge. For that, this is a meal of consolation.

Why do Sefaradim not do this?

This tradition emerges from the teachings of the Terumas Hadeshen and later the Ramo. These are Ashkenazi poskim.

What is a Brit Yitzchak?

The Sefaradim have a different tradition. That is to conduct a Brit Yitzchak ceremony the night before the mila. This is based on a Zohar in Lech Lecha which describes people staying up the night before the mila. Later poskim explain that the satan criticizes at this vulnerable moment before the child enters the covenant of mila.

What should I serve at a Shalom Zachor?

It is considered a seudas mitzva and should reflect being a seuda as much as possible. It is also customary to serve chickpeas.

Why?

It is round like the cyclical shape which reminds us of aveilus. Also, it is called 'arbis' in Yiddish which relates to the bracha that Hashem will increase our children like the stars of the heaven.

Where should we make it?

Ideally, the Shalom Zachor should be in the house in which the baby is. Sometimes this is not possible. If not, it may be done in the absence of the baby.

Must the mother be present?

Many times the mother is caring for the baby and cannot be present but there is a special custom for the mother to partake in the seudas mitzva as well.

What if the baby was born on Friday night?

The minhag is to have the shalom zachor the next Friday night, just before the bris.

What about the girls?

Reasons 2, 4 and 5 do not apply with the birth of a girl and as such there is not such a minhag to do a shalom bas. But reasons 1 and 3 do certainly applies and the minhag is to make a kiddush for the girl but there is not the pressure to do it the first Shabbos.
Rav Yaakov Emden suggests the idea of a similar idea for girls but does not think it is necessary. (Migdal Oz, Birkas Shamayim). The Margalios Hayam in Sanhedrin 32b suggests that it was done.

What should be done at the Shalom Zachor?

It is important to use it as a time to sing songs and share Torah.