

A Discussion and Analysis of the Rulings and Responses Regarding the Timing of
Weddings and Bris Milah throughout the Jewish Community During the
COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

During the development of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring of 2020, there was much discussion throughout the Jewish community regarding religious ritual and theology. Namely, leaders within the Jewish community discussed at great length the ideal manner in which individuals should go about typical religious practices and the proper theological responses they should invoke with regard to the extreme challenges brought forth by the development of the pandemic. Two specific topics of great discussion were the religious rituals of weddings and Bris Milah. Prior to the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the world in February and March of 2020, many observant Jews had scheduled weddings to take place in the coming months. However, because of the development of the pandemic, it soon became an extreme health risk for large gatherings such as weddings to take place. In response, Rabbinic leaders throughout the broader Jewish community issued rulings regarding the ideal protocol concerning previously scheduled weddings and whether postponing wedding celebrations was ideal or even permitted at all. A similar phenomenon took place regarding the Jewish practice of Bris Milah. Many Rabbinic leaders discussed the ideal manner in which Bris Milah should be performed for newly born baby boys, and whether the Bris Milah could be performed on the eighth day following the birth of a newborn baby boy, which is when it is typically performed. Throughout the Jewish community as a whole, there were many different approaches taken by individuals regarding the timing of their own weddings and Bris Milah celebrations and the way in which such celebrations would be manifest. In Rabbinic literature, there is ample discussion regarding the typical practice of not postponing wedding celebrations,

and there is significant discussion regarding the typical practice of not postponing Bris Milah as well. The rulings by Rabbinic leaders regarding Bris Milah and wedding celebrations as well as the specific responses by individuals to personal celebrations reflected significant differences between the two. Moreover, regarding both weddings and Bris Milah, responses within different Hashkafic communities toward the question of delaying celebrations can be attributed to particular attributes of those communities.

Introduction

The topic of scheduling weddings is not discussed at all in the Torah Shebichsav. While the topic of the ideal timing for weddings is discussed at great length in the Talmud, particularly in Maseches Kesubos, the Talmud makes little mention of the question of postponing previously scheduled weddings. Moreover, classical commentators to the Talmud and codifiers of Jewish law largely do not discuss this practice. However, the practice of not postponing Jewish weddings is discussed to a certain extent within Rabbinic literature written during recent years. Perhaps the first source to discuss this practice was the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, published by Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried in 1864. In 166:3, the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch writes that one should not push off a Jewish wedding in order to fulfill the then-common custom of marrying during the first part of the month. Although the practice of scheduling weddings during the first part of the month has strong basis throughout Rabbinic literature, the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch writes that one should not push off a previously scheduled wedding in order to fulfill this practice. While it isn't

clear what the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch would hold regarding postponing weddings for other purposes, here he subscribes to the view that a wedding should not be postponed in order to fulfill a particular common wedding custom.

In the past several decades, substantial Rabbinic literature has been written about the specific details of the practice of not postponing Jewish weddings. In his Sh'ut Yabeah Omer EH 3:10:3, Chacham Ovadia Yosef, who passed away in 2013, writes that one should not delay a previously scheduled wedding in order to favor a specific day, month, or season. Chacham Ovadia Yosef also writes that it is not clear whether it would be permissible to postpone a previously scheduled wedding in response to other factors (Student Organization of Yeshiva). Perhaps the most direct discussion regarding the practice of not postponing weddings is found within the writings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menacheem Mendel Schneerson, who passed away in 1994. In his Igros Kodesh Vol. 20 p. 12, the Rebbe writes that once the date for a wedding has been fixed, the custom is that it is not postponed, especially if there is no reason to do so. In the Rebbe's Shaarei Halachah U'Minhag Vol. 5 p. 267, he writes that the issue involved with postponing a previously scheduled wedding is that doing so may lead to impropriety and challenges of Tznius. Moreover, in his Igros Kodesh Vol. 10 p. 286, the Rebbe writes that a wedding date should not be postponed due to financial considerations (Dubov). A survey of these sources highlights that the practice of not postponing previously scheduled weddings within Judaism is a practically based concern, and is not an absolute Halachic issue with the same kind of rigidity as the practice of not postponing Bris Milah. Moreover, the practice is one which is encouraged when certain factors are involved, but there is little Rabbinic literature

written regarding the significance of the practice during times of extenuating circumstances. Throughout religiously observant Jewish communities in today's day and age, it seems that this Minhag is widely accepted, although it doesn't seem to be a practice which is deemed to be Halachically binding.

In contrast to the practice of not postponing wedding celebrations, the practice of not postponing Bris Milah is one that has a strong Halachic basis throughout Rabbinic literature. When discussing the Mitzvah of Bris Milah, the Torah in Vayikra 12:2 describes that all newborn Jewish baby boys should be circumcised on the eighth day of their lives. In contrast to weddings, the Torah discusses the scheduling of Bris Milah, and even writes that Bris Milah should be performed specifically on the eighth day of a newborn baby boy's life. Moreover, in contrast to the practice of not postponing weddings, the practice of not postponing Bris Milah is discussed throughout classical Rabbinic literature to a large extent. This principle is greatly highlighted by the Talmud in the nineteenth Perek of Maseches Shabbos, which describes that the timing of Bris Milah is considered to be so important that should the eighth day of a baby boy's life fall out on Shabbos, actions which would normally be forbidden are permitted in order to fulfill the requirement to circumcise (Jewish Virtual Library). It could have been assumed that Bris Milah can simply be postponed to a day other than the eighth day. However, the Halacha that a Bris Milah be performed specifically on the eighth day of a baby boy's life is so significant that the typical Halachos which govern Shabbos observance do not apply in order that Bris Milah be fulfilled at the usual time. In the first Perek of Hilchos Milah, the Rambam writes that while the Mitzvah of Bris Milah can be performed after the eighth day of a baby's life, it should ideally be

performed on the eighth day, as taught by the Pasuk in Vayikra cited above. Moreover, the Rambam writes that the principle that Bris Milah overrides the laws governing Shabbos applies when circumcision is performed on the eighth day of a baby's life, but not when it is performed at a later time. According to the Rambam, as well as some other Halachic authorities, a Bris Milah performed on the eighth day of a baby's life is the ideal, so much so that it differs in nature from Milah done at a later date to the extent that only when Bris Milah is performed on the eighth day of a baby's life does the Mitzvah of Bris Milah override the laws of Shabbos. (Touger). The Shulchan Arukh rules that while Bris Milah can be done past the eighth day of a baby's life, the ideal is for it to be done on the eighth day. Moreover, he writes that if a child is sick the Bris Milah for the child should be performed precisely one week after the child is healed. Thus, even in a scenario in which Bris Milah is not being performed on the eighth day of a child's life, the Bris should still be performed in a timely manner, provided that this would be safe for the child (Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 263:2). The Shulchan Aruch only discusses delaying Bris Milah in the context of a sick child, highlighting that one should only postpone a Bris Milah if there is a very specific reason to do so, such as a scenario in which Bris Milah would put the health of the child at risk. The significance of this practice is reflected in the writings of the Nodeh B'Yehuda (Mahadura Tinyana Yoreh Deah 166), which caution against a father delaying the Bris Milah of his son to Erev Pesach in order to intentionally adhere to the widely-accepted custom of making a celebration on that day, invoking the notion that the performing Bris Milah in a timely manner is of utmost importance. In contrast to the practice of not delaying previously scheduled weddings, the practice of not pushing off Bris Milah is one which has a strong basis within Torah Shebichsav as well as throughout classic Rabbinical

literature. While the practice of not pushing off weddings is one which is merely a widely-accepted Minhag, the practice of not pushing off Bris Milah is one which is Halachic in nature. Throughout religiously observant Jewish communities in today's day and age, it seems that the practice of not postponing a Bris Milah is one which is widely accepted, and most accept it as Halachically binding.

Postponing Weddings During the Covid Pandemic

Being that the practice of not postponing weddings in Judaism is only a Minhag, Rabbinic leaders throughout the Jewish community related to the question of postponing weddings previously scheduled to take place during the COVID-19 pandemic with particular considerations. Moreover, individuals within the Jewish community who had to decide what to do about their own previously scheduled weddings took the nature of this practice into strong consideration when making their personal decisions. Throughout different Hashkafic communities, both Rabbinic leaders who made rulings and individuals who made personal decisions related to the practice of not postponing weddings in unique ways, mainly due to specific attributes of those Hashkafic communities.

When discussing the question of postponing weddings which had previously been scheduled to take place during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading Orthodox Rabbis in Israel primarily subscribed to the opinion that previously scheduled weddings should not be postponed.

Rabbi David Lau, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, issued a statement on March 12, 2020 in which he said that previously scheduled weddings should not be postponed, because weddings “are very important.” He also emphasized that because of the extreme health risk involved with having large wedding gatherings, the amount of attendees at weddings must be scaled down (Israel Hayom Staff). Moreover, an article published by Arutz Sheva on the same day explained that according to Rabbi Lau, it was preferable to not postpone previously scheduled weddings and to have weddings with decreased levels of attendance because it wasn’t clear when mass celebrations would be possible again (Sones). Also on March 12, Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef put out a statement similar in nature to the opinion of Rabbi Lau, in which he said that weddings should not be pushed off under any circumstances and should be held on time in a minimized manner according to governmental instructions (YWN Israel Desk - Jerusalem). When making decisions regarding the issue of previously scheduled weddings, leading Orthodox Rabbis said that they should not be postponed for reasons such as weddings being very important and a lack of knowledge as to when large gatherings would be possible again. None of them cited Halachic sources as a basis for their rulings that previously scheduled weddings should not be postponed, because the practice of not postponing weddings is merely a Minhag in nature. However, leading Orthodox Rabbis in Israel typically strive to make rulings which adhere to typical Orthodox Jewish practice, regardless of whether the practice is Halachic in nature or a Minhag in nature. Moreover, while individuals who had previously scheduled weddings to take place during the COVID-19 pandemic would certainly be frustrated by the inability to have large gatherings at their wedding celebrations, Rabbinic leaders reasoned that the importance of not delaying wedding celebrations is significant enough in nature that previously scheduled

weddings should not be postponed and rather should be celebrated with smaller attendances. An article published by Israel21c described that many religiously-Observant couples in Israel who had previously scheduled weddings to take place during the pandemic elected to not postpone their weddings and to have them with smaller attendances, despite the frustration of not being able to celebrate with large gatherings, in accordance with the rulings of the Chief Rabbis. Couples elected to get married at venues such as balconies overlooking Har HaBayis, courtyards, and supermarkets (Leichman).

Not every couple shared this sentiment. This phenomenon is reflected in an article in the Jerusalem Post which detailed the experiences of Rabbi Yuval Cherlow, one of the founders of Tzohar, an organization which aims to bridge the gaps between religious and secular Jews in Israel. He described that while he had been attempting to convince non-Observant Jews in Israel to adhere to the rulings of the Chief Rabbis, the majority of non-Observant Jews who had previously scheduled weddings to take place during the pandemic elected to postpone their weddings because “many of the couples don’t want to give up their dream wedding” (Adler). The majority of religiously-Observant couples in Israel elected to not postpone previously scheduled weddings because of their desire to adhere to the practice of not postponing previously scheduled weddings, as suggested by the Chief Rabbis, although they would not be able to celebrate with large gatherings. In contrast, the majority of non-Observant couples in Israel elected to postpone previously scheduled weddings, despite the rulings of the Chief Rabbis, because of their desire to have celebrations with large gatherings.

In contrast to Israel's Chief Rabbis, several Rabbis belonging to religiously progressive denominations ruled that weddings can and perhaps even should be postponed. An article written by a Jewish Wedding Blog known as Smashing the Glass on April 23 describes how Rabbi Paul Glantz, who associates with both the Liberal and Reform movements, ruled that it is permissible for couples who had previously scheduled weddings to take place during the pandemic to postpone their weddings. He noted that "Although it's true that there's a strong custom not to postpone under normal circumstances, it's just that: a custom. There's absolutely nothing in Halacha prohibiting it." He went on to explain that because there is a high level of Pikuach Nefesh involved with maintaining large wedding gatherings, weddings can be postponed, as the importance of preservation of human life in scenarios of Pikuach Nefesh takes priority over nearly all other Jewish laws and customs (Cinnamon). When explaining the basis for his decision regarding the question of postponing previously scheduled weddings, Rabbi Glantz highlighted that the practice of not postponing previously scheduled weddings is merely a Minhag and not Halachic nature, and because of that there is room to be lenient regarding this custom. As a result, during the existing extenuating circumstances involving Pikuach Nefesh, it was permissible to postpone previously scheduled weddings. Although this article was written in late April 2020, when the extreme dangers of the novel coronavirus had become well known throughout the world, the opinion among Rabbis of the religiously progressive denominations that previously scheduled weddings may be postponed was espoused even more forcefully by the Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards earlier on during the development of the pandemic. In an update put out on March 13, the CJLS ruled that previously scheduled weddings should be postponed, if at all possible (Rabbinical-Assembly).

Within the Chabad community, Rabbinic leaders were very adamant that previously scheduled weddings should not be postponed, although weddings held during the COVID-19 pandemic should be held with very small attendances. An article published on March 16, 2020 by a Chabad News Service known as COLlive notes that Beis Din Rabbonei Chabad, the rabbinical authority of the Chabad-Lubavitch community in Israel, ruled that all weddings which had previously been scheduled to take place in the coming weeks should not be postponed, in accordance with the typical practice of not postponing previously scheduled weddings. They explained that while it is very important that weddings not be postponed, any weddings which were to be held must follow all instructions set forth by the Health Ministry in order to limit the spread of the virus (COLlive Reporter). Rabbinic leaders within the Chabad community in the United States took a similar approach. An article published by Chabad Lubavitch Headquarters on March 19, 2020 cites the decision regarding the question of postponing previously scheduled weddings by Rabbi Shlomo Segal, Dayan of the Beis Din of Crown Heights. He ruled that weddings should not be postponed and explained that “once the bride and groom have set a date we must do all we can to keep the wedding as close to that as possible.” The article goes on to describe that many Chabad couples had weddings on their previously scheduled dates and adhered to governmental guidelines regarding social distancing and large crowds (Weiss, A.). Both in Israel and in the United States, Rabbinic leaders within the Chabad community were very adamant that previously scheduled weddings should not be postponed, and should be kept at their scheduled dates if at all possible. Perhaps their adamency was stimulated by the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s strong conviction that previously scheduled weddings not be postponed. As noted above, while there is little discussion throughout classical Rabbinic literature regarding the

question of postponing previously scheduled weddings, in his Igros Kodesh and Shaarei Halachah U'Minhag the Rebbe comes out strongly against postponing previously scheduled weddings. It seems that the practice of not postponing weddings is one which is strongly ingrained within the Chabad tradition, which is what caused the Rabbinic leaders within the Chabad movement to hold true to that practice despite the challenges brought forth by the development of the pandemic. Moreover, this phenomenon is illustrated by a comparison of the language used by the Chabad Rabbinic leaders and Rabbi David Lau in their statements which ruled that weddings should not be postponed. In an article written by IsraelHaYom cited above, Rabbi Lau ruled that weddings should not be postponed, explaining that weddings “are very important.” The statement of Rabbi Segal of the Beis Din of Crown Heights noted that “once the bride and groom have set a date we must do all we can to keep the wedding as close to that as possible.” It seems that according to Rabbi Lau weddings should not be postponed simply because they are important and because there is a general custom not to do so, whereas according to Rabbi Segal weddings should not be postponed because that decision reflects adherence to a strong practice ingrained within the Chabad tradition.

The approach of the Rabbis of the progressive denominations differed significantly from that of the Chief Rabbis in Israel and that of the Chabad community. While the latter group encouraged couples to adhere to the practice of not postponing previously scheduled weddings, the Rabbis of the progressive denominations noted that because the practice is merely a Minhag it would be permissible and perhaps even advisable to postpone previously scheduled weddings under the existing circumstances. Moreover, while the Chief Rabbis in Israel and leaders of the

Chabad community proposed that smaller weddings should be organized in order to ensure the highest levels of safety, thus adhering to the practice of not pushing off weddings, the progressive Rabbis ruled that weddings should be postponed altogether, without even considering the possibility of having smaller weddings. These two differences in approach can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, because of their strong desire to maintain typical religious practices, the Israel Chief Rabbis ruled that weddings should not be postponed, even if it meant that couples would have to have smaller weddings. In contrast, because of their tendency to be more flexible regarding Jewish practices, Rabbis of the progressive denominations ruled that weddings could and perhaps even should be postponed. Although they could have simply ruled that previously scheduled weddings should be held at smaller capacity, they instead treated the nature of the practice of not postponing weddings as a leniency which enabled the postponement of weddings all together. Moreover, the Rabbis of the progressive movements took the factor of Pikuach Nefesh into consideration much more significantly than the Israel Chief Rabbis, who noted that the dangers of the pandemic could simply be avoided by having smaller wedding gatherings. This is perhaps due to the fact that in early March, when the statements of the Israel Chief Rabbis were made, the dangers of the novel coronavirus were not fully understood within Israel and the legal policies regarding large gatherings were very loose. However, shortly thereafter, the dangers of the virus became much more well known, and Israel became much more strict with respect to its policy regarding large gatherings (Muhsen). In fact, the Arutz Sheva article cited above notes that on March 17, 2020 the Israeli government imposed a partial shutdown of the country, which canceled weddings indefinitely. An article written by the religiously progressive Alexandra Pucciarelli on April 23, 2020 strongly highlights the

discrepancy between the views of the Israel Chief Rabbis and the Rabbis of the progressive denominations. She noted that Rabbi Lau had declared that weddings should not be postponed, in accordance with the typical practice of not postponing previously scheduled weddings. However, she and her fiance elected to postpone their previously scheduled wedding, because of the dangers involved with hosting large gatherings, which had become very apparent. Moreover, she noted that although it would have been possible to have a smaller wedding during the pandemic in order to adhere to the custom of not postponing weddings, because it is merely a custom and because she and her husband much preferred to have a larger and more celebratory wedding at a later date, they decided to postpone their wedding (Pucciarelli).

An additional distinction between the Orthodox and progressive communities is that in the progressive camps many couples already live together or engage in physical relationships prior to marriage. As such, the wedding ceremony may be more of a formality and does not affect a significant change in the relationship. This being the case, postponing a previously scheduled wedding would not affect the nature of the relationship of a couple. For Orthodox couples, delaying the wedding would mean delaying living together and delaying a physical relationship. As such there was more motivation not to delay the wedding ceremony (Liebman).

Within the Ultra-Orthodox community in the United States, weddings scheduled to be held during the pandemic were largely not postponed. Throughout the course of the pandemic, the Ultra-Orthodox community often neglected governmental regulations regarding large crowds and social distancing. This resulted in a very high number of coronavirus cases within the

Ultra-Orthodox community and a large number of casualties (Cortellessa). A New York Times article published on March 17, 2020 described that in the previous several days there had been many large Ultra-Orthodox weddings held in Brooklyn, in defiance of governmental restrictions on public events. The article noted that a guest at one such large wedding, by the name of Chaim, said that the wedding he attended had to take place the day it did because it is “prohibited to postpone a wedding once it has been planned.” “You do what you gotta do,” he said (Stack).

While the opinion here reflects the opinion of one particular Ultra-Orthodox individual, it likely represents that of the Ultra-Orthodox community as a whole, as members of the Ultra-Orthodox community tend to share similar opinions regarding the significance of religious rituals as well as regarding governmental policies (Gallagher). The statement by the Ultra-Orthodox wedding guest named Chaim reflects an overstatement of the importance of the practice of not postponing previously scheduled weddings within Judaism. As elaborated upon above, this practice is rooted in a practically based concern, and is not a Halachically binding law. Thus, postponing weddings should by no means be considered something which is prohibited. Perhaps the basis behind this opinion is that Ultra-Orthodox Jews tend to adhere strongly to all Jewish customs to the very best of their ability, so much so that to them there is little difference between laws and customs; they are all practices which should ideally always be observed (Gallgher).

Postponing Bris Milah During the Covid Pandemic

In contrast to the practice of not postponing previously scheduled weddings, the practice of not postponing Bris Milah is one which is Halachic in nature. Because of this, there were significant differences between the rulings of Rabbinic leaders as well as the approaches of individuals to their own personal celebrations when it came to Bris Milah, as compared to weddings. Moreover, the discussions regarding the two topics involved different sets of factors, which contributed to the differences between the two in terms of rulings and approaches.

Within the Modern/Centrist Orthodox community in the United States, Rabbinic leaders ruled that Bris Milah should be performed for newly born baby boys on the eighth day of their lives, in accordance with the requisite health precautions. An article written by The Lakewood Scoop on April 30, 2020 described the approach taken by Modern-Orthodox Mohel Rabbi Ari Pruzansky. Rabbi Pruzansky began his discussion by noting that it is typically of prime significance that Bris Milah be performed on the eighth day of a baby's life. He went on to explain that in certain scenarios it had been difficult for families to find a Mohel to perform a Bris on the eighth day of a newborn boy's life because some Mohalim have gotten sick and others are scared that they will sicken the child whom they are circumcising. As such, he was trying his best to perform Bris Milah ceremonies as often as he was able. He then explained that very little was known about the then-novel coronavirus, as every week new information was being revealed regarding risk factors, new treatments, and recommended precautions. Noting that he personally implements extreme precautions when performing Brissim, Rabbi Pruzansky

claimed that there was little danger posed to a newborn child upon whom he performed a Bris Milah (Sussman). A similar approach was taken by Rabbi Paysach Krohn, as described in an article in *The Jewish Week*, published on April 22, 2020. He noted that he had been performing Brissim while wearing gloves and a mask and with a minimal amount of people in attendance. Rabbi Krohn explained that although many people were nervous about Bris Milah because of the unknown nature of the then-novel coronavirus, he was comfortable performing Brissim because he performs them with great caution (Ain). Both Rabbi Pruzansky and Rabbi Krohn elected to continue performing Bris Milah ceremonies during the pandemic and went out of their way to be very careful about health precautions in order to fulfill the Halacha that a Bris Milah should be performed on the eighth day of a newborn baby's life. Although they simply could have elected to delay Bris Milah for newborn babies until performing a Bris Milah was deemed to be entirely risk-free and until they would not need to take extreme health precautions, they decided to continue performing Bris Milah at the proper time, recognizing the significance of Bris Milah being performed on the eighth day of a child's life. Moreover, their commitment to adhere to the utmost health protocol reflects the attitude within the Modern/Centrist Orthodox community throughout the development of the pandemic that health precautions should be adhered to at all costs (Trencher). An article published in *The Forward* on March 19, 2020 described how the majority of Modern/Centrist Orthodox parents who had recently had a newborn baby boy elected to have a Bris on the eighth day of his life. This was likely due to their desire to adhere to the Halacha of not postponing Bris Milah, as long as doing so would be sure to not pose a health risk to the newborn boy (Pink).

Similar to Rabbinic leaders within the American Modern/Centrist Orthodox communities in the United States, Rabbinic leaders within the Orthodox community in Israel also subscribed to the opinion that Bris Milah should be fulfilled on the eighth day of a newborn boy's life. In the second edition of his responsa regarding Halachic questions raised throughout the development of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rabbi Asher Weiss discussed the issue of postponing Bris Milah in a Teshuva written on April 17, 2020. He emphasized that typically Bris Milah should not be postponed unless there is a very specific reason to do so, as the Halacha is that Bris Milah should ideally be performed on the eighth day of a newborn boy's life. Rabbi Weiss then explained that while the COVID-19 pandemic posed severe health dangers, it was evident that Bris Milah does not pose a health risk to a newborn boy if performed with the requisite health precautions. His basis for this claim was that there had been thousands of Bris Milahs performed throughout Israel since the beginning of the pandemic, and none had resulted in a child becoming sick (Weiss, R. A.). An article published by The Jewish Press on March 16, 2020 highlighted that the popular Israeli Orthodox Mohel, Rabbi Yehuda Machpud, had an opinion similar to that of Rabbi Weiss. In the article, Rabbi Machpud encouraged parents of newborn baby boys to not postpone the Bris Milahs of their children, in accordance with the Halacha of having Bris Milah on the eighth day of a child's life. He went on to say that while people were concerned about the potential health risks involved with Bris Milah, the precautions which Mohalim took were sure to prevent any health issues from affecting newborn baby boys. Rabbi Machpud was quoted as saying that "people should realize that circumcision is more important than a Chuppah... I know that the Bris is important to people and that they are scared, but this is a very important commandment and should not be postponed because of such considerations" (Israel, D.). Both

Rabbi Weiss and Rabbi Machpud ruled in accordance with Modern/Centrist Orthodox American Rabbis that Bris Milah should not be postponed and should rather be performed on the eighth day of a newborn baby's life. However, they differed in terms of their approach to the potential health issues posed by Bris Milah. Rabbi Pruzansky and Rabbi Krohn both explained that although many intricacies of the novel coronavirus were unknown, even among leading medical experts, and it could be that Bris Milah posed a health risk to newborn babies, they were comfortable performing Bris Milah because of the extreme level of precaution which they took. In contrast to this approach, Rabbi Weiss posited that Bris Milah did not in fact pose a health risk for newborns because thousands of newborns had received Bris Milahs and had not suffered from health issues, and he did not take into consideration that there was little medical evidence regarding whether or not Bris Milah posed health risks to newborns. Similarly, Rabbi Machpud reasoned that although individuals had serious concerns regarding the potential health risks involved with Bris Milah, these concerns should simply be ignored because Bris Milah is an extremely important Mitzvah and because Mohalim take certain particular health precautions.

Similar to Modern/Centrist Orthodox Rabbis in America and Orthodox Rabbis in Israel, Ultra-Orthodox Rabbis in America encouraged that Bris Milah not be postponed. They too claimed that the people should adhere to the Halacha that Bris Milah be performed on the eighth day of a newborn baby's life. In a message shared with his Monsey congregation, Rabbi Gedalia Oberlander ruled that the practice of Metzitzah B'Peh, the controversial custom in which the Mohel uses his mouth to suck away an infant's blood after circumcision, should be continued. He advised that the Mohel should first rinse his mouth with Listerine, as doing so would destroy the

virus if the Mohel had been infected (Oberlander). The ancient practice of Metzitzah B'Peh is one which has been investigated by representatives from the New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene extensively. The health department has criticized the widespread implementation of this practice, noting that it has been shown to be a cause of death by herpes simplex virus type 1 as well as significant brain damage (Tanne). This ruling highlighted the desire of Ultra-Orthodox Jews to adhere to specific religious practices in the typical manner, despite potential health risks. Moreover, it reflected a lack of understanding of the intricacies of the then-novel coronavirus, being that the causes of the spreading of the virus and the appropriate preventative measures were still being investigated by medical professionals. At the time of Rabbi Oberlander's statement there was not any evidence that the use of Listerine can kill the coronavirus. Moreover, being that there was evidence that the practice of Metzitzah B'Peh can lead to herpes infections, there was no reason to assume that it would not end up leading to coronavirus infections (Tanne).

Rabbinic leaders of religiously progressive denominations also emphasized the importance of Bris Milah being performed on the eighth day of a newborn boy's life, but they were more flexible than their Orthodox counterparts regarding the question of postponing Bris Milah. This was in contrast to the approach which they primarily took when it came to the question of postponing previously scheduled weddings, regarding which they tended to be very lenient. This was perhaps due to their understanding that the practice of not postponing weddings is one which is merely a Minhag and thus is one which can be treated leniently, whereas the practice of not postponing Bris Milah is one which is Halachic in nature and thus should be

adhered to unless there is strong reason to not do so. In a Joint Statement on Bris Milah in the Context of COVID-19 Restrictions, the Ontario Liberal-minded Association of Mohalim and Reform Rabbis of Greater Toronto ruled that under the existing circumstances Bris Milah should be performed on the eighth day of a newborn baby's life. However, if it was deemed appropriate by the parents of the child based on their individual situation and environment, the newborn baby could be circumcised at a later date (Mohalim of Ontario). Similarly, Conservative Rabbis including Rabbi Elliot Dorf, a leading figure of the Conservative community of Los Angeles, California, recommended that Bris Milahs be performed in a timely manner after the birth of newborn baby boys. However, members of the Conservative movement were advised to postpone Bris Milahs if they felt that doing so was appropriate (Ain). With regard to what individuals facing this dilemma elected to do, an article in the Forward describes that while many members of religiously progressive denominations elected to postpone Bris Milah for their newborn baby boys, many did not (Pink). This phenomenon contrasted significantly with how the vast majority of religiously progressive couples decided to postpone previously scheduled weddings. Perhaps this was the case because while most religiously progressive individuals simply disregarded the practice of not pushing off weddings because it is merely a Minhag, many, although not all, religiously progressive individuals desired to adhere to the Halacha that Bris Milahs should not be postponed. Rabbis of religiously progressive denominations differed significantly in terms of their rulings regarding postponing Bris Milah from their Orthodox counterparts. For the most part the latter strongly advised that Bris Milah be performed on the eighth day of a newborn boy's life, in accordance with the typical Halacha. They fully supported the Halacha that Bris Milahs should not be postponed and did not suggest that parents postpone

Bris Milah under any circumstances. In contrast, Rabbis of religiously progressive denominations recommended that the practice of Bris Milah being performed on the eighth day of a newborn's life be followed if possible. However, they were flexible in allowing Bris Milah to be postponed if deemed appropriate by parents of a newborn child.

Conclusion

An analysis of the discussion among Rabbinic leaders of the broader Jewish community regarding the issues of postponing weddings and postponing Bris Milah and the choices of individuals in the context of their own personal celebrations throughout the development of the COVID-19 pandemic highlights that responses to both issues were reflective of the nature of each practice. A survey of Torah Shebichsav as well as classical and recent Rabbinic literature reveals that while the practice of not postponing weddings is merely a Minhag, the practice of not postponing weddings is firmly rooted in Halacha. Within the Orthodox community at large, Rabbinic leaders ruled that previously scheduled weddings should not be postponed, in accordance with the standard Minhag. In contrast, Rabbinic leaders of religiously progressive denominations ruled that weddings can and even should be postponed, noting that the practice of not postponing weddings is merely a Minhag and can be treated leniently because of the extenuating circumstances presented by the pandemic. While the vast majority of Orthodox couples elected to not postpone previously scheduled weddings, most couples belonging to religiously progressive denominations elected to have their weddings at a later date.

With regard to the question of postponing Bris Milah, the majority of Orthodox Rabbinic leaders ruled that Bris Milahs should not be postponed, invoking the importance of the Halacha that Bris Milah be performed on the eighth day of a newborn boy's life. Notably, Rabbis of religiously progressive denominations recommended that Bris Milah not be postponed, in accordance with the Halacha, but noted that they can be postponed if deemed appropriate. The vast majority of Orthodox couples elected to not postpone previously scheduled weddings, whereas while many religiously progressive parents elected to have Bris Milah performed on the eighth day of the life of their newborn babies, many elected to postpone to a later date. Moreover, differences in Rabbinic rulings and individual responses between different Hashkafic communities can be attributed to distinctions in attributes and values between those communities. These differences are able to shed light on the varying lifestyles and practices of different sects within the Jewish community at large. As such, the broad topic of differences between religious denominations within Judaism is one which is open to much further development and exploration.

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