

Samuil Almalekh



This is my son Sami before his brit. He was laid down on the table in the kitchen in my apartment in Varna for this picture. There is no inscription on the back of the photo. There is a stamp of a photo studio. The picture was taken by the photographer S. Pilibosyan Stalin on 24th April 1956 [from 1949 till October 1956 the city of Varna was renamed Stalin].

I got married on 29th April [1955] and on 1st February [1956] I gave birth to my son Sami – Samuil Yosif Almalekh.

It was clear that he would be named after my father-in-law and I didn't mind. We should do his brit on the eighth day. It could be done in Sofia only in those days. My mother-in-law thought it wasn't necessary to do the brit: 'Who does a brit nowadays? Where are we going to find money to call a mohel from Sofia?' Then I told her: 'This child is your first grandson and has your husband's name. You accepted me as a Jewish woman in this house. I came to you to find a Jewish family. I took a circumcised Jewish man for a husband. How much money have you made for your life? It's less than 20 stotinkas. So you will not talk about money. Your son who has a son and has become a father has his responsibilities. He will find a way.'

We didn't do the brit on the eighth day, because the baby got ill besides I left the maternity hospital with a lot of complications. We did it on the thirtieth day. It was performed in our home in the presence of a mohel from Sofia, whose name I can't remember. He arrived in the morning on the day of the brit and left in the afternoon, because otherwise he had to spend the night at home and there was no space. They counted on me as a nurse to take care of the baby's wound. David Levi and his wife Dora (a professional obstetrician, who used to look after me through the entire period of pregnancy besides the consultations) became a sandak and a sandaka. A sandak is a man chosen by the family who has to hold the baby during his circumcision. A sandaka is his wife. She has to take the baby from the mother's arms, to take him to the place of the circumcision and to deliver him to the arms of the mohel who accomplishes the act of circumcision. It's the act of uniting with God. After the brit the sandaka takes the baby once again and delivers him in his mother's arms.

My father-in-law and my mother-in-law were present at the brit as well. My father-in-law announced the baby's name to the mohel. They had placed some gauze with some cotton soaked in wine in the baby's mouth so he couldn't feel pain during the circumcision. I had run away to the end of a large balcony at the end of that floor so I wouldn't listen to the baby's cry. It was March and spring was coming. Seagulls had started showing up. Some were flying and croaking above the balcony and I felt like that was the baby's cry. This twenty-minute period felt like it's never-ending. I don't know how I didn't go berserk. After that they called me when they removed the wine from his mouth. I was almost unconscious. I took the baby to my breast immediately and he threw up his mother's milk. I didn't take into consideration he was full of wine. I should have left him throw up the wine first.