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Pidyon HaBen - הבן פדיון

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# Introduction

In this [study](study.html) I would like to examine the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Pidyon HaBen, literally, [*redemption*](redemption.html) *of the son*. In common usage, Pidyon HaBen is usually referred to as the [*redemption*](redemption.html) *of the firstborn*.

The [first](one.html) and best of all things belong to [HaShem](hashem.html). This is true even of the firstborn of children. Originally, it was intended that the firstborn would serve as the [priests](priests.html) and ministers to [HaShem](hashem.html).[[1]](#footnote-1) However, during the [sin of the golden calf](sin.html), the firstborn participated in the [sin](sin.html) while the Levites did not. When Moshe came down from Mount [Sinai](stages.html) and saw what was happening, he smashed the tablets and he issued everyone an ultimatum: “Who is on [HaShem](hashem.html)’s side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of [Levi](file:///D:\Word\LAW\tribes.html) [gathered](gather.html) themselves together unto him”.[[2]](#footnote-2)

***Bamidbar (***[***Numbers***](nchart.html)***) 8:11-19*** *And Aaron shall offer the Levites before* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *for an* [*offering*](korbanot.html) *of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*. 12 And the Levites shall lay their* [*hands*](fourteen.html) *upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the* [*one*](one.html) *for a* [*sin offering*](sin.html)*, and the other for a* [*burnt offering*](korbanot.html)*, unto* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, to make an* [*atonement*](atonemen.html) *for the Levites. 13 And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them for an* [*offering*](korbanot.html) *unto* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*. 14 Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine. 15 And after that shall the Levites go in to do the service of the* [*tabernacle of the congregation*](mikdash.html)*: and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them for an* [*offering*](korbanot.html)*. 16 For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as* [*open every womb*](thebirth.html)*, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me. 17 For all the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I* [*smote every firstborn*](file:///D:\Word\LAW\plagues.html) *in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself. 18 And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel. 19 And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the* [*tabernacle*](mikdash.html) *of the congregation, and to make an* [*atonement*](atonemen.html) *for the children of Israel: that there be no* [*plague*](plagues.html) *among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the* [*sanctuary*](mikdash.html)*.*

Only the [tribe](tribes.html) of Levi came to the side of [HaShem](hashem.html). At that point, [HaShem](hashem.html) decreed that each family’s [first](one.html)-born would forfeit their “[Kohen](priests.html)” status, and henceforth all the [Kohanim](priests.html) would come from the [tribe](tribes.html) of Levi.[[3]](#footnote-3) I have written more extensively on this subject in a [study](study.html) titled: [PRIESTS](priests.html).

Because of the exchange of the Levites for the firstborn during the [sin](sin.html) of the golden calf, [HaShem](hashem.html) gave us the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Pidyon HaBen This [mitzva](cmds613.html) is detailed in Bamidbar chapter 3.

***Bamidbar (***[***Numbers***](nchart.html)***) 3:44-50*** *And* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *spake unto Moses, saying, 45 Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; and the Levites shall be mine: I am* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*. 46 And for those that are to be* [*redeemed*](redemption.html) *of the* [*two*](two.html) *hundred and threescore and* [*thirteen*](thirteen.html) *of the firstborn of the children of Israel, which are more than the Levites; 47 Thou shalt even take* [*five*](five.html) *shekels apiece by the poll, after the shekel of the* [*sanctuary*](mikdash.html) *shalt thou take them: (the shekel is* [*twenty*](twenty.html) *gerahs:) 48 And thou shalt give the money, wherewith the odd* [*number*](nchart.html) *of them is to be* [*redeemed*](redemption.html)*, unto Aaron and to his sons. 49 And Moses took the* [*redemption*](redemption.html) *money of them that were over and above them that were* [*redeemed*](redemption.html) *by the* [*Levites*](file:///D:\Word\LAW\tribes.html)*: 50 Of the firstborn of the children of Israel took he the money; a thousand* [*three*](three.html) *hundred and threescore and* [*five*](five.html) *shekels, after the shekel of the* [*sanctuary*](mikdash.html)*:*

Which brings us to the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Pidyon Ha’Ben. Since the firstborn child is technically a “[Kohen](priests.html)” whose potential cannot be actualized, he has to be replaced, so to [speak](mashal.html), by a [Kohen](priests.html) from the [tribe](tribes.html) of Levi. This is accomplished by the father of the baby [offering](korbanot.html) the [Kohen](priests.html) a [redemptive](redemption.html) value of [five](five.html) silver coins for the boy.

Ordinarily, the Pidyon HaBen is performed, for the newborn boy, on the 31st day (the day of [birth](birth.html) being the [first](one.html) day) of his life;[[4]](#footnote-4) however, the ritual cannot be performed on [Shabbat](sabbath.html) because it involves the exchange of money. The performance of the [mitzva](cmds613.html) involves buying him back, for [five](five.html) shekels, from a [Kohen](priests.html). This [redemption](redemption.html) price, for the firstborn, was set at [five](five.html) shekels for each of [two](two.html) hundred and [seventy](seventy.html)-[three](three.html) surplus firstborn Levites, as we saw in Bamidbar ([Numbers](nchart.html)) 3:46.

The [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Pidyon HaBen applies to a relatively small [number](nchart.html) of [Jews](gen-jew.html). It applies only to the firstborn [male](male+female.html) child if it is born by natural childbirth. Thus, if a [female](male+female.html) is the firstborn, no child in the family is subject to the ritual. If the [first](one.html) child is born by Caesarean section, the ritual does not apply to that child (nor, according to most sources, to any child born after that child). If the [first](one.html) conception ends in miscarriage after more than [forty](forty.html) days' term, it does not apply to any subsequent child. It does not apply to members of the [tribe](tribes.html) of Levi, or children born to a daughter of a member of the [tribe](tribes.html) of Levi.

Pidyon HaBen for an *adopted* boy is determined by the status of the [*birth*](thebirth.html) *parents*, not by that of the adoptive parents. The child's status as a [Kohen](priests.html), a Levi, a [Jew](gen-jew.html), and a firstborn are all determined by reference to the [birth](thebirth.html) parents.

# Context

Since the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Pidyon HaBen appears in context of the termination of the [ten](ten.html) [plagues](plagues.html) and the ensuing [exodus from Egypt](thebirth.html),[[5]](#footnote-5) it serves as a [spiritual](physical.html) model for [redemption](redemption.html). We are commanded to [redeem](redemption.html) our firstborn son because [HaShem](hashem.html), our Father, [redeemed](redemption.html) us from our [bondage in Egypt](file:///D:\Word\LAW\thebirth.html). Indeed, following the Torah’s lead, Chassidic commentaries and Kabbalistic works discuss the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of redeeming the firstborn in [connection](connection.html) with our own final [redemption](redemption.html), whose [future](future.html) description is likened by the prophets to the [exodus from Egypt](thebirth.html), “Like the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show you wonders”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

# The Pidyon HaBen of [Mashiach](mashiach.html)

The material in this section I learned from my brother Yisroel Killian.

The [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Pidyon HaBen [teaches](teacher.html) us several critical things about [Yeshua](yeshua.html) the [Mashiach](mashiach.html).

1. We learn that [Yeshua](yeshua.html) was a firstborn son who opened Miriam’s [womb](thebirth.html) and therefore *needed* to be [redeemed](redemption.html) through the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Pidyon HaBen.
2. We learn from this [mitzva](cmds613.html) that [Yeshua](yeshua.html) *was*, Himself, [redeemed](redemption.html) through Pidyon HaBen.
3. We learn that [Yeshua](yeshua.html) has a *biological father* who fathered [Yeshua](yeshua.html) through normal marital intimacy.[[7]](#footnote-7)
4. We learn that He was *not* born of a [virgin](virgin.html).
5. We learn that [Yeshua](yeshua.html) will be a [priest](priests.html) according to the order of Melchizedek when the priesthood of the firstborn is restored.

Lets delve into the sources to begin to understand the points above. Lets begin by examing a crucial passage from the Nazarean Codicil:

***Luqas (***[***Luke***](luke.html)***) 2:21*** *And when* [*eight*](eight.html) *days were accomplished for the* [*circumcising*](file:///D:\Word\LAW\circumcz.html) *of the child, his* [*name*](name.html) *was called* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html)*, which was so named of the* [*angel*](angels.html) *before he was conceived in the* [*womb*](thebirth.html)*. 22 And when the days of her purification according to the* [*law*](law.html) *of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to* [*Jerusalem*](city.html)*, to present him to* [*the Lord*](file:///D:\Word\LAW\hashem.html)*; 23 (As it is written in the* [*law*](law.html) *of the Lord, Every* [*male*](male+female.html) *that openeth the* [*womb*](thebirth.html) *shall be called holy to the Lord;) 24 And to offer a* [*sacrifice*](korbanot.html) *according to that which is said in the* [*law*](law.html) *of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or* [*two*](two.html) *young pigeons.*

From the above passage we see that [Yeshua](yeshua.html) was a firstborn who opened Miriam’s [womb](thebirth.html). We also see that ‘they’, i.e. His parents, Miriam and [Yosef](joseph.html), brought [Yeshua](yeshua.html) to [Jerusalem](city.html) in order to perform the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Pidyon HaBen. (As an aside, they also went up to [Jerusalem](city.html) to present the [offerings](file:///D:\Word\LAW\korbanot.html) for Miriam’s purification.)

[Yosef](joseph.html), the *biological* father of [Yeshua](yeshua.html) [HaMashiach](file:///D:\Word\LAW\mashiach.html) was responsible for the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Pidyon HaBen. So, how do we [know](daat.html) that [Yeshua](yeshua.html)’s biological father was involved in the Pidyon HaBen of [Yeshua](yeshua.html)? To answer this important question, we need to examine the [Oral Torah](orallaw.html) because the details for the performance of *every* [mitzva](cmds613.html) are found, *exclusively*, in the [Oral Torah](orallaw.html). We learn in the [Oral Torah](orallaw.html) that only the biological father could perform this [mitzva](cmds613.html):

***Eiruvin 27a*** *… are women liable to perform every positive precept the performance of which is not dependent on a specified* [*time*](time.html)*? Are there not in fact [the precepts of] the* [*study of the Torah*](study.html)*,[[8]](#footnote-8) propagation of the race[[9]](#footnote-9) and* [*redemption*](redemption.html) *of the son[[10]](#footnote-10) each of which is a positive precept the observance of which is not dependent on any specified* [*time*](time.html) *and women are nevertheless exempt [from their observance]?*

And

***Kiddushin 29a*** *‘To* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *him.’ How do we* [*know*](daat.html) *it? — Because it is written, and all the firstborn of man among thy sons shalt thou* [*redeem*](redemption.html)*.[[11]](#footnote-11) And if his father did not* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *him, he is bound to* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *himself, for it is written, [nevertheless the firstborn of man] thou shalt surely* [*redeem*](redemption.html)*.[[12]](#footnote-12) And how do we* [*know*](daat.html) *that she [his mother] is not obliged [to* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *him]? — Because it is written, thou shalt* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *[tifdeh] [which may also be read] thou shalt* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *thyself [tippadeh]:* [*one*](one.html) *who is charged with redeeming oneself is charged to* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *others; whereas* [*one*](one.html) *who is not charged to* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *oneself is not charged to* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *others. And how do we* [*know*](daat.html) *that she is not bound to* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *herself?[[13]](#footnote-13) — Because it is written, thou shalt* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *[tifdeh], [which may be read] thou shalt* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *thyself the* [*one*](one.html) *whom others are commanded to* [*redeem*](redemption.html)*, is commanded to* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *oneself: the* [*one*](one.html) *whom others are not commanded to* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *is not commanded to* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *oneself. And how do we* [*know*](daat.html) *that others are not commanded to* [*redeem*](redemption.html) *her? — Because the Writ saith, ‘and all the firstborn of man among thy sons shalt thou* [*redeem*](redemption.html)*’:[[14]](#footnote-14) ‘thy sons’, but not thy daughters.*

With this background, we can understand that [Yosef](joseph.html), himself, had to perform Pidyon HaBen for his son. After [Yeshua](yeshua.html) was [redeemed](redemption.html) by [Yosef](joseph.html), his biological father, the family returned to Nazareth.

***Luqas (***[***Luke***](luke.html)***) 2:39*** *And when they had performed all things according to the* [*law of the Lord*](law.html)*, they returned into Galilee, to their own* [*city*](city.html) *Nazareth.*

From [Yeshua](yeshua.html)’s Pidyon HaBen we learn several *very* interesting things:

1. [Yeshua](yeshua.html), the [redeemer](file:///D:\Word\LAW\redemption.html), was himself [redeemed](redemption.html) by a [kohen](priests.html).
2. [Yeshua](yeshua.html) had a biological father and thus proving that a [virgin birth](virgin.html) did *not* happen.[[15]](#footnote-15)
3. [Yeshua](yeshua.html) was a firstborn.
4. [Yeshua](yeshua.html) will be a [kohen](priests.html), a [priest](priests.html), according to the order of Melchizedek, when the priesthood is restored to the firstborn.

# Prophetic Implications[[16]](#footnote-16)

The [Babylonian](bavel.html) and [Jerusalem](city.html) [Talmuds](file:///D:\Word\LAW\orallaw.html) differ on the question of upon whom the Torah places the responsibility of [redeeming](file:///D:\Word\LAW\redemption.html) the firstborn son: the father or the firstborn himself. According to the [Talmud](orallaw.html) Bavli, the responsibility is the father’s (and this is how we rule). However, according to the [Talmud](orallaw.html) Yerushalmi, the responsibility is placed on the firstborn himself. It is only because he is too young to perform the [redemption](redemption.html) himself, at a month old. Therefore just as a baby cannot [circumcise](circumcz.html) himself, the son is unable to [redeem](redemption.html) himself and thus the Torah temporarily gives the obligation to the father. But, once the firstborn son is old enough the responsibility reverts back on him to [redeem](redemption.html) himself if his father has not yet done so.

Because of the parallel between the [mitzva](cmds613.html) of Pidyon HaBen and the [redemption](redemption.html) from our present [exile](galuyot.html), we may interpret the difference between the Talmuds as representing [two](two.html) opinions regarding the question of “Who holds the key to [redemption](redemption.html)?” In other words, who is responsible for acting in order to [redeem](redemption.html) us from our current [exile](galuyot.html), [HaShem](hashem.html) or we, the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people?

When the son is young, both Talmuds agree that the responsibility is the father’s because the son is unable to [redeem](redemption.html) himself. This was the state of the [Jewish people](gen-jew.html) at the [time](time.html) of the [exodus from Egypt](thebirth.html). We were very young, the [nation](nations.html) had just been born, and there was no possibility of us freeing ourselves [from Egypt](thebirth.html). As a people, we did not have any [merits](merit.html) of our own and therefore [HaShem](hashem.html) [redeemed](redemption.html) us with [Heavenly](file:///D:\Word\LAW\heaven.html) strength alone.

Now, after the giving of the Torah, following thousands of years of ups and downs during which the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people have matured, and continue to mature, we have come to the point where the dispute between the [two](two.html) Talmuds is relevant. Does the responsibility to [redeem](redemption.html) us from our current [exile](galuyot.html) still belong to our father, [HaShem](hashem.html), as the [Talmud](orallaw.html) Bavli holds. Or, is it now our responsibility (and the father’s responsibility is over)?

As noted earlier, [halachically](file:///D:\Word\LAW\walking.html) we rule according to the [Talmud](orallaw.html) Bavli and the obligation is upon the father. Thus, if the son snatches the [mitzva](cmds613.html), as it were, and performs it before his father has a chance to, it sounds like he acted in rebellion, what the [Talmud](orallaw.html) describes (in relation to the [redemption](redemption.html)) as a forceful aliyah.[[17]](#footnote-17) In which case, the son is obligated to compensate his father.

However, if it is the case that the key and responsibility for [redemption](redemption.html) is placed in our [hands](fourteen.html), why wait another moment!? The moment it becomes possible, we must [redeem](redemption.html) ourselves. It might be that the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people are in such a downfallen state that we are like a premature firstborn (which in [Hebrew](hebrew.html) is called “a fallen [one](one.html),” נפל) that cannot yet be [redeemed](redemption.html), in fact, it would be dangerous to try and perform the [redemption](redemption.html) then. But, the moment we are able to rise up, the moment we are no longer considered premature, we must we must seize the opportunity and as the verse states, “As I have fallen, I have risen”.[[18]](#footnote-18)

\* \* \*

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1. Shemot (Exodus( 13:1-2, Shemot (Exodus) 24:5 with Rashi. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Shemot (Exodus) 32:26 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bamidbar (Numbers) 3:11-12 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A child is not considered fully "established" until he is has survived his first month. Therefore, a Pidyon Haben should take place on the thirty-first day of the child's life. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bamidbar (Numbers) 3:44-50 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Micah 7:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Rema ( יו'ד ס' ש'ה סעיף י ) quotes a Rivash that says, the father cannot assign a שליח – an agent, to redeem his son from the kohen. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. That women are exempt is deduced from Devarim (Deuteronomy) 11:19, ‘And ye shall teach them your sons’ but not your daughters. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. Yebamot 65b. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Shemot (Exodus) 13:13 and Kidushin 29a. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Shemot (Exodus) 13:13 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Bamidbar (Numbers) 18:15. The deduction is from the emphatic ‘surely’, expressed in [Hebrew](file:///D:\Word\LAW\hebrew.html) by the doubling of the verb. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Though ‘among thy sons’ is explicitly stated, the verse may imply that a father is bound to redeem his son only, but the daughter must redeem herself when she grows up. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Shemot (Exodus) 34:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The poskim argue about whether others (a rabbinic court or perhaps a third party - see below) can redeem the son if his father has not done so. The Ma'adanei Melekh (=Divrei Chamudot) commenting on the Rosh in Bekhorot (8:17) believes, like the Shulchan Arukh, that in the absence of a father the only available option is for the son to redeem himself. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. From the teachings of Harav Titzchak Ginsburgh [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ketubot 111a [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Micah 7:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)