



tidbits

for bar mitzvah

Klal Govoah
In Memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz z"l

The Bar Mitzvah celebrates a boy maturing into a *gadol*, an adult, who is obligated in mitzvot. On the day he reaches thirteen years of age, he becomes a responsible adult and his actions are recognized. Even if he was born in the latter part of the day, he becomes Bar Mitzvah from the night of his thirteenth Hebrew birthday. Aside from his age, he must have *siman gadlus* - two pubic hairs - to be considered a *gadol*. For items of Rabbinic nature, we assume that he has these *simanim*. For items that are *d'orayso* we are stringent and therefore the boy should not be *motzi* others with kiddush on Friday night, blowing shofar, or the *aliyah* of *Parashas Zachor* (he is also not entrusted with *tevilas keilim* without the presence of another *gadol* who can verify it was performed).

A child born during *bein hashmashos* (the time between *shekiya* and *tzeis hakochavim*) needs to be stringent and consider himself an adult from the earlier day.

One who is born in Adar II during a leap year, whose Bar Mitzvah date falls during a non-leap year, is considered Bar Mitzvah from the date in the single month of Adar. One whose Bar Mitzvah falls during Adar I or Adar II of a leap-year, whose birth occurred during a leap year as well, keeps his exact birthdate. If he was born during Adar in a non-leap year and his Bar Mitzvah date is during a leap year, he is only considered to be thirteen years of age in the second Adar. However, many are stringent regarding wearing tefillin and other *mitzvot d'orayso* from Adar Rishon.

A child born on the 30th day of Cheshvan (i.e. the first day of Rosh Chodesh Kislev) whose Bar Mitzvah year contains no 30th day of Cheshvan (and only one day of Rosh Chodesh Kislev), celebrates his Bar Mitzvah on Rosh Chodesh Kislev. If his birthday was on Rosh Chodesh Kislev in a year when there was only one day of Rosh Chodesh and the Bar Mitzvah year contains two days of Rosh Chodesh, the Bar Mitzvah is on the first day of Rosh Chodesh Kislev (i.e. the 30th of Cheshvan).

One who becomes Bar Mitzvah on Motzaei Shabbos/Sunday should not make havdalah on behalf of others, as he did not observe Shabbos as a *gadol*.

A child who is to become Bar Mitzvah does not need to wait until he is a Bar Mitzvah to recite *kiddush levanah*; rather he may say it as a child. He also does not recite it again when he reaches adulthood.

Tefillin

There is a minhag for a child to begin the mitzvah of wearing tefillin shortly before his Bar Mitzvah. Some do so just one day before, while others do so thirty days or even three months prior to the birthdate. The mitzvah of tefillin is a *mitzvah d'orayso*. The child should be fitted properly with the *tefillin shel rosh*. He should also be instructed exactly where to place the *tefillin shel yad* on his arm (this can be complex if the child is small). As the child grows the tefillin may need adjustments periodically, as an improper fit or placement may cause one to not fulfill the mitzvah.

Some go to a rav to put on the tefillin for the first time. Additionally, many have the practice for a boy to receive berachos from gedolim on the occasion of becoming Bar Mitzvah.

Some recite a *shehecheyanu* on the tefillin on the day of their Bar Mitzvah. The berachah is made on the mitzvah, as well on the tefillin themselves that the father gifts to his child at this time, as they are an expensive asset.

Common practice is for the boy to begin wearing a hat and suit jacket for davening from the time he begins the mitzvah of tefillin. The minhag amongst Sefardim and B'nei Ashkenaz (Yekkes) is to begin wearing a tallis *gadol* at this point, although some begin earlier.

Aliyah L'Torah

A Bar Mitzvah boy receives an *aliyah* on Shabbos. Some have the practice of calling him up using a special "*yaamod*" *nussach*. This is usually done on the Shabbos following his Bar Mitzvah. The custom is to call him up for the *aliyah* of *maftir* along with the *haftarah*. He does not receive the *maftir* of *Parashas Zachor* (some do not honor a Bar Mitzvah boy with any of the *daled parshiyos*).

Some have the custom that he receives an *aliyah* on the Shabbos prior to his birthdate. In this case, as he is not yet a *gadol* the only *aliyah* he may receive is *maftir*. Additionally, in this case, common practice is not to give him *maftir* on any of the following occasions: the *daled parshiyos*, the seventh day of Pesach, first day of Shavuot, Shabbos Chazon, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Shabbos Shuvah.

Many say that the *chiyuv* of a Bar Mitzvah boy for his *aliyah* gives him precedence for the *aliyah* of *maftir* over one who has *yarzheit*.

Some boys perform the actual *leining* with some *leining* just the *maftir* with *haftarah* while others will *lein* the entire *parashah* as well. The extensive preparation of the *leining* will often result in the boy knowing the *pesukim* by heart, however when *leining*, the words must be read from the *sefer torah* and not recited from memory. He should prepare the *berachos* for the *aliyah* and *haftarah* to ensure he can recite them properly. If he is not *leining* he should be instructed to read along with the *baal koreh* in an undertone.

Many have the minhag to honor the Bar Mitzvah boy with *pesichah* (*hotza'ah ve'hachnasah*). Some have a minhag to throw candies after the *aliyah* and to sing *siman tov*.

There is a minhag for the women to attend shul on this occasion. The father of the boy makes a berachah of *Baruch she'p'tarani mei'oinshi shel zeh*. The berachah is generally made after the boy receives his first *aliyah* as it is the first public display of his adulthood. As his son is now responsible for his own actions and the primary obligation of *chinuch* for his son is now minimized, the father's liability for his son's actions are lessened; the father thanks Hashem for reaching this milestone (Magen Avraham 225:5). According to most customs the berachah is made without *Shem U'malchus* (Hashem's name), and therefore Amen is not said in response to this berachah. In the case of twin boys, the berachah is made for each son individually. There are different minhagim as to whether this berachah is made in the case of a stepson or an adopted child.

Many have the custom to make a Kiddush on Shabbos in honor of the occasion.

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Seudas Mitzvah

The Magen Avraham (225:4) writes that one should make a seudah on the day his son becomes Bar Mitzvah, like the day his son marries. The Yam Shel Shelomo (Bava Kama 7:17) writes that even if the seudah does not take place on the actual birthdate, it is still considered a *seudas mitzvah* if the boy says Divrei Torah. This is, perhaps, a source for the common practice for the Bar Mitzvah boy to say a Bar Mitzvah *pshetel*. Another reason for the pshetel is mentioned in the Kaf Hachaim (O.C. 225:11) who writes from Kabbalistic sources that one should start his adulthood with words of Torah.

The following are a few sources stated for the Bar Mitzvah celebration. The rule is that one who performs a mitzvah due to obligation is of greater stature than one who performs it voluntarily. Therefore, although a child can perform mitzvos, since he was previously not obligated, we celebrate this greater level of mitzvah performance (Elya Rabbah). Another source for celebrating is from the Yom Tov of Shavuot during which we display our happiness in receiving the Torah and becoming obligated in mitzvah observance; for a Bar Mitzvah boy, this day commemorates the same. Another source, Midrash Rabbah (Bereishis 53,10), writes that Avraham's celebration of the *Yom Higgamel* of Yitzchok was when his son reached thirteen years of age and was weaned from the yetzer hara, because at age thirteen one receives a *yetzer tov* to counter the yetzer hara.

The celebration allows one to impress upon his son the greatness and opportunity that a life of Torah and mitzvos affords. The Chasam Sofer writes (Parashas Vayechi) that there is a mitzvah to serve Hashem with joy. Accordingly, the Bar Mitzvah boy initiates his performance of mitzvos with a celebration of mitzvah performance.

The boy should have a haircut and dress formally for the event. Many allow a Bar Mitzvah boy to have a haircut during sefirah in honor of the oc-

casion, although he should preferably do so before his birthday. A Bar Mitzvah celebration may be held during sefirah, but according to many, music and dancing are not permitted. One who becomes Bar Mitzvah during sefirah may continue to count with a berachah (if he previously missed a day he continues to count without a berachah).

Many allow a Bar Mitzvah celebration during the Nine Days until the 7th of Av. The boy and his parents may wear Shabbos clothing, but not those attending.

Some have the practice for the boy to learn a designated section of mishna or gemara with the goal of making a siyum at the time of the Bar Mitzvah celebration.

The boy should lead the zimun for *birkas hamazon* at the event (Aruch HaShulchan 199:4)

Many do not say *tachanun* at a minyan held at the Bar Mitzvah event. Some extend this to any minyan where the Bar Mitzvah boy is present on the day of his Bar Mitzvah. The minhag is to say *av harachamim* on the Shabbos.

This space was left blank because...

**When you have
nothing to say,
say nothing.**

-Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz z"l

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