

Fascinating INSIGHTS

כה' תמוז תש"פ

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[Birthday Parties¹](#)

We know many make a birthday party when that big day arrives.² What is the Jewish outlook on this?

R' Yisrael Lipshitz (1782-1860),³ the author of the commentary *Tiferes Yisrael* on *Mishnayos*, told each of his family members, in his *Tzavaa* (ethical will), that all the siblings should send birthday greetings of *Mazal Tov* on the occasion of their birthdays. He writes further that this custom shouldn't be stopped, and only if there is an absolute emergency should it be shortened.

The *Midrash Seichel Tov*⁴ says רוב בני אדם, מהבבדים...ושמחים בו ועושין בו משתה

¹ This essay shouldn't be confused with the one titled "Birthdays" that is found in the newly released *Sefer, "Fascinating Insights,"* as this one specifically speaks of birthday parties.

² R' Tzadok Hakohen (*Divrei Chalomos* 20) writes that a person is at the strength of his *Mazel* (בתיקו מזלו) on the day he is born and he shouldn't be afraid on his annual birthday that something bad will come (See also the *Karbon Ha'eidah* to *Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana* 3:8, s.v. הדיה). A woman in need of surgery posed the following question to R' Chaim Kanievsky (*Derech Sicha* p. 174): Should the surgery be delayed in order that it be done on her birthday since the *Mazel* is strong on this day in addition to it being a day where *Tefila* is more accepted?

³ He became the *Rav* of the following cities: Dessau, Schotland, Weinberg, Langfurt, and Danzig and its province near the end of his life. His son R' Baruch Yitzchak testified concerning him: "From the time he became the *Av Beis Din* of Dessau, he studied incessantly and fasted often, at times for three days and nights in a row, enwrapped in his *Tallis* and wearing his *Tefillin* under his coat, without anyone noticing. He studied constantly, making his nights into days of Torah study." R' Lipshitz wrote many *Sefarim*: Commentaries on the *Rambam*, responsum on all areas of Torah, and his commentary on the *Mishna*. He practiced charity throughout his life, as he went from house to house collecting funds to help poor Jewish women get married as well as to help other *Tzedaka* causes. A few days before his death, at the age of 78, people saw him going from street to street, and even climbing stairs to the highest floors, to collect money for the poor. During *Tzom Gedalia* in 1860, he went to the *Beis Midrash* as usual to daven. After reciting *Selichos* and giving his daily *Shiurim*, he fainted and rendered his soul to his Creator, wearing his *Tallis* and *Tefillin*.

⁴ *Breishis* 40:20. This was authored by R' Menachem Ben Shlomo and written in 1139.

birthday is beloved to them and they rejoice and make a party.

The *Ben Ish Chai*⁵ remarks that there are those who are accustomed every year on their birthday to make it a festive day, and this is a good omen. This is what we are accustomed to doing in our house. R' *Ovadia Yosef*⁶ writes that when there are *Divrei Torah* and songs and praises (שירות ותשבחות) to Hashem at a birthday meal, it is a *Seudas Mitzva*.

When the *Chafetz Chaim* turned 70 years old, he invited his students—R' *Elchonon Wasserman* and R' *Yosef Kahanamen* (known as the *Ponovitcher Rav*)—and said the *Bracha* of *Sheheciyanu*⁷ in their presence and gave them cake⁸ and *schnapps*—ייין שרף.⁹ R' *Dovid Chazzan* would celebrate his birthday yearly after he reached the age of 70.¹⁰

R' *Nosson Adler* (1741-1800),¹¹ the *Rebbe* of the *Chassam Sofer*, held a birthday party on the 80th birthday¹² of his mother and invited the entire town. For

⁵ *Reeh*, שנה א', 17. See *Hoshea* 7:5, *Metzudas Dovid*.

⁶ *Beit Orach*, *Orach Chaim*, 6:29:4.

⁷ See *Pischei Teshuva*, *Yoreh Deah*, 217:16.

⁸ See *תשובת חזון יאיר*, 70.

⁹ *Sefer Chafetz Chaim U'paalav*, 40, *Askan Tziburi*, s.v. לכשמלאו. The *Gemara* (*Moed Katan* 28a) relates that when R' *Yosef* reached the age of 60, he made a festive day for the rabbinic students as he said that he left the range of *keres* (כרת is inflicted between the ages of 50 and 60).

¹⁰ *מע' ברכת שהחינו*, 123; see *Yishrei Lev*, p. 2b.

¹¹ See *Igros Sofrim* p. 83. When R' *Nosson Adler* was ten years old, the *Chida*, who was in Frankfurt collecting money for those in *Eretz Yisrael*, said on him the words that the *Isha HaShunamis* said on *Elisha*, "I now know that there is a Holy man of Hashem among us." R' *Adler's* doors remained open day and night, and he declared all his possessions to be common property, so that he might prevent the punishment of those who may carry away an item with them unintentionally. He adopted the liturgical system of the *Arizal*, assembling about himself a select community of kabbalistic adepts. R' *Adler* davened with *Sefardi* pronunciation of Hebrew, and gave hospitality to a *Sefardi* scholar for several months to ensure that he learned that pronunciation accurately. In his *Minyan* they did *Birchas Kohanim* daily. Every *Shabbos* morning, R' *Adler* received two *Aliyos*—*Kohen* and *Maftir*. The customs and use of *Kabbala* were making the community at large fearful, and in 1779 the *Rabbanim* gave him an ultimatum to either disband this group or be put into *Cheirem*, to which he ignored. In 1782, he became *Rav* of *Boskowitz* but there also were people who couldn't get used to his ways. He was ultimately forced to leave after three years and returned to Frankfurt. After four more years in Frankfurt with not much change, R' *Nosson Adler* was put into *Cheirem* that lasted until shortly before his death in 1800. His life and his ways were shrouded in mysticism, allowing only the greatest of the great to understand his lofty level. R' *Adler* didn't leave behind any children. His only daughter passed away when she was twelve years old, while he was serving in *Boskowitz*. He also didn't leave behind any *Sefarim*, although a *Sefer* was published from the cryptic notes in the margin of his *Mishnayos*. One responsum is found among the *Chassam Sofer's*—*Yoreh Deah*, 261. R' *Shimon Sofer* once praised R' *Nosson Adler* to his father, the *Chassam Sofer*, by saying, "Your *Rebbe* is a *Malach* of Hashem." The *Chassam Sofer* objected, saying, "There is no *Malach* like my *Rebbe*. No *Malach* has ever reached this level and no *Malach* has merited what R' *Nosson* has merited." In the eulogy of his *Rebbe*, the *Chassam Sofer* said: "He (R' *Adler*) achieved the complete purpose of *Chassidus* and *Prishus* (abstinence)... and all gates of Torah were open before him."

¹² See *שו"ת בית ישראל*, 32.

R' Shmuel Salant's¹³ 93rd birthday, on Rosh Chodesh Shvat in 1909, a party took place at his house with cake. Nearly all of Yerushalayim was there including the Chevra Kadisha, the staff of the Bikur Cholim hospital and the B'datz of Yerushalayim.

Talking, Hearing and Seeing

The sin of the Meraglim which culminated on Tisha Bav,¹⁴ caused damage in three areas—seeing, hearing and speech. This is because they saw Eretz Yisrael in a negative way as Rashi¹⁵ tells us Hashem really sent the dead for the benefit of the Meraglim yet they didn't interpret it that way, they spoke about the land negatively and their report was heard and accepted. This is hinted to in ¹⁶קדם, return us to you, Hashem, renew our days like the days of old—before we sinned in these areas. Looking closely at the word **דש** we notice it is an acronym for **דבור שמיעה**, seeing, speaking and hearing.

The sins of **דמים**, שפיכות דמים, idolatry, immorality and murder—the cause of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash,¹⁷ parallel these three. In regard to Avoda Zara it says **לא תזכירו** ושם אלהים אחרים לא תזכירו. This corresponds to speech. Murder matches up with hearing as in **קול דמי אחיך** צעקים אלי, the voice of your

¹³ R' Shmuel Salant's father, who died when he was a child, was the rabbi of the town as well as the rabbi of Trakai near Vilna. After marrying the eldest daughter of R' Yosef Zundel of Salant, R' Shmuel Salant (1816–1909) adopted his father-in-law's last name. At an early age his lungs became damaged and was advised to seek a warm climate. This pushed him in 1840 to go with his wife and son to Yerushalayim. He arrived in Yerushalayim in 1841, rejoining his father-in-law and about 500 other Ashkenazim who had preceded him. Upon his arrival in Yerushalayim, he moved into a tiny two-room apartment without windows in the courtyard of the Churva, where he would live and work for the next fifty years. In his capacity as chief rabbi, he met with the great sages and prominent people of the era to discuss communal matters, in addition to the continuous stream of plain folk who came to consult with him. From 1848 to 1851 he served as a *meshulach* (fundraiser), visiting the principal cities of Lithuania and Poland to collect money for the impoverished Jews of the Old Yishuv. In 1860, he traveled to Europe to collect funds. Upon his return to Yerushalayim, he succeeded in ensuring that his contributions were equally divided between the Sefardim and Ashkenazim. He also collected donations for the building of the Beis **Yaakov** Shul in Yerushalayim, which was named so after James (**Yaakov**) Rothschild. In 1860, he also founded the Rabbi Meir Baal Haneis Salant charity together with his father-in-law. Its purpose was to provide for all of Israel's poor and impoverished, Sefardi and Ashkenazi. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Eitz Chaim Yeshiva in Yerushalayim as well as helping found Bikur Cholim Hospital. He encouraged people to move into new neighborhoods outside the Old City walls. During his tenure as chief rabbi, the Jewish population of Yerushalayim grew from 5,000 to 30,000. R' Shmuel Salant would have a quick Seder on Pesach followed by a nap. This was because he drank four cups of wine rendering him unfit to *Paskin* the many *Shailos* that would come to him on the night of the Seder. In 1888, his eyesight began to fail, and a few years later he became blind. R' Yechiel Michel Tucazinsky, who was his student and grandson by marriage wrote that though funerals in Yerushalayim were generally performed within the same day or night as the passing, R' Shmuel Salant's was an exception. He died at night and the funeral wasn't held until daybreak because the Rabbis were concerned that the massive attendance to a nighttime funeral procession would lead to injuries or worse. R' Shmuel Salant served as the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Yerushalayim for nearly 70 years.

¹⁴ See Sanhedrin 104b, Tehillim 106:27, Rashi.

¹⁵ Bamidbar 13:32, Rashi.

¹⁶ Eicha 5:21.

¹⁷ Yoma 9b.

brother's blood cries out to Me.¹⁸ Immorality lines up with seeing as it states **ולא תתורו...עייניכם**, don't explore after your heart and eyes.¹⁹ This is alluded to in the Haftoras of the Three Weeks. They are **דברי ירמיהו, שמעו דבר ה', חזון** ישעיהו.²⁰ These also correspond to the first three Parshiyos of the שבועה דנחמתא, the seven weeks of consolation—**והיה עקב תשמעון** is speech, **ואתחנן**, **ועקב**, **ראה**, hearing and **ראה** is seeing.

שמיעה	דבור	חזון
חדש	חדש	חדש
שפיכות דמים	עבודה זרה	גלוי עריות
שמעו דבר ה'	דברי ירמיהו	חזון ישעיהו
עקב	ואתחנן	ראה

A Reminder Of Love

1) In Parshas Masei, the Torah tells of the death of Aharon—**וימת שם**—²¹which was in the month of Av. Why does the Torah repeat Aharon's death, as it already told us in Parshas Chukas **וימת אהרן שם**, Aharon died there?²²

2) In Parshas Masei the Torah reports the encampments²³ without going into detail on what happened there. Even when it mentions Sinai,²⁴ it makes no mention of the great event of receiving the Torah, rather it just says **ויחנן במדבר סיני** ויסעו מרפידים ויחננו במדבר סיני, they journeyed from Refidim and encamped in the Wilderness of Sinai. However, when it comes to the death of Aharon, it relates what happened as it says they encamped in Mount Hor... Aharon went up to there and died on Rosh Chodesh Av.²⁵ Why does the Torah do this?

3) Why is Aharon's Yartzheit (The Torah makes note of the date of his death—Rosh Chodesh Av) the only one mentioned in the Torah?

The Sefas Emes explains that only the Yartzheit stated in the Torah is Aharon's because he died in Av. The destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, which occurred at this time, was due to **שנאת חנם**. Since Aharon was an **אוהב שלום ורודף שלום**, loving and pursuing peace,²⁶ we must learn from him because that is the rectification that is needed. This also explains why Aharon's death is repeated in Masei because Masei comes out in most years Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Av or Shabbos Mevarchim Chodesh Av. In order to rectify the tragedies of the month of Av, we need to remove **שנאת חנם**.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander Tz"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the *Sefer, Fascinating Insights: Torah Perspectives On Unique Topics*. His writings inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in a suburb of Yerushalayim where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

¹⁸ Breishis 4:10.

¹⁹ Bamidbar 15:39.

²⁰ Orach Chaim 428:8, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 122:6. See Pri Tzadik, Masei 11.

²¹ Bamidbar 33:38.

²² Bamidbar 20:28.

²³ Tangentially, the Sefer Beis Yaakov (Likutim, p. 95, s.v. אמר. This was authored by R' Yaakov Aharon Yanovski, who passed away in 1869.) writes in the name of R' Dovid of Lelov that Moshe wrote all the journeys of the Jewish people and made from them Torah. So too now Eliyahu writes all the journeys and adventures of each Jew, and when Moshiach comes, there will be a Sefer from this which we will learn from.

²⁴ Bamidbar 33:15.

²⁵ Bamidbar 33:37,38.

²⁶ Avos 1:12. Rashi (Bamidbar 20:29) writes that Aharon was mourned by everyone (unlike Moshe), men and women because he pursued peace and extended himself to bring harmony between adversaries and between man and his wife.