



Birthdays

What is the Jewish view on birthdays?

1) The Karbon Ha'eida (Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana 3:8, s.v. היה) comments that on one's birthday, he doesn't get damaged so quickly because the mazel that rules on that day helps him. Similarly, the Chida writes (Chomas Incha, l'yon 3, s.v. יאבד) that on one's birthday his mazel is בריא (strong, וחזק).

2) Many give brachos to others on their birthday. An allusion to this is found in אני היום ילדתיך שאל ממני ואתנה (Tehillim 2:7-8), today is my birthday, ask me for something and I will give it.

3) The Tolna Rebbe said that on one's birthday there is the power to request and beseech that one should have his desires filled, as is hinted to in אני היום ילדתיך שאל ממני ואתנה (Brought in the sefer אמרתך חייתיני, p. 246).

4) Many do חשבון הנפש, a personal accounting and reckoning on their birthday. This idea is brought out from the following. Rosh Hashana isn't observed on the day when the world was created, rather six days later—on the anniversary of the creation of Adam and Chava (their birthday). This is the day when everything truly began. Just as this day of Rosh Hashana is יום הדין, the day of judgment, we too on our birthdays should experience the same. That is to say, we should do a חשבון הנפש, contemplate and see where we have improved and how we can improve more.

When R' Shmuel Mohilever turned 70, there were those who wanted to make him a celebration. When R' Shmuel became aware of this, he adamantly refused, as he said that we don't find in Torah that Jews make birthday celebrations. We only find non-Jews doing this, as Paroh made a feast for his birthday

(Breishis 40:20). He then added that this is a difference between us and the nations, as a Jew on his birthday makes a חשבון הנפש for himself whereas a non-Jew on his birthday makes a חשבון for others, as Paroh restored the שר המשקים to his position and the האופים was hung (Sefer עיסורי תורה, Vayeshev, 40:20).

A student of the Ksav Sofer (1815-1871) once saw his rebbe wallowing in tears. When he asked his rebbe about this, he responded, "Today is my 54th birthday and I am judging (דן, to judge, has a gematria of 54) myself as to what I was busy with all these years. I found many wasteful moments—without Torah, wisdom, and righteousness. Should I not cry about these wasted times that won't return?"

When the student heard this, he also cried, as the great Ksav Sofer spent his days only with Torah, avoda, and gemilus chasadim, and was nevertheless crying about his life. What are we—of lower stature who truly wasted our years—going to answer?

What is the cause for celebration of a birthday since it is just one day closer to death? That is to say, unless we truly utilize our time well in this world. Then there is a cause for celebration because with each coming year we accomplish more.

It has been said that a birthday is the day Hashem decided the world can't continue without you. You, as an individual, are unique and irreplaceable. No person alive, no person who has ever lived, and no person who will ever live can fulfill the specific role in Hashem's creation that you have been entrusted with.

The Midrash Seichel Tov (Breishis

40:20) says רוב בני אדם מחבבים...ושמחים בו, to most people, their birthday is beloved to them and they rejoice and make a party. The Midrash Tanuchma (Pikudai 13) tells us that Hashem combined the simcha of Yitzchak's birthday with the simcha of erecting the Mishkan.

The Ben Ish Chai (Reeh, 17, 'שנה א') 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' Dovid Chazzan would celebrate his birthday yearly after he reached the age of 70 (ש"ת אפרקסא) מע' ברכת שהחינו, יביע אומר, Orach Chaim, 6:29:4) writes that when there are divrei Torah and songs and praises (שירות) to Hashem at a birthday meal, it is a seudas mitzva. The (ש"ת תגנוי יוסף, 4:2) brings from מעשה אנשי מעשה, men of good deed, to say a new fruit or garment on one's birthday.

The Chassam Sofer would complete the Chumash with his students on the 7th of Tishrei, his birthday. He would also give each student there four coins to buy dairy bread (Minhagei Chassam Sofer, 7:14). The Ksav Sofer says that one should make a siyum on a mesachta on his birthday. Indeed, this is what the Ksav Sofer would do on his birthday (Kuntros Ohel Leah, printed in the beginning of Ksav Sofer Al Hatorah). For his 50th birthday the Ksav Sofer made a siyum on Mesachta Pesachim (ש"ת כתב סופר, Yoreh Deah 148). It is beneficial to increase Torah and tefila on one's birthday (מנהג ישראל תורה, Volume I, 225:2). The sefer צדקה לחיים writes from R' Chaim Palagi that on one's birthday he should increase his giving of tzedaka according to his ability

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