

Fascinating INSIGHTS

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In 1846, at the young age of 30, R' Avraham Mordechai Alter, the son of the Chidushei Harim (1799-1866) became very ill. Seeing his son low-spirited, the Chidushai Harim told him to have a will to live as in בחרת בחיים, choose life.¹ After his father left the room, R' Avrohom Mordechai pleaded with Hashem to have another few years to his life so he can have another child. He then said that he will call him Yehuda because הפעם אודה את ה', gratefully praise Hashem, the words expressed by Yehuda's mother when he was born. The following year, in 1847, Yehuda Aryeh, otherwise known as the Sefas Emes (1847-1905), was born.

R' Eliyahu Itamri (1659-1729), author of the *Meil Tzedaka*, writes that a person once approached him about his hardships. R' Itamri offered words of conciliation and encouragement. Days later, this man admitted that had he not met R' Itamri who consoled him, he would have committed suicide.

In this way we can grasp the words נשא את ראש בני גרשון: lift up those people who feel that they are divorced

¹ Devarim 30:19. Tangentially, In Lashon Hakodesh there is no word for life. חיים doesn't mean life, rather it means lives—plural. חי means “alive”—it's an adjective. That is to say, we live in this world in order to get to the next world. In other words, we are living in two worlds simultaneously since the actions we do here affect our next world.

² Breishis 29:35.

from Hashem.³ By encouraging others, we can fulfill ולאחיו יאמר חזק, to his brother he would say “Be Strong.”⁴

We see an example of this by Kayin who was told... למה נפלוי פניך הלא אם תטיב שאת, why are you down, if you improve yourself you will be forgiven.⁵ In an age where so many feel dejected, it is relatively easy to fulfill this. Giving someone a word of encouragement⁶ or some advice can go a long way.⁷ Even to ourselves we can fulfill this as there are many times when we feel down as well.

[Bar and Bas Mitzva](#)

At the age of 13 one becomes obligated in mitzvos, as the Mishna states עשרה למצות.⁸ The word איש is written by עונשין, punishments⁹ and mitzvos. What classifies one as an איש? The age of 13,¹⁰ as we see from Shimon and Levi, who were called איש at the age of 13.¹¹

The Gemara¹² says גדול מצווה ועושה ממי שאינו מצווה ועושה, greater is the one who is commanded and fulfills than one who is not commanded and fulfills. In light of this, R' Yosef, who was blind, remarked, “If someone told me the halacha is that a blind person is obligated to fulfill mitzvos, I would celebrate a festival day for the Rabbanan.” From this we learn, says the Kaf Hachaim,¹³ that the day one becomes obligated in mitzvos is a

³ Bamidbar 4:22. Although at times it is necessary to give rebuke, it needs to be done in the proper way as otherwise it can cause lots of damage. In this way we can interpret אל תוכח לין, do not rebuke a scoffer lest he hate you, rebuke a wise man and he will love you (Mishlei 9:8): don't rebuke someone by belittling him since then he will hate you. Rather give rebuke by saying you are a חכם, you are too good for this. In a similar vein, we can grasp אל תמאס בני אל, my child do not despise Hashem's discipline (Mishlei 3:11), as the Mussar is that we are a son of Hashem. So, אל תמאס, don't make yourself disgusting as we are too good for negative behavior.

⁴ Yeshaya 41:6.

⁵ Breishis 4:6,7.

⁶ There is a saying, “If you see a person without a smile, give them one of yours.”

⁷ The Pasuk states מהטב עציך עד שאב מימין, ... from the hewer of wood to the drawer of water (Devarim 29:10). A deeper explanation given is that at times it is more important to give advice, to someone than to learn, עצות, שאב מימין, as Torah is referred to as water.

⁸ Avos 5:21. The Rosh (כלל טז) (תשובת הראש) says that he is obligated because of הלכה למשה מסיני.

⁹ See Bamidbar 5:6.

¹⁰ The pasuk states ויגדל הילד ויגמל ויעש אברהם משתה גדול, the child grew and was weaned. Avraham made a great feast on this day (Breishis 21:8). The Midrash (Breishis Rabba 53:10) says that this refers to him being weaned from the yetzer hara, as at 13 one gets his yetzer tov (This is why he becomes responsible for adherence to the mitzvos at this age—Eitz Yosef, s.v. נגמל.). So ויגמל means that Yitzchak became a גדול (bar mitzva). The feast Avraham made was in honor of that.

¹¹ Breishis 34:25. See the Gra and Bartenura to Avos, 5:21, s.v. בן ור' יוסי...מדאורייתא. שלש עשרה. See Nazir 29b, Rashi s.v.

¹² Kidushin 31a.

¹³ 225:11.

festival. We therefore have a seuda on the day one becomes bar mitzva.

R' Shimon Bar Yochai invited the Tanaaim to eat a big seuda that he made when his son, R' Elazar, became bar mitzva. R' Shimon explained why this day was so special as he said that a נשמתא קדישא עילאה, holy upper soul, descended through malachim (היות הקודש) to my son R' Elazar since he is now 13.¹⁴

The Yam Shel Shlomo¹⁵ tells us to praise and thank Hashem when a boy reaches bar mitzva,¹⁶ as he is now commanded in mitzvos. The father merited to raise him to this point.¹⁷

The Gemara¹⁸ states אור לארבעה עשר בודקין את החמץ לאור הנוב, the night of the 14th of Nissan we search for chametz by the light of a candle. It is said from R' Chaim Vital that this is also a reference to a bar mitzva boy, who is beginning the 14th year of his life. This is when he fights the yetzer hara—chametz—with the Torah and mitzvos, as it says נוב מצודה ותורה אור.¹⁹ Additionally, this is when he gets the yetzer tov.

What about a bas mitzva? In a letter dated the second of Sivan תשי"ט (1959), R' Moshe Feinstein²⁰ writes that it is not a seudas mitzva, but is rather like a regular birthday, for which a seuda is optional. Therefore, one must not make it in shul. However, one can make a kidush in shul for it.

Why is a bas mitzva different from a bar mitzva in that there is no seudas mitzva? She is now also obligated in mitzvos! R' Moshe Feinstein²¹ explains that it is because it is not as recognizable as it is with a boy, since a boy can now be part of a minyan as well as a מזומן, among other things.²² Since it is not recognizable, there is no mitzva for a seuda when a girl becomes bas mitzva.

The Ben Ish Chai²³ (1832-1909) says that on the day a girl enters the obligation of mitzvos, even though we are not accustomed to make a seuda, nevertheless she should still be happy and wear Shabbos clothes. If possible she should wear a new garment and say שהחיינו and have in mind her entry into the yoke of mitzvos.

R' Avraham Mosfia²⁴ writes that it seems that one who makes a seuda when his daughter becomes bas

mitzva it is a seudas mitzva²⁵ just as a boy who becomes bar mitzva. R' Amram Abourabia²⁶ (1892-1966) states that nowadays the widespread custom is to make a celebration when a girl reaches bas mitzva. In שו"ת ישכיל עבדי,²⁷ R' Ovadia Hedaya (1889-1969) writes that in a place where they are accustomed to make a seuda and simcha for a girl who becomes bas mitzva it is surely fitting and proper.

In the opinion of the שרידי אש²⁸ (1884-1966), since the intent of those who make a bas mitzva is for chizuk and encouragement in educating their daughter for mitzvos, it is good to do it. Regarding the claim that girls in earlier generations didn't have a bas mitzva, in those generations they didn't need to educate girls, since each Jew was filled with Torah and yiras shamayim. The entire atmosphere was pure and filled with kedusha of Yiddishkeit. So a girl who was raised in a Jewish home naturally aspired to this. Nowadays we have the influence of the streets, which is the opposite of Yiddishkeit. It therefore is incumbent on us to focus on educating our girls.

R' Ovadia Yosef²⁹ (1920-2013) is of the opinion that one should make a seuda of simcha and thanks to Hashem since she merited to reach the age of mitzvos. It is proper to say Torah as well as songs and praises to Hashem at a bas mitzva celebration. Then it is surely a seudas mitzva. One should just be careful that it is done within the parameters of tznius.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the books, *Fascinating Insights and Incredible Insights* in addition to being the host of *The Fascinating Insights Podcast*. 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 Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

²⁵ The Yam Shel Shlomo (Baba Kamma, 7:37, s.v. רב) says that a seuda to give praise to Hashem, to publicize a mitzva, or a miracle is a seudas mitzva (see also Teshuvos Chavos Yair, 70).

²⁶ 225, p. 111. In 1906 R' Amram Abourabia, who was born in Morocco, immigrated to Palestine with his paternal grandparents. The rest of the family followed them seven years later, settling in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Yerushalayim. This is where his father held a yeshiva in his home, called Ohr Zarua. At age 29 he received semicha from his rebbi, R' Yosef Chaim Hakohen, president and Raavad (Chief Rabbinical Judge) of the Ma'araviim Congregation in Yerushalayim. He also became a certified shochet (ritual slaughterer). In 1919, he married his rebbi's daughter, Rivka, and the couple had five sons and one daughter. He co-owned a store which sold Hebrew religious books and Judaica to North African Jewry and other communities in the Diaspora. In addition to his occupation at the shop, he taught at the Porat Yosef Yeshiva and at Yeshivat Shaarey Zion. He was appointed Chief Rabbi of the Nachlaot neighborhood in Yerushalayim, where he served from 1925-1951. During the same time, R' Abourabia was a dayan for the Ma'araviim Rabbinical Court in Yerushalayim. In 1951 he became the Rav of Petach Tikva. In 1920, he was among the founders of the new Yerushalayim neighborhood of Bayit Vegan.

²⁷ 5, Orach Chaim, 25.

²⁸ 3:93.

²⁹ Yechava Daas 2:29.

¹⁴ Zohar Chodosh, Breishis 14.

¹⁵ Baba Kama 7:37, s.v. וסעודת.

¹⁶ At 13 one becomes part of the unity of the Jewish people, as he can now be counted for a minyan. Indeed, אחד—one—has a numerical value of 13!

¹⁷ In Judaism 13 is a holy number, as it is the numerical value of אחד (ה') as well as the number of attributes of mercy. There are also 13 מאמין.

¹⁸ Pesachim 2a.

¹⁹ Mishlei 6:23. See Kidushin 30b.

²⁰ Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 4:36. See also Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 1:104.

²¹ Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 2:97.

²² See Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim 225:4.

²³ שנה א', Reeh, 17.

²⁴ Brought in Kovetz Noam 7, p. 4. He was the son of R' Chaim Mosfia, author of שו"ת היים והסד.