



Bar & Bas Mitzva

At the age of 13 one becomes obligated in mitzvos, as the Mishna states *בן שלש עשרה למצות* (Avos 5:21. The Rosh [תשובת הראש, כלל טז] says that he is obligated because of *למשה מסיני* (הלכה למשה מסיני). The word *איש* is written by *עונשין*, punishments and mitzvos. What classifies one as an *איש*? The age of 13, as we see from Shimon and Levi, who were called *איש* at the age of 13 (Breishis 34:25).

The Gemara (Kidushin 31a) says *גדול מצווה ועושה ממי*, 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 (225:11), that the day one becomes obligated in mitzvos is a 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 *קדישא עילאה*, holy upper soul, descended through *malachim* (חיות הקודש) to my son R' Elazar since he is now 13 (Zohar Chodosh, Breishis 14).

The Yam Shel Shlomo (Baba Kama 7:37) tells us to praise and thank Hashem when a boy reaches bar mitzva, as he is now commanded in mitzvos. The father merited to raise him to this point.

The Gemara (Pesachim 2a) states *אור לארבעה עשר* *בדוקין את החמץ לאור הנר*, 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 *נר מצוה ותורה אור* (Mishlei 6:23). Additionally, this is when he gets the yetzer tov.

What about a bas mitzva? In a letter dated the second of Sivan 1959 (תשי"ט), R' Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 4:36, see also Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 1:104) 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 Feinstein (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 2:97) 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 *מוזמן*, among other things. Since it is not recognizable, there is no mitzva for a seuda when a girl becomes bas mitzva.

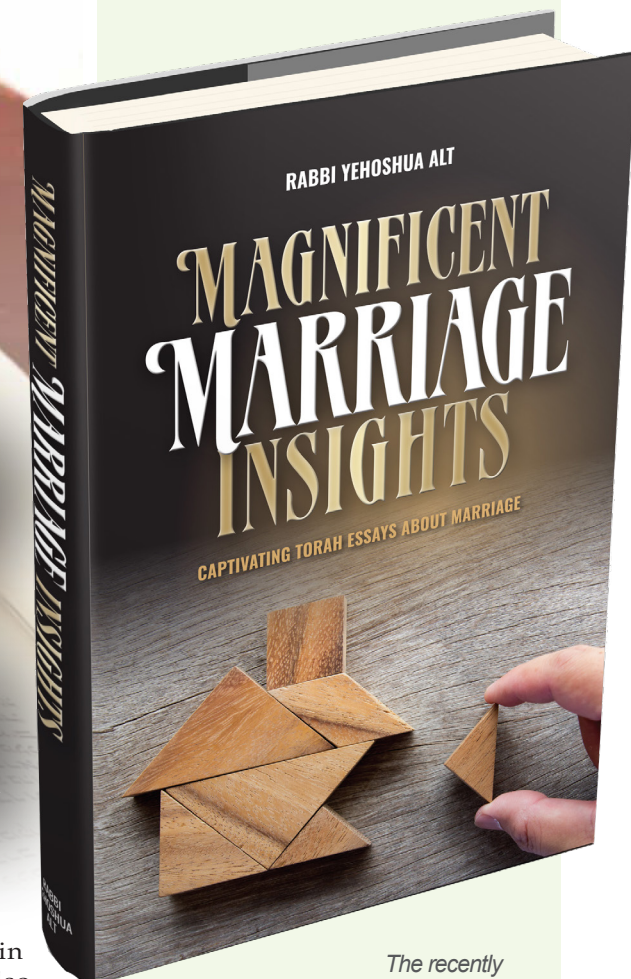
The Ben Ish Chai (Shana Alef, Reeh, 17) says that on the day a girl enters the obligation of mitzvos, even though we are not accustomed to make a seuda, nevertheless she should still be happy and wear Shabbos clothes. If possible she should wear a new garment and say *שהחיינו* and have in mind her entry into the yoke of mitzvos.

R' Avraham Mosfia (Brought in Kovetz Noamd 7, p. 4) writes that it seems that one who makes a seuda when his daughter becomes bas mitzva it is a seudas mitzva just as a boy who becomes bar mitzva. R' Amram Abourabia (Nesivei Yam, 225, p. 111) states that nowadays the widespread custom is to make a celebration when a girl reaches bas mitzva. In Shu"t Yaskil Avdi (5, Orach Chaim, 25), 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 Seridei Aish (3:93): 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 Yosef (Yechava Daas 2:29) 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 YEHOSHUA ALT



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