
BAR & BAT MITZVAH

The Transformational Birthday Party for the Soul

The vast majority of Jewish children, irrespective of religious affiliation, celebrates a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*. Of course, the manner in which the celebration is conducted varies greatly according to tradition, means, and other factors. The event, however, is almost always commemorated.

But a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is not just an event; it is a time, a stage of life that starts with the maturity of adulthood. The word *Bar* is ancient Aramaic for “son” while *Bat* means “daughter.” To be the son or daughter of the mitzvot means to be obligated by Jewish law in the fulfillment of the commandments in the Torah. The Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebration aims to commemorate this important milestone in the coming-of-age of every Jew.

There is a practice, more and more prevalent these days, of “celebrating” Bar and Bat Mitzvahs late into adulthood. Jewish organizations across the religious spectrum run Bar and Bat Mitzvah classes for fully grown adults. On the one hand, this phenomenon reflects a common misunderstanding, because in reality every Jewish 12 or 13-year-old is a Bat or Bar Mitzvah, respectively, in the true sense of the word: they are subject to the mitzvot of the Torah. However, this milestone of adulthood too often passes with more celebration than sincerity, leaving many people today either oblivious to or questioning its true significance.

This class will explore the deeper meaning of what it means to become Bar or Bat Mitzvah, leaving behind both the celebrities in their celebrity garb (they are otherwise welcome to join the class!) and DJ spectacles, to discover what it is that makes this event a transformational life experience.

- What is the meaning of Bar/Bat Mitzvah?
- What is so great about being obligated to keep the mitzvot?
- Why is this “coming of age” a cause for celebration?
- How should a Bar/Bat Mitzvah be celebrated?
- How can we help children, or adults, prepare for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

Class Outline:

- Section I. Coming of Age
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- Section II. The Greatness of Becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah
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SECTION I. COMING OF AGE

While on a state visit to India in 1997, John Major, then the prime minister of Britain, went to visit an ancient tribe that inhabits the mountain range between India and Tibet. He attended a poignant coming-of-age ceremony in which a group of thirteen-year-old boys was being welcomed as men into the tribe. The prime minister watched as the father of each boy walked up to his son and presented him with a symbol of manhood and tribal identity – a Kalashnikov rifle.

This ceremony speaks volumes about the values of that society, highlighting their most important value – self-preservation amidst the warring mountain tribes and communal pride in taking part in the tribe’s defense.

*What are the values that I am instilling in my kids? What do I hold dear that I would like to see continued into the next generation? Is it an appreciation for the finer things in life – good wine, good food, my love of baseball? Maybe it’s expertise at chess or the right way to wash your car? What are the things that I can’t touch or see but are the most valuable concepts and morals I can transmit to my children? (From Rabbi Yisroel Roll, *Step Up to the Plate*, pp. 1-3).*

These are the kinds of questions we need to think about in approaching the topic of Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Judaism’s own coming-of-age ceremony. How does it express Jewish values? What legacy does it transmit to the next generation? What is significant about the timing of this event in a person’s life?

PART A. MUCH OBLIGED

The phrase Bar or Bat Mitzvah expresses a person’s newfound adulthood in terms of mitzvot. At the age of thirteen a person becomes obligated in the performance of mitzvot and as such more responsible for his actions.

1. **Mishnah, Avot 5:21 – At thirteen years old for mitzvot.**

A boy [who is] thirteen years old becomes obligated in performing the mitzvot.

בן י"ג למצוות.

2. **Bereishit Rabbah, Chapter 63:10 – From the age of thirteen, a child is responsible for himself.**

Rabbi Elazar Bar Shimon said: Until the age of thirteen, a father must take responsibility for his son; from then on he should declare, "Blessed is He who has exempted me from being punished on account of this one."

אמר ר' אלעזר בר' שמעון צריך אדם להיטפל בבנו י"ג שנה, מיכן ואילך צריך שיאמר ברוך שפטרני מענשו שלזה.

3. **Rabbi Yehoshafat Alpert, Niglot V'Nistarot BeYahadut, pp. 125-126 – The expression "son of a mitzvah" captures the nature of our relationship with the mitzvot.**

The obligation [of mitzvot] is automatic, and begins from the moment the sun sets on the day that a child becomes Bar Mitzvah, without the need for any agreement or consent on his part.

Therefore, unlike somebody who acts improperly, we attach the term "son" to a Bar-mitzvah boy [the word bar means "son"], whereas a transgressor is termed *baal aveira* "owner of a sin." The conceptual difference between the terms son and owner are clear and significant.

A son is a son by virtue of his birth, and will never cease to be a son. He might become distant or even estranged, yet he will forever remain part of the family. So, too, is the status of each Jew — a status hinted at in the words Bar Mitzvah, "the son of a mitzvah." Of each Jew it is written, "You are children of the Lord, your God." Each Jew, even the most estranged from a Torah lifestyle, remains a Jew, "even if he transgresses, he is still called a Jew."

In contrast to a Bar Mitzvah is the *baal aveira*, "the owner of a transgression." Ownership comes and goes, and "ownership" of a transgression can be reversed through repentance and regret. The transgression is not part of a Jew's integral nature. It is performed out of free will choosing between two alternatives... This choice remains *after* committing a transgression as well, enabling the person to repent. Consequently the expression for one who transgresses is called a "*baal aveira*," not a "*bar aveira*."

התחייבות זו אוטומטית משיגיע היום הקובע והשמש תשקע נעשה הנער "בר מצוה" מבלי שתידרש הסכמה או התחייבות מצידו.

לכן בהבדל מהעובר עבירה, אנו קושרים לראשו של בר המצוה את כתר ה"בן", ולראשו של העבריין את תואר ה"בעל". גם ההבדל הרעיוני בין תארי בן ובעל ברורים ומשמעותיים.

הבן מעצם לידתו "בן" ולעולם לא יחדל להיקרא כך. תיתכן התרחקות, התנכרות, אך איש לבית אבותיו יפקד תמיד. כן היחס והקשר בין יהודי, ובכלל זה בר המצוה עם מצוות ה': "בנים אתם לה' אלוקיכם", וכל יהודי, אף המנוכר והמרוחק מאורח חיים של מצוות מעם ישראל ומתורת ישראל, יהודי ייחשב, ו"ישראל אעפ"י שחטא ישראל הוא".

כנגדו של בר-המצוה—בעל עבירה. "בעלות" זו עוברת וחולפת ע"י תשובה וחרטה. אין העבירה טבועה בו ביסודו—היא נעשתה מכוח הבחירה הקיימת בין שתי אלטרנטיבות... ובחירה זו קיימת גם לאחר שעבר עבירה ורוצה לשוב, לכן הכינוי "בעל עבירה" ולא "בר עבירה".

PART B. PHYSICAL MATURITY

It is not by chance that the ages for Bar and Bat Mitzvah coincide with the onset of adulthood. In fact, the halachic Bar/Bat Mitzvah depends not only on reaching the age of twelve or thirteen, but also on the onset of the process of puberty. Therefore, the concept of physical maturity is bound together with the onset of spiritual maturity and responsibility. There is an ancient tradition that links the process of physical maturity to the development of the spiritual capacity to be obligated in observing the mitzvot.

1. Responsa Rosh, 16:1 – The age of thirteen as the age of maturity is not dependent on individual maturity, but dates all the way back to Moshe at Sinai.

That which you asked, from where do we know that a thirteen-year-old is considered an adult? Know that this was given to Moshe at Sinai.

וששאלת מאין לנו דבן י"ג שנה ויום אחד הוא בר עונשין אבל פחות מכן לא – דע כי הלכה למושה מסיני הוא.

The necessity of physical maturity and its connection to spiritual maturity explains why girls reach this stage earlier than boys. For girls, Bat Mitzvah begins at the age of twelve.

2. Torah Temima, Bereishit 2:22, footnote 48 – Why a girl becomes Bat Mitzvah a year earlier than a boy becomes Bar Mitzvah.

A girl [becomes Bat Mitzvah] at twelve, [whereas] a boy [becomes Bar Mitzvah] at thirteen... because the body's physical development goes in tandem with emotional and spiritual maturity, and because girls develop earlier physically, their emotional and spiritual maturity is earlier, too.

תינוקות בת י"ב שנה... ובתינוק רק מבן י"ג... כי בהתחזק כחות הגוף מתחזקים גם כחות הנפש, ולכן מכיון שממהרת להביא כח בגוף ממהרת להביא כח גם בנפש.

3. Rambam, Hilchot Ishut 2:21 – Thirteen years are calculated by the Jewish year and not by the solar year.

The years mentioned by boys [13] and girls [12] are neither lunar years nor solar years, rather years following the Jewish calendar [which correlates the solar and lunar year]... These [solar and lunar combined] years are used for all [counting with regard to] religious matters.

כל השנים האמורים בבן ובבת... אינן לא שני הלבנה ולא שני החמה אלא שנים של סדר העיבור שהן פשוטות ומעוברות ע"פ ב"ד... ובאותן השנים מונין לכל דברי הדת.

4. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. 1, p. 40 – The significance of this age lies in the potential for child-bearing.

Every person needs to know that from the moment that his reproductive organs begin to develop he is no longer living in a personal, private state of existence.

These physical processes enable him to be a parent to children, a progenitor of a new generation. The life that he received from three partners – his father, mother and Creator – he

על האדם לדעת, כי מן הרגע שתאי הזרע בגופו מתעוררים להתרבות- אינו עוד יצור החי רק חיי עצמו.

תהליכים אלו בגופו מכשירים אותו להיות אב לבנים, מוליד דור חדש. את החיים שהוא קיבל משלושת השותפים, אביו ואמו ובוראו – הנו מצווה למסור לדור הבא – שוב עם שני שותפים: עם האשה אשר יוכיח

is now commanded to pass on to the next generation, together with his two partners: the spouse that God will send him and the Divine spirit that will reside between them.

Preparation for the great responsibility of parenthood must begin from the initial moments of sexual maturation. The young person must even then understand, "You will be a parent to children."

ה' להיות לו לעזר ועם השכינה שתשרה ביניהם.

ההתכוננות לתפקיד הגדול הזה "להיות אב", צריכה להתחיל ברגע שתאי הזרע מתחילים בפעולתם... אז על הצעיר לדעת: הנך נועד להיות אב לבנים!

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ≈ Upon reaching the Bar Mitzvah age, a person is considered the "son" or "daughter" of the mitzvot, legally bound to abide by the commandments in the Torah.
- ≈ The Bar/Bat Mitzvah event in a person's life coincides with his or her physical development and ability to procreate. Preparation for the great responsibility of parenthood must begin from the initial moments of sexual maturation.
- ≈ Moreover, as a person reaches Bar Mitzvah, his existence extends from a purely personal, "egoistic" nature, to an existence that has a deep and wide-ranging significance for others.
- ≈ The term "Bar Mitzvah," son of the mitzvot, itself implies a deep personal connection to the mitzvot and to God who gave them.

SECTION II. THE GREATNESS OF BECOMING BAR AND BAT MITZVAH

So from twelve or thirteen a person is obligated to keep the mitzvot and is held accountable for his actions, but what is so wonderful about that? In the United States people are held accountable under the law as adults from the age of eighteen, but nobody celebrates that transition. If anything, adulthood is lauded for the *release* of restrictions, such as the permission to acquire a driver's license or consume alcohol. Why does Judaism make such a big deal about physical maturity and the acquisition of legal responsibility that comes with it?

PART A. OVERCOMING NATURE

Hopefully children start fulfilling mitzvot and doing good deeds before the time of their Bar and Bat Mitzvah. But there is a fundamental difference between the quality of their actions before this transition and after it, as we will see below.

Judaism places a premium on fulfilling one's obligations, to the point that acting in response to a commandment is considered morally superior to volunteering on one's own volition.

1. Talmud, Avodah Zara 3a – It is better to perform an act out of obligation than voluntarily.

Rav Chanina said: Greater is one who is commanded and performs than one who is not commanded and performs.

אר"ח גדול המצווה ועושה יותר משאינו מצווה ועושה.

At first glance, this principle seems highly counterintuitive. We tend to regard the person who volunteers as an aid worker, for example, to be on a morally higher plane than the doctor whose job it is to help others. After all, the latter may only be motivated by the money his salary provides while the former demonstrates a true inner drive to be a good person. Acting voluntarily, says conventional wisdom, is of greater value than acting because I am required. And yet here we are being told just the opposite!

The answer is rooted in a universal psychological phenomenon: the desire to shirk responsibility. Whenever we feel ourselves pressured into performing a task, part of us would like nothing more than to throw off the yoke of obligation. Our natural human tendency to assert our individuality feels threatened with suffocation at the thought of being forced to do something by someone else, and especially if that "someone" else is God.

2. Tosafot, Ibid. – The greatness of performing an act out of obligation stems from the fact that it requires greater strength of character.

Greater is one who is commanded and performs... The explanation is that someone who is commanded must constantly struggle to overcome his personal desires in order to fulfill the commandments of his Creator.

גדול המצווה ועושה - פ' מפני שהוא דואג תמיד לבטל יצרו ולקיים מצוות בוראו.

3. Rabbi Akiva Tatz, The Thinking Jewish Teenager's Guide to Life, pg. 105 – Responding to a command requires overcoming one's ego.

When you are commanded to act, you are immediately confronted by resistance – your lower self steps in and says, "Don't tell me what to do!" The ego, the "I," that deep root of the personality wishes to assert itself, refuses to be subdued. Therefore, in order to fulfill a command you must overcome this inner resistance, and in doing so lies the secret of inner growth – self-control is at the heart of all personal growth. However, when you act spontaneously there is no resistance to overcome and the action is easy; it is not intrinsically an exercise in self-control and therefore has relatively little growth potential.

Overcoming the desire to shirk the duties of obligation requires a much stronger character than simply going with the flow of one's natural inspiration, no matter how altruistic that inspiration may be.

The Bar Mitzvah child, newly initiated into the requirements of mitzvah observance, must now act in response to obligation rather than merely on a voluntary basis.

PART B. EARLY CHILDHOOD SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The struggle described above only begins once a person has firmly implanted within his psyche both elements of desire – his personal yearnings, countered by the awareness of God's will as something external to his own will. In Jewish thought this experience is described as the internal battle between one's *yetzer hatov*, the good inclination, versus one's *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination. This battle only starts at Bar/Bat Mitzvah age with the acquisition at that time of the *yetzer hatov* to balance off against the *yetzer hara*. (These

terms, somewhat misleading in translation, will be clarified below.)

In order to appreciate the significance of becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah, we need to take a step back and understand early child development, Jewish-style. A person's soul, which has its roots in the spiritual world, starts out with a clear perception of Truth, which is then lost upon birth into this world.

1. Talmud Bavli, Nidah 30b – The soul in the womb has a clear perception of Truth but this clarity is lost at birth.

A person never has it as good as when he is in his mother's womb... [angels] teach him the entire Torah... and as soon as he emerges into the air of this world, an angel comes and taps him on the mouth and he forgets the entire Torah.

ואין לך ימים שאדם שרוי בטובה יותר מאותן הימים ... ומלמדו אותנו כל התורה כולה ... וכיון שבא לאויר העולם - בא מלאך וסטר על פיו, ומשכחו כל התורה כולה.

The perception of the truth inherent in each person's soul must be cultivated during the childhood years. Once the child reaches the brink of adulthood he should have gained the ability to make freewill decisions between good and evil.

2. Kohelet Rabba 4:15 – The “evil inclination” enters at birth while the “good inclination” does not develop until Bar/Bat Mitzvah age.

Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king. (Kohelet/Ecclesiastes 4:13)

“Better is a poor and wise child,” i.e., the good inclination. Why is it called a child? Because it attaches itself to man only from the age of thirteen years and onward. And why is it called poor? Because all do not obey it. And why is it called wise? Because it teaches human beings the right way.

“...than an old and foolish king,” i.e., the evil inclination. Why is it called a king? Because all obey it. Why is it called old? Because it attaches itself to man from youth to old age. Why is it called foolish? Because it teaches man the way of evil.

[ד,יג] טוב ילד מסכן וחכם ממלך זקן וכסיל.

טוב ילד מסכן וחכם, זה יצר טוב. ולמה נקרא שמו ילד כי אין מזדווג לאדם אלא מבן י"ג שנה ולמעלה ולמה נקרא שמו מסכן שאין הכל שומעין לו ולמה נקרא שמו חכם שהוא מלמד את הבריות לדרך ישרה.

ממלך זקן וכסיל, זה יצר הרע. ולמה קורא אותו מלך שהכל שומעין לו ולמה קורא אותו זקן שהוא מזדווג לו מילדותו ועד זקנתו, ולמה קורא אותו כסיל שהוא מלמד לאדם לדרך רעה.

3. Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, pg. 49 – With maturity comes free will and therefore responsibility for one's actions.

At birth, the “evil inclination” enters a person, i.e., he or she loses that incredible clarity that he possessed before entering this world. The soul's desires are overshadowed by the physicality of the body, and its yearning for spiritual fulfillment is muted by ego, selfishness, and materialism. Childhood is a time when the physical world and all of its overwhelming desires rule over the human being, and the soul and its aspirations are largely dormant. It is for this reason that the child is not held legally responsible for his/her actions.

Toward the end of childhood – during a girl's twelfth year or a boy's thirteenth year – the soul begins to awaken and assert itself more overtly. When the child reaches adulthood, the soul has reached its full

level of activity and therefore this person has complete free will. He or she is able to choose between good and evil, the spiritual and the material, between humility and egotism, to engage in a full range of moral decisions. Since they now have both a “good inclination” and an “evil inclination” and the ability to choose between the two, they are fully accountable for their actions.

A positive free will decision requires the employment of the “good inclination,” i.e., one’s perception of Truth, to overcome the “evil inclination,” i.e., one’s natural tendency, habit, or ego.

4. **Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, *Ish U’Beito*, p. 343 – Until the “good inclination” has matured, children act purely out of natural instinct; only with maturity can we choose to overcome that instinct.**

God decreed that before thirteen years old for a boy and twelve for a girl the evil inclination would be solely in charge. Whether or not the child does good or bad, it all stems from his own desire and natural inclination, for the “good inclination” has not yet developed. A person’s desires that awaken of their own accord that are not prompted by the internal battle of will, even if such desires are to do good, nevertheless they stem from the “evil inclination” at this stage. The “good inclination” in the language of our Sages only refers to the faculty within a person to subdue his natural tendency.

רצה הבורא שלפני י"ג שנה לבן וי"ב שנה לבת, יצר הרע לבדו יהא שולט באדם. בין הוא עושה טוב ובין הוא עושה רע, הכל נובע מרצון עצמו ומכח טבעו ועדיין אין שם יצר טוב. רצונותיו של האדם שמתעוררים בו מאליהם, ולא קדמה להם מלחמה נפשית תחלה, אפילו טובים הם הרצונות הללו, יצר הרע יש בהם, והוא שעורר אותם. לא נקרא יצר טוב בלשון חכמי ישראל, אלא כח זה שהאדם מפעילו נגד רצונו.

PART C. THE FIRST STEP IN A LONG JOURNEY

Succeeding in the challenge of free will brings one closer to God. According to Judaism, this is the spiritual journey of life, and it only starts at Bar/Bat Mitzvah age. In light of this perspective we can more fully appreciate the significance of this milestone in a person’s life.

1. **Rabbi Akiva Tatz, *The Thinking Jewish Teenager’s Guide to Life*, pg. 106 – Choosing to do a mitzvah attaches you to God.**

When you act spontaneously, motivated only by that which arises within yourself, you are expressing yourself. That may be great, but it can never be greater than you are at the moment you act. At best, the act will be a full and true expression of all that you are. But when the command originates outside yourself and you fulfill it, something is happening which expresses more than just yourself. When you act because you are commanded by a source outside yourself, you become the expression of that source. Your action is an expression of the command of the source, and *you are an expression of the source itself*. In fact, you and the source become one: both are needed for the result to manifest.

2. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudilkov, *Degel Machaneh Ephraim, Likkutim* – The word “mitzvah” means attachment to God.**

The word “mitzvah” is derived from the grammatical construction of *tzavta*. This means that when a person performs a mitzvah he must do so as a means of attachment to God, for this is the central component of the mitzvah.

מצוה הוא לשון צוותא היינו כשאדם עושה מצוה צריך לעשותה בצוותא ודביקות להקב"ה זהו עיקר המצוה.

3. Rabbi Yisroel Roll, *Step Up to the Plate*, pp. 83-86 – God Himself does not need the mitzvot; He only gave them to us to facilitate our connection to Him.

God gets no benefit from us performing the commandments. He is not happier, more uplifted, nor does He smile when we do them. God is perfect. He does not need anything – even our fulfilling the mitzvot. The commandments are not for God; they are for us. He has given them to us so that we can do His will and thereby come closer to our own perfection and achieve our maximum potential...

The word “mitzvah” comes from the word *tzav*, which means “connection.” The mitzvot are avenues or pathways to connect with the will of God. God obligates us to fulfill the mitzvot because our *raison d'être* is to connect with our Source. Our goal in life is to connect to God, to have a relationship with Him, and the way to achieve it is through our observance of the mitzvot. Ultimately, we should want to perform the mitzvot because they put us onto God's spiritual frequency.

The “coming of age” in Judaism with the obligation to keep the mitzvot and the start of the internal struggle to overcome one's basic nature and attach to God, is the start of the spiritual journey of life. Through a lifetime of observing the mitzvot, the Bar Mitzvah boy and Bat Mitzvah girl learn to develop their character and express the spiritual side of their existence.

See further the Morasha class entitled, “The Mitzvot & Why They Are Detailed.”

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ≈ Judaism places a premium on fulfilling one's obligations because doing so requires the strength of character to overcome one's natural tendency to assert the ego and shirk responsibility.
- ≈ The significance of the Bar Mitzvah as a milestone is that, in being newly obligated to keep the mitzvot, it affords us the opportunity to develop our character by choosing to perform mitzvot.
- ≈ The ability to develop strength of character comes with the maturity of acquiring a *yetzer hatov* and the ability to subdue one's natural tendencies.
- ≈ Exercising free will in the performance of mitzvot helps us to attach ourselves to God. This is the very purpose of our existence and we only start to fulfill that purpose from the time of Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

SECTION III. THE BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION

After his or her Bar/Bat Mitzvah, a person becomes fully obligated in keeping the mitzvot, and is held accountable for his own actions. In fact, a father whose son reaches the age of 13 recites a special blessing: “Blessed is He who has absolved me from the punishment of this [child].” Based on this perspective of obligation and accountability, it is hard to see the cause for celebration (except perhaps for the father). Most people consider themselves happier with fewer obligations than with more!

When we appreciate that the day one becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah is the start of one's spiritual journey through life, then it becomes appropriate to celebrate the day with great joy and elation. Unfortunately, with all the fanfare surrounding Bar/Bat Mitzvahs these days, the true significance of the day tends to get drowned out.

PART A. A JUST CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

Although we are all familiar with Bar Mitzvah parties, below are some classical sources stating explicitly that a Bar Mitzvah is a time of great celebration.

1. Zohar Chadash, Genesis 15:4 – The Bar Mitzvah day should be as joyous as a wedding.

For on that day [of a Bar Mitzvah] a righteous person should rejoice in his heart as on the day of his wedding. On account of this virtue [of rejoicing over becoming Bar Mitzvah], God is destined to awaken them and to proclaim before them, “go out and see, daughters of Zion” (Song of Songs 3:11).

דההוא יומא חובתא על צדיקא למיעבד חדוותא דלבא, כיומא דסליק לחופה. ובגין ההוא זכותא, עתיד הקב"ה לאתערא להו ולעברא כרוזא קדמיהון בחדוה, צאינה וראינה בנות ציון.

2. Rabbi Shlomo Luria, Yam Shel Shlomo, Bava Kamma 7:37 – The Bar Mitzvah celebrates the promotion to being obligated in mitzvot.

There seems to be no greater festive meal than the one done for a Bar Mitzvah, as its name [Bar Mitzvah] testifies: a party is conducted, praising and thanking God for enabling this child to become obligated in mitzvot, for it is greater to be commanded to do something [than doing it without having been commanded], and the father merited raising his son to the stage of entering into the covenant of Torah.

סעודת בר מצוה שעושים, לכאורה אין לך סעודת מצוה גדולה מזו, ושמה יוכיח עליה. ועושים שמחה, ונותנים למקום שבח והודיה, שזכה הנער להיות בר מצוה, וגדול המצווה ועושה, והאב זכה שגדלו עד עתה, להכניסו בברית התורה בכללה.

3. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, public address on Shevat 5744 – On one's Bar Mitzvah, a person becomes a full-fledged Jew.

The day of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a “cherished day,” a day of great joy. For on this day the Bar-Mitzvah [boy] becomes a complete part of Israel, a complete Jew, a part of the nation that began at Sinai and continues through to the end of all generations. Therefore, the day of one's Bar Mitzvah is compared to the “day on which the entire Jewish people became a nation” (Devarim/Deuteronomy 27:9).

יום הבר מצוה או בת מצוה הוא “יום סגולה”, שמחה גדולה ביותר. שכן בו ביום נעשה ה”בר מצוה” איש ישראל בשלמות, יהודי שלם, חלק מכל עם ישראל החל ממתן תורה עד סוף כל הדורות. ונמצא שיום הבר מצוה בחייו הפרטיים הוא ע”ד ובדוגמת “היום הזה נהיית לעם” דכללות עם ישראל.

4. Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfreid, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 61:8 – The father's obligations include a festive banquet.

One whose son reaches the age of Bar Mitzvah – when the child is called to the Torah for the first time, after he recites the second blessing over the Torah, the father recites the following blessing: “Blessed are You, Hashem ... who exempted me from the punishment of this one.” It is a mitzvah to arrange a banquet on the day on which a son

מי שנעשה בנו בר מצוה, כשעולה לתורה בפעם הראשונה, לאחר שבירך ברכה אחרונה על הספר תורה מברך האב ואומר, ברוך אתה ה' אמן”ה אשר פטרני מענשו של זה. ומצוה על האדם לעשות סעודה ביום שנעשה בנו בר מצוה דהיינו ביום שנכנס לשנת הי”ד. ואם הנער דורש הוי סעודת מצוה אפילו אינה

becomes Bar Mitzvah, meaning on the day on which he enters his fourteenth year. If the son gives a Torah lecture, the banquet receives the status of a “mitzvah banquet” even if it is not held on the precise birthday.

באותו יום:

PART B. THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH CELEBRATION AND THE BIRTHDAY CONNECTION

Bar Mitzvah is not just another birthday celebration – it marks the true birth of a person and his induction into the ranks of the Jewish people and its destiny.

1. Zohar 2:98a – The Bar Mitzvah is a birthday for the soul.

Regarding when King David reached the age of thirteen, and entered his fourteenth year, it is written (Psalms 2:7) “God told me, you are My son. Today I have given birth to you.” Why is this so? Because prior to this [age] ... the elevated soul did not rest upon him ... and therefore it is considered as the day of birth itself.

כד מטא דוד לתליסר שנין, וזכה בההוא יומא דעאל לארביסר, כדין כתיב (תהלים ב ז) ה' אמר אלי בני אתה אני היום ילדתיך, מאי טעמא, דהא מקדמת דנא ... ולא שראת עליה נשמתא עלאה ... ובגין כך אני היום ילדתיך.

2. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, Ish U'Beito pg. 348 – The Bar Mitzvah is celebrated because it marks the true beginning of life.

Although Jewish custom is not to celebrate birthdays, it is customary to celebrate the day a child becomes Bar Mitzvah or the following Shabbat, once thirteen years have come to completion. The day a child becomes Bar Mitzvah is greater than the day upon which he was born, and certainly greater than any other birthday. When a child is born, he is very far from being a complete creation.

But on the day of his Bar Mitzvah, having been trained in Torah and mitzvot, he completely accepts upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven and he is granted the good inclination – at that point his birth is complete. “And God created man...” – the Hebrew word for “created,” *yatzar*, is written with two *yuds*. Our Sages say that this hints at the two inclinations, the *yetzer hatov* and the *yetzer hara*. Now, the *yetzer hatov* does not enter a person until he is obligated to keep mitzvot. As such, a person's creation isn't really complete until this point.

אף על פי שלא נהגו ישראל לחוג את ימי הולדת כבר נהגו לעשות שמחה ומשתה ביום שנעשה הבן לבר מצוה, או בשבת שלאחרי יום מלאות לו שלוש עשרה שנה. טעם הדבר, שגדול יום הבר מצוה מיום הלידה, כל שכן מיום הולדת שבכל שנה.

שביום שנולד עדיין יצירתו לא היתה שלמה, אבל ביום שנעשה לבר מצוה ונתחנך לתורה ונכנס למצוות וקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים שלמה, ונזדווג לו יצר הטוב, הרי נשלמה יצירתו. 'וייצר ה' אלקים את האדם' – שתי יודי"ן בתיבה זו – אמרו חכמים: שתי יצירות בראו, יצר טוב ויצר רע. והרי אין יצר הטוב מזדווג לו לאדם עד שעה שהוא נעשה מצווה בכל מצוות התורה ומושבץ לקיימן, הרי שלא נשלמה יצירתו עד עכשיו.

3. Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach, *Thoughts of Elders*, p. 342 – The Bar Mitzvah is the true celebration of one's birthday.

What is the joy of a Bar Mitzvah? Let us contemplate the normal idea of human life. Many people make an annual celebration of their "birthday." This celebration is hard to understand: what significance is there [in a birthday] ... surely if a person is decreed to live for eighty years, it reasons that every year he has one year less to live: when he is ten only seventy years remain because ten years have already passed, when he is twenty, sixty years remain and when he is fifty only thirty years remain, and so on. Why then does a person celebrate his birthday, which only denotes another year closer to death? It should not be called a birthday, but rather a death-day!

However, somebody who believes [in God] and observes the Torah and mitzvot, lives eternally, in this world and in the next – as the sages wrote (*Berachot* 18a), "The righteous are considered alive even in their death." For him a birthday is truly a birthday, for on each year he gains a new element of eternal life.

This, too, is the underlying theme of a Bar Mitzvah. A person becomes obligated in mitzvot, and by means of mitzvot he is able to acquire eternal life, such that every year does not diminish his lifetime but rather increases it, and even in death he is considered to be alive. Therefore we celebrate a Bar Mitzvah, for through the keeping of Torah and mitzvot a person lives eternally, and one who believes in God is partner in the construction of the nation of Israel, and lives forever. This is the greatest of all joys.

מהי שמחת "בר מצוה" שהנה האדם צריך להתבונן במושג של החיים בני אדם רגילים לציין את "יום ההולדת" שלהם מדי שנה בשנה וקשה להבין איזו משמעות מוצא בזה ... הרי אם נגזר על האדם לחיות שמונים שנה נמצא שבשעת לידתו היו לו שמונים שנה של חיים וכשגדל ונעשה בן עשר נשארו לו לחיות רק שבעים שנה כי כבר עברו עשר שנים וכשנעשה בן עשרים נשארו לו ששים שנה ובגיל חמישים נותרו לו שלושים שנה וכן הלאה ואם כן בכל שנה החולפת יורדת לו שנה מחייו והוא מתקרב אל יום מיתתו ומהי השמחה שיש לו בזה ואולי לא היה ראוי לקרוא לכך "יום הולדת" אלא "יום המיתה" ורק ביום לידתו הוא יום הולדת.

אמנם מי שמאמין ושומר תורה ומצוות הוא האדם החי לעולם יש לו חיים בעולם הזה וחיים בעולם הבא וכמו שאמרו (ברכות יח) צדיקים במיתתם קרויים חיים ואצלו באמת נחשב תמיד ליום הולדת כי בכל שנה נוספים לו חיים שהרי אינו מת אלא חי לעולם.

וכך הוא כשיהודי נעשה בר מצוה הוא נעשה אדם, הוא מתחייב במצוות ועל ידי קיום המצוות הוא קונה את עולמו ואז לא יורד לו מחייו אלא אדרבה הוא מוסיף חיים וגם במיתתו הוא נקרא חי וזה נקרא יום הולדת ועל כן עושים שמחה בבר מצוה כי כאשר האדם שומר תורה ומצוות הוא חי חיי עולם ומי שמאמין בהקב"ה בונה את עם ישראל וחי לעולם וזהו האושר הגדול ביותר.

PART C. HOW TO CELEBRATE, AND HOW NOT TO

The following extract describes some of the modern innovations that Bar Mitzvah celebrations incorporate:

"...game rooms for the kids that rival carnival midways, emcees, Broadway dancers, the occasional drag queen ... even Las Vegas headliners. Natalie Cole did a Bar Mitzvah on the aircraft carrier *Intrepid* in October. Her fee: \$150,000 for 30 minutes... And don't forget about the laser-tag games, the wax hand-sculpture vats, fireworks, commissioned murals of the kid's favorite band, the dog-tag-stamping equipment, the music-video studio, and the mobile photo-processing center that allows you to put a guest's picture on everything from mouse pads to a Rice Krispies box..."

... “[one Bar Mitzvah Producer says:] “We almost always shut the games down during the candle lighting ceremony and the blessing of the bread.” (from www.newyorkmetro.com)

It seems that for many the event has become more about the “bar” than the “mitzvah.” But based on what we have already learned, we should now have a clear idea of how to approach a Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration. Bearing in mind the very meaning of a Bar Mitzvah which initiates a person’s entry into a world of spiritual maturity, of an inner connection with God and with the Torah, the Bar Mitzvah milestone is not a time for a wild party, the tone of which is distant from anything religious or serious. Yes, the Bar Mitzvah is a cause for joy and celebration, but the celebration should suit the nature of the occasion.

Meet Lorne Hughes, a young non-Jewish gentleman from the Virgin Islands clad in a form-fitting black outfit, who “regularly spends his weekends dancing with 13-year-olds... at Bar Mitzvahs,” according to an article that recently appeared in *The New York Times*.

The report was ostensibly about Mr. Hughes’ “lucrative and competitive” profession – he is a “party motivator.” But its detailed descriptions of the devolution of Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations in some circles could only have left any reader sensitive to the Jewish religious tradition deeply depressed.

Party “motivators” are paid to attend Bar Mitzvahs and other events to make sure “that young guests are swept up in dancing and games,” according to the report. Mr. Hughes was described as smiling ecstatically at one Bar Mitzvah “as he danced to Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez songs with middle school students” and with their parents... (Rabbi Avi Shafran, Director of Public Affairs for Agudath Israel of America, JewishAmerica.com – Problems of the materialistic approach.)

1. Rabbi Avi Shafran, JewishAmerica.com – The real “motivators” are those who inspire commitment to the Jewish way of life.

Dancers, decadence and the lowest common denominators of American pop culture are hardly fitting “motivators” for entering Jewish adulthood. How horribly far the concept of “Bar Mitzvah” has drifted from its true meaning in these materialistic, vulgar times.

A mitzvah is a commandment, one with its source in the ultimate Commander. And the “Bar” refers not to what a Bartender tends but rather to the responsibility of the new Jewish young adult to shoulder the duties and obligations of a Jew — the study and observance of the Torah.

And so, a truly successful Bar Mitzvah is one where the young person has come to recognize that responsibility. Dancers, decadence and the lowest common denominators of American pop culture are hardly fitting “motivators” for such.

The issue is not denominational. There are excesses to be found in celebrations of Orthodox Jews as there are in those of Jews of other affiliations. While the “motivators” phenomenon might represent a particular nadir of Jewish insensitivity, none of us is immune to the disease of skewed priorities, the confusing of essence with embellishment, the allowing of the true meaning of a life-milestone to become obscured by the trappings of its celebration...

As it happens, one of my own sons is, at this writing, about to celebrate his [Bar Mitzvah]. He will read the Torah portion on the Shabbat after he turns 13, but for the Wednesday before, his Jewish birthday, my wife and I are planning a modest meal for relatives and a few friends—and, of course, our son’s friends and teachers.

There are only three things on the agenda for the evening. My son will deliver a *d’var Torah*, a discourse on a Torah topic, and each of his grandfathers will say a few words.

My wife's father will likely, as he always does at family celebrations, thank God for allowing him to survive the several concentration camps where he spent the Holocaust years, and where he and his religious comrades risked life and limb to maintain what Jewish observance they could.

And my own father will surely feel and may well express the deep gratitude he feels to the Creator for protecting him, during those same years, in a Siberian Soviet labor camp, where he and his fellow yeshiva students similarly endured terrible hardships to remain observant, believing Jews. Both grandfathers will take pride in how their children's children are continuing the lives and ideals of their parents' parents, and theirs before them.

And I will pray that my son will grow further to recognize the mission and meaning of a truly Jewish life, and follow the example of his grandfathers and grandmothers, parents and siblings, uncles and aunts and cousins, many of whom will be there to celebrate with him.

Neither Mr. Hughes nor his fellow entertainers will be present.

But motivators will be everywhere.

2. **Emuna Braverman, Bat Mitzvah Hoopla from www.aish.com – We need to reconsider how we are celebrating our Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.**

There is an irony that this traditional celebration of the assumption of responsibilities seems to actually illustrate the lack thereof.

Lavish Bar and Bat Mitzvah extravaganzas with fancy themes, fancier entertainment and outrageous price tags are in the news again. We're showing the world we've really made it, giving our children a gift they'll always remember.

But what will those memories consist of? The rapper 50 Cent singing about a Bat Mitzvah? Tom Petty? Some pretty great gifts? I'm all for creating positive associations with Jewish holidays and events, but the key word is "Jewish." Parents of a friend of ours consulted him about a theme for his Bar Mitzvah. Apparently his suggestion was too novel for them. "How about Judaism?" he replied.

I find it difficult to attend these extravaganzas (perhaps that's why I'm so rarely invited!). Amidst all the hoopla and bright lights, between plates of food and designer attire, I'm so conscious of what they're missing, of how much more there could be -- more in the sense of meaning. More in everything else seems to be covered.

There is an irony that this traditional celebration of the assumption of responsibilities seems to actually illustrate the lack thereof. For 13-year-old boys and 12-year-old girls to have such wealth thrown at them, not based on anything they've done and with no acknowledgement of responsibilities to God and man, creates a sense of entitlement that damages our children.

It also engenders scorn for our heritage. If we, as parents, are blinded by social pressures and expectations from seeing the emptiness of the experience, our children are not. They know underneath it all the occasion ultimately means nothing. Cynicism starts to take root and Judaism is viewed with scorn.

I'm not blaming. They don't know any better. I just wish they could have a glimpse of the way it could be ("Ushpizin" for the Bar Mitzvah set?). I wish they could see children who understand the meaning of becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah, who appreciate the privilege to assume the mantle of responsibility to observe the Almighty's commandments and feel appropriately awed and intimidated, children who

now feel a sense of accountability and approach the upcoming event with both excitement and a touch of heaviness. They know their lives are changing, and they are preparing themselves.

A Bar/Bat Mitzvah IS a time of celebration. Judaism recognizes that life is not meant to be one long Club Med vacation, that being responsible is a good thing, and something worthy of celebrating.

There is still good food, dancing and most of all, there is still joy. The joy that comes from discovering your place in the world, the joy that comes from recognizing you are part of a special people with unique responsibilities, and stepping up to the plate to accept them. This is a joy that has no price tag. But it's a joy that can only be earned, not bought.

When approached with the appropriate seriousness, a meaningful Bar Mitzvah has the power of offering the deepest sense of joy for both parents and children alike.

None of the highlights of my son's Bar Mitzvah took place at the Bar Mitzvah.

The first one occurred a month before the Bar Mitzvah, when my son Yisrael Rohn donned tefillin for the first time. Although the daily mitzvah of tefillin, like all the commandments of the Torah, would become incumbent upon him only when he reached the age of 13, the custom among Ashkenazi Jews is for a boy to start practicing putting on tefillin 30 days earlier. We chose to mark the event at the Kotel -- the Western Wall, Judaism's second holiest site (next to the Temple Mount). With his whole class in attendance and his father at his side, Yisrael Rohn bound the straps around his head and his left arm, so that the boxes containing the Scriptural passages commanding him to love and serve God were mounted firmly on his head and opposite his heart.

Seeing the straps coiled around my adolescent's arm, I was moved to tears. Whatever else we had given him in his life, this endowment was the most precious. We had given him purpose and boundaries. We had given him a goal to endow his life with meaning -- as defined in the boxes of the tefillin -- and we had given him boundaries -- the straps -- to direct and discipline his life.

That night when my son went to bed, I sat with him for a few minutes in his darkened room. I had been moved by the morning's event, but I wondered what it had meant to him. Sitting on the edge of his bed, I asked him what he thought was the purpose of his life.

"To fulfill my unique mission," he replied.

"And what is that?" I queried.

"I don't know yet," he answered honestly. I smiled. Many people even three times his age are not yet clear about the particular mission they have been assigned to accomplish in this world -- I was gratified that he understands that life is imbued with a lofty purpose. (Sara Yoheved Rigler, "Bar Mitzvah Highlights" from www.aish.com)

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ⌘ Although it is certainly correct to make a Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration, it is important to bear in mind what is being celebrated, and to be sure that the celebration is in line with the essential themes.
- ⌘ The custom, for instance, of singing and throwing candies at the time a boy is first called up to the Torah, is firmly in line with the elements we wish to emphasize at the time of a Bar Mitzvah. The idea, on the other hand, of disc jockeys taking over Bar Mitzvah parties with wild pop music hardly tallies with the essence of the event and the message we wish our children to internalize.

- As we plan the Bar Mitzvah event, care should therefore be taken to choose the forms of entertainment we feel are appropriate for expressing the importance and joy of the occasion.

SECTION IV. STARTING OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

At a Bar-mitzvah celebration, Rabbi Moshe Chodosh, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Ohr Elchonon in Jerusalem, retold the following parable from the Dubno Maggid, Rabbi Yaakov Krantz (1740-1804).

A certain poor fellow, Rabbi Yonah, was invited to a meal at a wealthy man's house. When he entered the mansion, Rabbi Yonah was overwhelmed by the opulence he beheld—such magnificent wall hangings, such gorgeous furniture, such bright chandeliers. Soon he was ushered into a large splendid dining room. First, everyone munched on various delicacies already on the table, and then the first course was served.

When all the diners were finished with their portions the rich man, who was seated at the head of the table, tinkled a bell that stood at the right of his place setting. Almost at once waiters came in to remove the dishes and bring in the next course. Rabbi Yonah was amazed. He never had seen a bell like that before.

After the second course was completed, the host again tinkled the bell, and again the waiters came in swiftly to remove the dishes and to bring in yet more food. Rabbi Yonah was immensely impressed. He decided he would have to get one of those bells for his home as well.

When the meal was finally over and everyone had left the dining room, Rabbi Yonah quickly walked to the head of the table to take a close-up look at what the bell was made of. It was a simple metal bell with a wooden handle. Rabbi Yonah decided to buy an even fancier bell for himself. He would get one of silver plate.

The next day he purchased a silver-plated bell and ran home excitedly to his wife and children. "Our days of hunger are over!" he exclaimed happily. "Wait until you see what I brought home! We won't be starving any longer." He immediately placed the bell on the table and told his family to take their regular seats. He then tinkled the bell with conviction. He waited for the waiter to walk in—but nothing happened! He shook it again, and still no one responded. "I can't understand it!" he muttered angrily. "When the rich man tinkled his bell, all that food was served—and here nothing is happening!"

The distraught man returned the bell to the store where he had purchased it. "This bell you sold me is useless. I got no response when I rang it."

"The obvious reason nothing happened," said the Dubno Maggid, "is because there is neither a waiter nor food in the poor man's house. The bell works to summon someone or something that is there to be summoned. Much preparation is necessary before the bell can accomplish anything."

Said Rabbi Chodosh, "This same idea of preparation is true regarding every Jewish boy who becomes thirteen years old. Simply reaching the age of Bar-mitzvah does not give someone an appreciation of what his relationship to Torah can be. Only if parents and teachers prepare a child in depth, properly, before he is recognized by halachah as an adult, will his life have any true religious significance afterwards.

*"Otherwise," said Rabbi Chodosh, "the boy's new birthday is merely a noisy bell heralding just another day of his life." (Rabbi Paysach Krohn, *Around the Maggid's Table*, pp. 254-256.)*

True preparation for Bar/Bat Mitzvah really begins long before that momentous day.

1. **Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, Ish U'Beito, pg. 345 – It is vital for Bar/Bat Mitzvah children to start off on the right foot.**

If something begins well, it is likely to continue in that way. Therefore, as a child approaches the date when he will become Bar Mitzvah, he must plan ahead and resolve in his heart to “start off on the right foot.” He must realize that, from the very beginning, he will have to conduct himself as a person of integrity, that is, as a person who is capable of subduing his natural tendencies – as a soldier battling with his good inclination against his evil inclination. If he does so, he will merit to remain with strength of character his entire life.

הכל הולך אחר ההתחלה והראשית ומי שראשיתו טובה זוכה להמשך טוב. לפיכך צריך כל מתחיל במצוות לתת את דעתו הרבה על ראשיתו, ומיד בימים הראשונים להיעשותו בר מצוה ינהג מנהג של איש, כלומר, של גבור הכובש את יצרו ואיש מלחמה המרגיז יצר טוב על יצר רע: ואם הוא עושה כן הרי הוא זוכה ונשאר בגבורתו כל ימיו.

Ultimately, it is the child that needs to take responsibility for him/herself, to rise to the challenge of being a Bar or Bat mitzvah.

2. **Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Maamar Vehitchazakta, Vol. 3, p. 221 – One can only grow spiritually through one's own effort in that direction.**

This is the meaning of the words “You shall strengthen yourself, and be a man” (Kings I, 2:2). When a person reaches the age of 13, he reaches adulthood, and becomes a man in a physical sense. This is something that God established as part of the natural order, and represents elevated matters. Yet, because the principal elevation is only reached by means of a person's own labor... therefore the verse states, “you shall strengthen yourself, and be a man” – that he should be a man by means of his own labor.

זהו “וחזקת והיית לאיש” דזה שבן י"ג שנה נעשה איש ע"פ טבע הוא ענין שמצד למעלה, מצד שהקב"ה הטביע הטבע בהבריאה ומכיון שעיקר המעלה דכל ענין הוא כשהוא בא ע"י עבודת האדם... לכן צ"ל “וחזקת והיית לאיש” שיהי' לאיש גם ע"י עבודתו.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV.

- ∞ The Bar Mitzvah party is not a magical event that transforms a child into an adult. The celebration is meant as just that, a celebration of this transition, whereas the actual work to bring about that transition must be accomplished by the child himself, with the help of his parents and teachers of course.
- ∞ In the year prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, arrange to teach the boys and girls – and if possible their parents – a tailored curriculum (such as suggested above based on the Morasha Curriculum) in preparation for the Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

CLASS SUMMARY

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

The literal definition of Bar/Bat Mitzvah is “a child to the mitzvot,” meaning one who is obligated in the observance of the commandments in the Torah. It is a stage of physical and emotional development at which point a child is able to take responsibility for his own actions as an adult and is therefore held accountable to the law.

The expression *bar mitzvah*, in contrast to *baal aveira* (“the owner of a sin”), expresses the deep inner connection that the Jewish people have to the mitzvot, to the Torah, and to God.

WHAT IS SO GREAT ABOUT BEING OBLIGATED TO KEEP THE MITZVOT?

It is better to fulfill the mitzvot out of obligation than to perform them on a voluntary basis. The difficulty of being obligated affords us the opportunity to control the natural tendency to exert the ego. Obligation should be viewed as a chance to develop one’s character and to grow spiritually.

Performing the commandments in the Torah is our way of connecting to God. He gave us the mitzvot as a way to have a relationship with Him. As such, being obligated to do them is a tremendous gift to us.

WHY IS THIS “COMING OF AGE” A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION?

While at first glance, being obligated to do something is more of a liability than an asset, Judaism does not look at it in that way. As per the above, it is considered a good thing to be obligated in the commandments.

The spiritual journey initiated by entering under the authority of the commandments is the very purpose of our existence. As such, the Bar Mitzvah in a spiritual sense is like the day of birth itself.

HOW SHOULD A BAR/BAT MITZVAH BE CELEBRATED?

The significance of the day certainly warrants much celebration, but unfortunately, the meaning of the Bar Mitzvah tends to get drowned out by noise of the celebrations that accompany it.

The celebrations should be attended with a more serious note as well, preferably by experiences that will encourage and inspire the new adult to rise to the challenge of his station.

HOW CAN WE HELP CHILDREN, AND ADULTS, PREPARE FOR THEIR BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

Children need to be encouraged to think about what it means to “come of age,” to ponder the meaning of life, and the significance of being Bar or Bat Mitzvah as it has been described in this class.

Ultimately, though, children as well as adults need to understand that they are responsible for their own spiritual growth. They should not let the noise of the band at their Bar Mitzvah celebration drown out the quiet voice of the soul within them.

ADDITIONAL READING:

Rabbi Akiva Tatz, MD, The Thinking Jewish Teenager's Guide to Life

Rabbi Yisroel Roll, Step Up to the Plate

Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen, Permission to Believe

Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen, Permission to Receive

Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism

Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, The Jew and His Home

Lisa Aiken, To Be a Jewish Woman

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Tefillin

Rabbi Michael Munk, Wisdom of the Hebrew Alphabet

Manis Freedman, Doesn't Anyone Blush Anymore

Gila Manelson, The Magic Touch

Rabbi Moshe Chaninah Neiman, Shaarei Bar Mitzvah

Personalized study of selected topics from the Morasha Syllabus