

HALOCHOSCOPE TOPI

May one celebrate a *Bar-Mitzvah* with a *Melava Malka* on the eve of *Asara Beteiveis*?

The issues:

- (A) *Asara Beteiveis*, and the night before a *Taanis*
 - (B) *Seudas Bar Mitzvah*, the meal to celebrate a *Bar Mitzvah*
 - (C) *Melava Malka*, the meal after the termination of *Shabbos*
- (A) *Asara Beteiveis*

The Torah imposes one Scriptural *Taanis*, *Yom Kippur*, commanding us to afflict ourselves, which means to refrain from all eating and drinking. The Rabbis added three more restrictions including such things as bathing. Four more public fasts were added by the Prophets, including *Asara Beteiveis*, to commemorate sorrowful events surrounding the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and the exile. Except for *Tisha Bav*, on these fasts only eating and drinking is restricted. Communal fasts are imposed periodically on Heavenly dissatisfaction with our behavior, displayed in catastrophic events or drought. On most of these the fast is limited to eating and drinking restrictions, but in extreme situations the other restrictions also apply.

Personal fasts are undertaken as penitence, for personal or family catastrophes, after bad dreams, to commemorate events such as *Yahrzeit* or to raise one's spirituality. A *Yachid*, individual, undertaking a fast means to fast by day the following day. With the exception of *Yom Kippur*, *Tisha Bav* and extreme cases of drought in *Eretz Yisroel*, other fasts also begin in the morning. In Judaism, the date begins the preceding evening. Thus, a date commemorating an event should be commemorated from the preceding night. The Talmud assumes that while one may eat the night before, if he has finished eating, a stage which is debated by the Talmud, he may no longer eat until morning. However, one may declare that he has not finished eating and eat until dawn. Some maintain that the other fasts should begin by night but that the Rabbis did not restrict eating for so long. Most *Poskim* also maintain that, ideally, one mentions the *Taanis* in *Shemone Esrei* at *Maariv*, even though he will eat that night. A *Yachid* must

declare his undertaking before nightfall on the eve of his fast. This all indicates that indeed the fast begins at nightfall, but that the restrictions only begin by day.

A question is raised with regard to holding a wedding feast on the evening preceding the Seventeenth of Tamuz, which is also the first day of the three week mourning period culminating in Tisha Bav. Along with other mourning practices, weddings, considered especially festive, are restricted. Some Poskim maintain that weddings on the preceding night would be permissible if the issue was merely one of Taanis, but are forbidden based on the three week restriction, except in extenuating circumstances. There is a discussion on whether a wedding ceremony may be held on Asara Beteiveis, with the meal the following night. Another issue relevant to our case is a reference by some Poskim that the reason the extra three restrictions were never instituted was due to the relative peace in exile. When the Jewish people are beset with hardship this reason is no longer valid. Therefore, pious individuals should practice the extra restrictions on the additional fasts. Some Poskim maintain that the pious should also begin fasting at night. However, in honor of Shabbos one is obliged to bathe. Thus, a pious individual may not apply his restriction to Asara Beteiveis when it falls on Friday. [See Shabbos 24a, Taanis 11a-12b, Rif, Poskim. Tur Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 550:2, 551:2 564:1, commentaries. Igros Moshe O.C. I:168. Tzitz Eliezer VII:49:11 X:26.]

(B) Bar-Mitzvah Seuda

The Poskim discuss a Brocha to be recited by the father of a Bar-Mitzvah. When his son reaches the age of majority he becomes liable for his own actions. The father recites a Brocha on being relieved of the liability as his father. The original *Minhag* was to recite the Brocha on the day of the Bar-Mitzvah. Nowadays, this Brocha is customarily recited when the boy first shows publicly that he is an adult by acting as *Shliach Tzibbur*, leader of the congregation, to exempt them from a communal obligation. This is ideally when the boy reads publicly from the Torah. In former times, anyone called to recite the Brocha at the Torah, would read his portion. A minor can not discharge the congregants of their obligation to hear it read. Nowadays, being called to the Torah for a Brocha (*Aliya*) is a demonstration of adulthood. The father takes this opportunity recite the Brocha. If the boy acts as the *Shliach Tzibbur*, leading the congregation for the davening (which is also only allowed after he reaches adulthood) the father may recite the Brocha then.

In the course of this discussion the Poskim refer to a *Seuda* to celebrate the Bar Mitzvah. Ideally the Seuda should be on the day of the Bar-Mitzvah. This Seuda

is considered a *Seudas Mitzvah*, meaning that it is a Mitzvah to participate in such a gathering. If the boy presents the customary Torah discourse during the Seuda it is considered a *Seudas Mitzvah* even if it is not on his real birthday.

The terminology used by the Poskim is that the father should throw a feast the same as on the day of his son's *Chupa*, wedding. Various explanations for this Seuda are offered. In one view, the father celebrates for the same reason he recites the aforementioned Brocha. A second reason is that the soul of the son now comes into its own, being newly obligated in Mitzvos, and can directly affect matters in the universe. It is proper to celebrate the occasion, as much as at a *Bris Milah* or a wedding. The *Zohar* relates how Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai celebrated profusely on the day his son, later Rabi Elazar, was Bar-Mitzvah. Some Poskim maintain that Rabi Elazar bar Rabi Shimon was a special case, as determined by his great father. Some suggest that the boy's donning Tefilin is cause for a Seuda. Others counter, why should Tefilin be cause for more celebration than any other occasion? Moreover, most boys begin training wearing Tefilin one month before the Bar-Mitzvah.

The main reason given is based on a Talmudic passage. The blind are exempted from the obligation to perform Mitzvos, but may do so voluntarily. One blind sage announced that if anyone would show him that the blind are obligated in Mitzvos he would make a feast. Fulfilling Mitzvos due to an obligation is considered greater than doing so voluntarily. Thus, the day a boy becomes obligated is cause for celebration. The terminology "like his wedding day" implies the reason based on the *Zohar*, but the majority follow the last reason cited here. Delaying the Seuda to another day fits according to the reason that it is to celebrate the father's relief. Then, the Seuda could be on the day he recites the Brocha publicly.

Scripturally, only physical signs of maturity qualify a boy as Bar-Mitzvah. The thirteenth birthday is an average of this age, or even, the minimum possible. How can one be certain that the Seuda is a Mitzvah? Only the Torah discourse makes it into a *Seudas Mitzvah*. Accordingly, there is no difference whether it is on the thirteenth birthday or a few days later. It is possible that the discourse given by the boy is the first public teaching of Torah that he does as an adult. Teaching Torah is the best form of study. This might be legitimate cause for a *Seudas Mitzvah*, even if it is not on the same day as his Bar-Mitzvah. [See Kidushin 31a Baba Kama 87a Midrash Beraishis Raba Toldos 63:14, commentaries. Yam Shel Shlomo Baba Kama 7:37. Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 225:2 Rema, (Kaf Hachayim 11) commentaries. Chavos Yair 70. Tzitz Eliezer XI:17. Halochoscope III:24(B) V:21.]

(C) *Melava Malka*

Melava Demalka means escorting the [Shabbos] queen as she leaves. This is part of *Kavod*, honoring, Shabbos. The Talmud says that one must "set his table" on Motzoei Shabbos. Special food must be reserved to be served at this meal, even if very little will actually be eaten since people are full. There is a medicinal quality to hot food or drink and to hot bread eaten then. *Zemiro*s should accompany this Seuda just as they do when Shabbos is ushered in. Some say that one may fulfil this Seuda as late as Tuesday, but most Poskim suggest eating it as close to Shabbos as possible, and to try to have it before midnight. Some Poskim point out that this Seuda is not obligatory, as are the three Seudos on Shabbos, (though all all Rabbinically ordained), since this one is not connected to a Passuk. Nonetheless it is considered a Mitzvah. [See Shabbos 119b, Poskim Tur Sh. Ar. O.C. 300. Taamei Haminhagim (Kuntres Acharon) 125.]

This raises the question in our case, may one hold a Bar-Mitzvah Seuda on the night preceding Asara Beteiveis? Is it a festive Seuda? Is any festive Seuda forbidden, or is it the wedding type ceremony that is forbidden, or ill-advised? What about one who begins fasting the night before? Does the fact that the Talmud requires eating *Melava Malka* override the personal restrictive practice to fast from the preceding night?

It would appear that the Seuda does not have the festive status of a true wedding feast, though it might be compared to it. If it is not the night before the actual Bar Mitzvah, it probably does not conform to the main reasons for Seudas Bar Mitzvah, but to those for a delayed Seuda. [The laws of Taanis themselves often validate a Seuda delayed to the night.] We have shown that even a wedding is probably permitted even on the night of *Shiva Asar Betamuz*. If it is a Seudas Mitzvah, it might push off a Taanis Yachid. The pious practice may be considered on the level of a Taanis Yachid. Furthermore, one must disregard this practice to bathe for Shabbos. Furthermore, an individual may not practice the private mourning practices on Tisha Bav itself when it falls on Shabbos. Clearly, *Kavod Shabbos* supersedes the pious practices. Since he would, therefore, eat at any *Melava Malka*, there is no reason for him to refrain from this one, especially if it is a Seudas Mitzvah. [See Eshel Avraham 450.]

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