

Fixing a Bar Mitzvah Date Before the Birthday

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This paper was adopted on May 28, 1981 by a vote of 12-1-1. Members voting in favor: Rabbis Ben Zion Bokser, David M. Feldman, Edward M. Gershfield, David H. Lincoln, Mayer E. Rabinowitz, Joel Roth, Alexander M. Shapiro, Morris M. Shapiro, Phillip Sigal, Israel N. Silverman, Harry Z. Sky and Henry A. Sosland. Voting in opposition: Rabbi Kassel Abelson. Abstaining: Rabbi Ephraim L. Bennett.

SHE'ELAH

Is it permitted to perform an early Bar Mitzvah if the birthday occurs in the summer months when children go to camp?

TESHUVAH

My inclination is to discourage such early ceremonies in order to avoid *hefkerut* in this area. It seems to me that we are dealing with a convenience of dates rather than a desire to include the boy in religious obligations.

In large congregations, dates are allotted and assigned many years ahead, and parents often worry more about the availability of band leaders or the weather than the true reasons for the ceremony. If we allow early ceremonies -- how early?

Many of us have been faced with tragic problems of terminally ill parents who have wished to see their son become a Bar Mitzvah, and I am certain that in such cases we would not hesitate to accommodate. There can be no doubt that in certain countries, youngsters are encouraged to put on tefillin before Bar Mitzvah, and are feted in the synagogue as soon as it is felt that they understand the significance of such a mitzvah.

The Talmud (*Sukkah* 42a) mentions:

קטן היודע לשמור תפילין אביו לוקח לו תפילין וכו' . . .

It is uncertain from this statement whether it in fact refers to Bar Mitzvah or before. Many *posekim* feel, however, that it does refer to one who had not

reached the age of thirteen and is *mita'am hinukh* . (See also *Tosefta Hagigah* 81 for a similar reference.)

There is ample evidence (*Orah Hayyim* 282) of the permissibility of a *katan* reading the *Maftir* portion on most Sabbaths, with the exception of Shabbat Rosh Hodesh, Hanukkah and the *arba parshiyot*. (See also *Mishnah Berurah*.)

Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged from the Mishnah (*Avot* 5:21 that *ben shelosh esreh lemitzvot* and Rashi indicates that this rule is *halakhah leMoshe miSinai*. The Rosh also presents this view.

CONCLUSION

The date of a Bar Mitzvah should be fixed on the basis of the Hebrew birthday and every effort should be made to celebrate it on that date. However, due to extraordinary circumstances other than inconvenience, the date may be adjusted by the rabbi as the *mara d'atra*.