Fixing a Bar Mitzvah Date  
Before the Birthday  
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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:

キャンホデ השם והשלום אכלו לוחה לא טפילין ניני.

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.