

## CHANGING THE FORMAT FOR BAR MITZVAHS

### QUESTION

There is constant discussion about improving the Bar Mitzvah affair situation. I would like to present two viewpoints and hear your opinions.

A local mossad here has suggested that classmates no longer be invited to the evening affair, and instead, there should be a breakfast in yeshiva without photographers or a band. The gains;

- 1) The evening bar mitzvah ends too late and the boys don't learn well the next day
- 2) It will save the parents money. The school breakfast would cost \$180.00.
- 3) Boys without supervision have been known to act unruly and even cause slight damage.

The other school of thought suggests inviting the boys to the evening affair and instituting guidelines.

- 1) Make a deadline (ie: 9:30pm) where the boys have to leave regardless where the simcha is holding
- 2) A breakfast is not much less money: \$180 for a breakfast + donation to the yeshiva approx. \$180 = \$360, while the cost for 20 boys at \$20 for the night affair = \$400. The savings are not that significant.
- 3) The Rebbe, principal, mashgiach and others from the Yeshiva are invited to all Bar Mitzvahs. One of them should be there at all times watching the boys. Also, perhaps a policy should be implemented that any boy that does damage will not be invited to any of the other bar mitzvahs.
- 4) The halacha states the meal should be like a chasuna. If parents want to save money there are many other ways to do so.
- 5) When it comes to dancing the young boys are usually the ones that do the dancing and the most lebidik. They also help with the singing if the bar mitzvah boy needs it during the drasha.

Some feel it's really selfish not to have the Bar Mitzvah boy's friends invited, as the memories are of his friends. It is, after all, his simcha.

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I come from a generation where the Bar Mitzvah boy would get up and start his speech by saying "Today I am a fountain pen" ("I Pod", in today's parlance). The joke still applies in many ways to our *dor* where many Bar Mitzvahs are so ostentatious that the Bar Mitzvah boy forgets the importance of the day and its true meaning. *B"H* in our Yeshiva circles, it has toned down to the point where, for example, going to hotels with family and friends for an entire weekend of celebration, is almost nil. However, there is much room for improvement. If the Chinuch Roundtable is able to make a dent in lowering the pressure of extra, unnecessary expenses and increasing the understanding of the meaning of "Bar Mitzvah", then participation in addressing this problem will certainly be worthwhile.

We always look towards our *Gedolim* for guidance in every area of our lives. Pray tell, why aren't we doing so when it comes to the celebration of Bar Mitzvahs? I read that Rav Schach ZT"l did not leave Yeshiva and travel home for his Bar Mitzvah because of *Bitul Torah*. Rav Hirschprung ZT"l, Chief Rabbi of Montreal and Founding President of Bais Yaakov of Montreal, would bring *lekach* and *bronfen* on a Monday or a Thursday morning to his regular *minyán* for his boys' Bar Mitzvahs and would save the leftover *shnapps* for the next Bar Mitzvah. The way that our forefathers behaved in the *Alte Heim* has always been very *choshuv* to us and we have always tried to emulate their example. Why has the Bar Mitzvah been an exception?

I am not saying that we should deprive our sons of a *Seudas Mitzvah*, and, it only becomes a *Seudas Mitzvah* because of the *Dvar Torah* in the *pshetel* or a *Siyum* that is made by the Bar Mitzvah boy. However, we should look at the example given by our *Gedolim* for some sort of guidance and stop this ridiculous extravagance and behavior by putting the emphasis on the Bar Mitzvah boy's understanding of the importance of being privileged to be *mechuyov b'mitzvos*. In my opinion, this can best be done in a Yeshiva setting where the atmosphere for a Bar Mitzvah is most suitable, because of the *Rosh Yeshiva* and *Rebbeim's* guidelines and influence. This, therefore, should be the venue for the participation of the Bar Mitzvah boy's friends. I also think there should be a *Seudas Shabbos*, for the extended family only, in the home setting. Friends and business associates of the parents do not belong at the Bar Mitzvah. If this could become the prevailing norm, then no one would have any *taynis* at not having been invited. What we really need is quite a few "*Nachshon ben Aminadav's*" to jump into the fray and get the ball rolling.

Let us all ask ourselves what we are really gaining by having a catered affair for hundreds of people and what does it really have to do with the boy becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

Unfortunately I do not think that these suggestions will be adopted so readily by the *Hamon Am* because social pressures are so pervasive. But we should at least try to work toward that end.