

children would sink into the bitterness and despair of slavery, they would always have a visceral link with their past to cling to, and a promise of future consolation with which to inspire themselves.

There are inevitable moments in life where we must take stock of our valuables, and decide for ourselves what to hold close and what we can safely abandon. As the fires of assimilation threaten, and the harsh winds of history blow towards us, there is a danger that we may mistakenly leave Judaism behind in exchange for a carload of worthless junk. However, by planning ahead during the periods of relative calm, and assessing the value of our real assets in advance, we ensure our personal safety and ensure our legacy for future generations.

Live & Laugh

A kindergarten teacher was walking around observing her classroom of children while they were drawing pictures. As she got to one girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was. The girl replied, "I'm drawing G-d." The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what G-d looks like."

Without looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, "They will in a minute."

What's Nu?!

Choson Kallah Mazal Tov
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Calendar
Parshas Shekalim
Shabbos Mevorchim Adar 2
Molad: Wed 12:41:16

- ◆ Shacharis: 8:30 am (one minyan)
- ◆ Brocha in the Seeff Hall sponsored by **the Kahanovitz Family** in honour of Josh's oifruf.
- ◆ **Sushi & Black Label Farbrengen** sponsored by the Kahanovitz Family.
- ◆ Mincha: 6:00 pm
- ◆ Shabbos Ends: 7:09 pm
- ◆ **Rosh Chodesh:** Thurs 7 & Fri 8 March

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Rabbi Dr Akiva Tatz

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2 March 2019

- Rabbi Tatz will deliver the sermon in the big Shul on Shabbos morning (Approx. 10:30 am)
- TEEN TALK with Rav Tatz / O & A in the Youth Bayit 12:00 -12:30 pm

FRIDAY NIGHT FEVER
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Friday Night 8 March
 for a lively interactive service led by Yudi Cohen

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Good Shabbos SYDENHAM!

2 Mar 2019 Parshas Vayakhel 25 Adar 1 5779

Bar Mitzvahs: Magic or Tragic? by: Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Moshe said to the children of Israel: "See G-d has appointed Bertzalel, the son of Uri, the son of Chur of the tribe of Judah. He has filled him with the spirit of G-d, with wisdom, with insight, with Divine inspiration and with the ability for all types of workmanship."

Now Chur, Betzalel's grandfather, was a son of Miriam, Moshe's sister. That would make Betzalel a great grandnephew of Moshe. Indeed, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 69b), records that Betzalel was a mere 13 years old at the time when he was appointed as master architect and designer for the Sanctuary. Imagine a little Bar Mitzvah boy telling the great Moshe how to build the Tabernacle!

Remarkable - and, regrettably, all too rare. Ask any congregational Rabbi today and he will tell you that it is the exceptional young man who experiences a sense of true maturity at the time of his Bar Mitzvah. In fact, it may sound shocking but the average Bar Mitzvah is a failure. I don't mean that the young man failed his test or didn't perform adequately on the Bimah. And most parties are successful and lots of fun too. Bar Mitzvahs are failures because once the gifts have been unwrapped, the cash deposited, and the balloons have popped, what is left? Is there any lasting value to this year of study, of running to Shul for lessons, of nerves and anxiety? The success of a Bar Mitzvah should really be judged by the sustainability of the experience and by the value added to a young man's life.

Bar Mitzvah is meant to be an initiation into Jewish life and we've turned it into a gradua-

tion. A young man goes through the compulsory 12 months of drudgery and then wipes his brow and with a deep sense of relief quotes Dr Martin Luther King who said, "Free at last, free at last. Thank G-d Almighty I'm free at last."

It's like the old story with the Synagogue that was plagued by mice until the Rabbi decided to give all the mice a Bar Mitzvah. They were never seen again. Or, the Rabbi who said he finally worked out what happened to the 10 Lost Tribes of Israel. They never really got lost, he said. They just had a Bar Mitzvah!

A generation ago, the Jewish historian, Cecil Roth, advocated that the age of Bar Mitzvah should be moved up to 17 or 18 in the hope that we might then be addressing a more mature young man and appealing to his rational mind to better appreciate the Jewish way of life he was being introduced to. After all, just because he's reached puberty and biological maturity, - the halachic measure of majority - doesn't mean he is emotionally mature. Perhaps an 18 year old would respond more wisely and actually be inspired by what Judaism has to offer. While to this day nobody has acted on Roth's suggestion, all agree that something must be done and that throughout most of the 20th century and now well into the 21st, the Bar Mitzvah syndrome is one of Judaism's most spectacular educational failures.

Do we really think we can prepare 13 year old boys or 12 year old girls for the big issues of life? Can we teach Jewish philosophy to this age group? What is the meaning of life? Can one prove the existence of G-d? Why do bad things happen to good people? Where was G-d in Auschwitz? The

only answer we're giving them to all these questions is a sing song passage they must learn to parrot by rote. And more than often they have no clue what they are singing about.

The truth is that it's not the young man's fault. Nor is it the teacher's fault. And far be it from me to blame the Rabbi! It is the system which is doomed to failure unless an exceptional effort is made by all concerned that this Bar Mitzvah experience will be different. Honestly, do we really expect a boy of 13 to change his lifestyle on his own? Do we expect him to come home and share everything he's learned and change his whole family and their lifestyles? Once in a blue moon it actually happens but those are few and far between.

The average Bar Mitzvah fails because the average family doesn't really want any dramatic change in their son's life. They certainly do not want him to come home from his lessons and start preaching to them. What must happen if Bar Mitzvahs are to enjoy any measure of long term success is that parents sit down and give some serious thought to what they actually want from their son and for their son. Do they want a nice performance in Shul, a clever speech and a cool dinner dance? Then that's what they will get. If, however, they sincerely desire a meaningful rite of passage and a mature sense of earnest acceptance of Jewish responsibilities, then they too - and indeed the whole family - will need to prepare themselves for meaningful change.

That is a tall order for most people. Realistically speaking, it might be more practical to aim for one new mitzvah for the young man. A daily commitment to Tefillin by him is a basic traditional resolution. And a new mitzvah for the family - like coming to Shul more regularly - might be a good start for them. Then we can hope that there will be some follow through and lasting value to this Bar Mitzvah.

The truth is, it really must start long before the 12th year of a boy's life and it certainly cannot end after the party. Synagogues, too, must offer imaginative programming for teens that will captivate them and inspire them to keep coming back to Shul. That way when they are more emotionally mature they will be there to get those important answers to life's questions. I am very proud that here at Sydenham Shul we have

an outstanding Barmy Army programme for the boys and an excellent Batties Programme for the girls. And on the positive side, many good things can come from the Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience. Setting goals, achieving them one by one, a schedule of hard work leading to recognizable achievements and at the end of it all being rewarded for a year-long effort - these are all valuable lessons for life.

Bar Mitzvah is uniquely Jewish. Non-Jews don't have any celebrations at the age of 13. In fact, many non-Jewish kids are clamouring for their own equivalent party. Why should their Jewish friends have all the fun? In other cultures, 13 is actually an unlucky number. Caterers omit Table Number 13 at functions, hotel elevators mysteriously skip from the 12th floor to the 14th and Friday the 13th is a disaster waiting to happen!

But in Judaism 13 is special and it is a milestone which can be made special if we address ourselves to it with intelligent forethought, creative programming, and a personalised approach.

At the end of the day it is not the frills that will determine the success of our Bar Mitzvahs but the meaningful impression they make on a young man. My father, in his book *From Shedlitz to Safety*, recounts the incredible non-event his own Bar Mitzvah was back in pre-war Poland. He was already studying at a Yeshiva boarding school away from home. "Shortly before my 13th birthday, I received a parcel from home. Inside were a pair of Tefillin and a note from my father telling me to make sure I was called to the Torah for an Aliyah for the occasion." That was it. No invitation, no party, no photographs, no cash. But he was given the essential ingredients for a successful Bar Mitzvah - Tefillin to bind himself to G-d and an Aliyah to learn from the Torah how to live. Thank G-d, they stood him in good stead.

Many Jewish Day Schools today are introducing innovative ideas to make the experience meaningful, positive and more successful in the long term. With imagination, confidence and effort it can be

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done.

Betzalel was an extraordinary young man inspired with G-dly talents. While we cannot realistically expect that from every 13 year old, we can look to the occasional successes and draw from their experience. If we apply ourselves, it can provide that special window of opportunity.

Whether today's Bar Mitzvahs will be magic or tragic will depend on the will and determination of parents. Please G-d, with their genuine commitment, coupled with good Shul and School programmes as well as inspired teachers, we will make the magic the Jewish people need to build our future. Amen.

Parsha Pointers

*Vayakheil: Artscroll Chumash pg 516;
Living Torah pg 465*

Moses assembles the people of Israel and reiterates to them the commandment to observe the Shabbat. He then conveys G-d's instructions regarding the making of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). The people donate the required materials in abundance, bringing gold, silver, copper, blue, purple and red-dyed wool, goat hair, spun linen, animal skins, wood, olive oil, herbs and precious stones. Moses has to tell them to stop giving.

A team of wise-hearted artisans, led by Betzalel and Oholiav, make the Mishkan and all its impressive artefacts and furnishings.

Cedars

By: Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum

Taking It with You

When bushfires threaten rural communities, and residents are urged to abandon their houses in the face of danger, many people find themselves in the unenviable position of having to decide which of their possessions to abandon.

You can't take everything with you on an escape down the mountain; if it won't fit in the back seat of the car, you're probably going to have to leave it to the vagaries of fate and the mercies of the firefighters. Some people load up their family photo albums and copies of their insurance certificates; others chose to leave their paperwork behind, and concentrate on cramming their pets and livestock into the back of the van.

It's an invidious situation to be in. What would you reach for first in the panic? The choices you make as the firestorm heads your way say a lot about you as an individual. They demonstrate the relative importance you allocate to your material possessions compared to mementos of the past. And, while it's purely a reflection of personal priorities, this may be the truest test of value you may ever face.

Mementos from a Previous Life

The mourners at a funeral I recently conducted wrote a moving eulogy for their mother. I was stirred by their description of how the only heirlooms she brought with her on the long journey from the "old country" to her new home in Australia were her mother's Shabbat candlesticks. Battered and bent though they may have been, they represented her spiritual connection with her past, and now duly take pride of place as her legacy for her children.

By packing the *leichter* and leaving more valuable possessions behind, she was making a value judgment for the ages: demonstrating that Judaism was not just an abandonable relic of Europe, but was to be a vital component of her new home.

This demonstration of intent mirrors a similar decision made by our forefather Jacob. As he and his family descended from Canaan to Egypt, Jacob brought cedar saplings, native to Israel, with him, and then subsequently replanted them in Egypt. Generations later, as his descendants readied themselves to finally flee from Egyptian slavery, they cut down those now mature trees and carried the wood with them on their travels through the desert. These giant planks were eventually fashioned into the walls of the Mishkan, the traveling Tabernacle for G-dly worship.

It may seem an incredibly complicated way of procuring the necessary lumber. Yet Jacob's intention was clear: seeing the trees and remembering the promise of redemption that they represented would bolster the spirits of his descendants through even the darkest moments, and encourage them to look forward with hope to a better future.

Furthermore, by bringing specimens from Israel, Jacob was bridging the gap between the generations, and ensuring that no matter how far his