

Bar Mitzvah Insights for 'Boys' of All Ages

By Chaim Yehuda Meyer

Reviewing: "Phenomenal Insights about Bar Mitzvah and Tefillin," by Rabbi Yehoshua Alt. Independently published. March 2026. Paperback: 176 pages. ISBN-13: 979-8254139911.

What does it mean to be a bar mitzvah? How does one keep up the momentum long after they reach the age of 13? What are the obligations of a girl who becomes bat mitzvah? These questions and more are thoroughly explored and answered in the newest book by Rabbi Yehoshua Alt. "Phenomenal Insights about Bar Mitzvah and Tefillin" gathers insights from throughout the Torah to present more than 50 engaging essays on the significance of bar mitzvah and tefillin.

Written in a clear and accessible style, this book is suitable for Jews of all ages and especially makes a wonderful bar mitzvah present. The insights provided, including the source of the bar mitzvah "psheitel" (speech), can be a valuable resource for speeches by bar mitzvah boys, parents and rabbanim alike.

The book also features inspiring stories such as that of a man approaching the age of 105 who decided to put on tefillin for the very first time, inspiring a pre-med student to begin as well. As the student put it: "If a man can begin putting on tefillin at 105, why shouldn't I start now? Why wait until I'm 105?"

For some people, the significance of a bar mitzvah might only be revealed later. Still, it is always worthwhile to prepare well before one becomes a gadol. This book allows one to do just that.

There are 613 mitzvot in the Torah. The gematria of Torah is 611, corresponding to the commandments transmitted through Moshe. The first two commandments were heard directly from Hashem himself. This brings the total to 613. A bar mitzvah celebrates a young man becoming obligated in keeping the Torah and mitzvot.

The bar mitzvah is a stage a boy reaches in life whether or not they get an aliyah, have a party or get presents. However, celebrating with friends and family helps encourage one in attaining their status as a bar mitzvah. Nevertheless, this status is not diminished if they don't have a party.

If one did not have a formal bar mitzvah ceremony at the age of 13, they need not make a party later but it is certainly a nice thing to do. And it makes a great #MKY moment. While becoming bar mitzvah does not automatically make us want to keep Torah and mitzvot, if

someone found their way to religious observance later in life it is never too late to mark the occasion. It certainly is cause for celebration. And it is certainly never too late to return.

The book explains that when a boy becomes bar mitzvah, profound spiritual effects are set into motion. When Rabbi Elazar became bar mitzvah, his father, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, described the celestial holy soul that reached Rabbi Elazar and every boy when they reach the age of 13.

When a boy becomes bar mitzvah he affects worlds. His actions have the power to create malachim as the Mishna' tells us that one who fulfills a mitzvah acquires an advocate (angel), while he who commits a transgression acquires against himself an accuser (angel). In other words, our actions create angelic defenders born from mitzvot and, conversely, prosecuting angels brought into being by sin. We also know that once a boy reaches bar mitzvah age he is counted toward a minyan, something even malachim cannot do.

There can be nine men in a room but without a young man of 13 years of age, there is no minyan. Suddenly he shows up and the Shechinah rests. A minyan is formed not because of who we have become, but because of who we are.

The concept of minyan is learned from a *gezeira shava* (two Torah passages linked to one another through common terms that we can learn the laws from) in Megillah 23b. There, the Gemara brings us the words *toch toch* (inside) from the congregation of Korach (Bamidbar 16:21). How can we learn the principle of 10 Jews creating one unit for prayer from a wicked group? While Korach and his posse committed evil acts their *toch* remained intact. They were bound to Hashem at their core.

How does one sustain the excitement and inspiration of becoming bar mitzvah, especially when a person starts working and is out of the confines of formal learning? The answer lies in continued growth. Establishing a regular learning schedule. There are also mitzvot you can do in the

workforce. Give maser. Treat employees and coworkers kindly. Know money halacha. Learn about mitzvot and the reasoning behind them. This will transform the bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah experience into a lifelong journey.

The Brisker Rav's son was born at 3 a.m. When he was bar mitzvah, his father woke him up at 3 a.m. Obviously, we hold that the day of a bar mitzvah marks the time he becomes bar mitzvah, but the Brisker Rav saw fit to remind his son of the significance of this at the time he was born.

"Phenomenal Insights about Bar Mitzvah and Tefillin" is an excellent resource for bar mitzvah drasha. The importance of the bar mitzvah drasha is highlighted by the Chassam Sofer, who wrote that the main simchat mitzvah of a bar mitzvah is his *psheitel* (bar mitzvah speech). Reflecting on the bar mitzvah celebration for his orphaned nephew (the son of his sister), Shmuel Katz, he remarked: "Our simcha was incomplete because the main simchat mitzvah of a bar mitzva is the drasha of the bar mitzvah boy."

Generally, a bar mitzvah speech is prepared for the boy who may feel nervous delivering it. However, when a boy develops questions of his own and shapes them into a drasha, he forms a deeper personal connection to becoming bar mitzvah and it gives the speech greater meaning and authenticity. This book will help the bar mitzvah bachur do just that.

The significance of tefillin, in particular, has been felt even under the harshest circumstances. One Holocaust survivor recalled seeing a long line in a concentration camp. Normally such lines meant food but this line was for putting on tefillin. One person stood guard to make sure there were no Nazis coming as each person quickly said "Shema" and passed the tefillin to the next person. Instead of waiting in

line for food, these people were yearning for spiritual nourishment. In this way, the prophecy in Amos (8:11) was fulfilled. "Behold, days are coming, says Hashem, and I will send famine into the land, not a famine for bread nor a thirst for water, but to hear the word of Hashem."

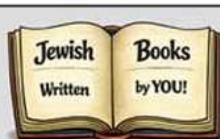
Chazal teaches that tefillin possess remarkable spiritual potency. The Gemara in Brachot teaches that wearing tefillin brings long life. The Gemara also teaches that when a person puts tefillin on his head, he projects fear over our enemies. A bar mitzvah boy possesses this power. Before the Six-Day War started, the Lubavitcher Rebbe told his followers across the world to go out to the streets and offer Jewish men and boys the opportunity to don tefillin as this would serve as a means of ensuring Divine protection against the grave threats facing Eretz Yisrael from its enemies. And after the Israelis were victorious, Ariel Sharon himself put on tefillin.

When one becomes bar mitzvah, they undertake a lifelong responsibility of mitzvot for life. What does it mean to accept this role? Rabbi Alt offers profound and inspiring insights into what it means to wear tefillin daily, to take responsibility for our actions and the power we have in conquering our evil inclination. This book is recommended for bnei mitzvah of all ages.

This book makes a meaningful gift. Rabbi Alt related that people have already requested signed copies for bar mitzvah boys and even a principal requested this book for the bar mitzvah boys in his yeshiva. With growing demand, this has become a truly meaningful gift for bar mitzvah boys — make sure you get your copy today.

You can purchase Phenomenal Insights about Bar Mitzvah and Tefillin on Amazon at www.amazon.com/dp/bogvdbvctd; to request the free weekly Fascinating Insights parsha sheet, please email yalt3285@gmail.com. Rabbi Alt can also be reached via WhatsApp at +972 54 849 5217.

¹Avot 4:13.
²Avos 4:13.



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