

Bar Mitzvah: Seoudat Mitzvah or Seoudat ha-reshut.

It is a pleasure for me to address this congregation at the occasion of the Bar Mitzvah of my grand child אליעזר בן ישראל שמואל

Seoudat ha-reshut also called מריעות שמחה is a party given for social reasons, whether one invite people for a social event, a promotion in your employment, a nomination at an executive or honorific situation, an anniversary, a house warming party or similar. The halakhah, in some instances, god forbid in the laws of semahot as we designate them בלשון סגי נהור by euphemism makes a difference between a party where you invite people for the first time or when you invite them back because of the obligation of reciprocity. See details in Yoreh deah 391. Parallel to the seoudot ha-reshut we have seoudat mitzvah. It is a party given at the occasion of the performance of a Mitzvah, which has been accomplished before or during the meal. As we will see the typical examples of seoudat mitzvah that we find in the Talmud are seoudat eirussin and seoudat nissuin, as in the time of the Talmud the marriage was divided in two steps. Eirussin, the legal marriage and Nissuin, the nuptials. Other typical examples were Seoudat brit mila and Pidion –ha-ben.

Finally למאי נפקא מיני what is the difference between seoudat mitzvah and seoudat ha-reshut ? finally if the attendance was sympathetic and the food was good it was a good meal and if not, it was less. There is in fact a difference and even a considerable difference: the gemara tells us in Pessahim 49a :

תניא רבי שמעון אומר: כל סעודה שאינה של מצווה, אין תלמיד חכם רשאי ליהנות ממנה. כגון מאי? אמר רבי יוחנן כגון בת כהן לישראל ובת תלמיד חכם לעם הארץ דא"ר יוחנן בת כהן לישראל אין זיוגם עולה יפה

And on the same page

וכל תלמיד חכם שמרבה סעודתו בכל מקום, לסוף מחריב את ביתו... פסחים מט ע"א

Rabbi Shimon taught: A talmid Hakham is not allowed to take advantage of a meal, which is not seoudat Mitzvah. For example the meal of a marriage between a Cohen's daughter and a Yisrael or the daughter of a Talmid Hakham and an Am ha-Arets because R. Johanan said that these marriages are not successful. And further it says any Talmid Hakham who eats anywhere, finally he destroys his family.

Furthermore the gemara tells us in Berakhot 64a:

הנהנה מסעודה שתלמיד חכם שרוי בתוכה כאילו נהנה מזיו השכינה

If someone takes advantage from a meal in which a Talmid hakham participated, it is as if he had taken advantage from the divine splendor. Similarly in Pesahim 113b, the gemara enumerates seven people who are repelled and removed from the sky. And finally it adds a last one: ואף מי שאינו מיסב בחבורה של מצוה. And even the one who does not participate in a companionship of mitzvah, which means a seoudat mitzvah. Indeed Rashi ad locum explains. חבורה של מצוה, כגון משתה של ברית מילה או בת כהן לכהן. Thus, Rashi explains: a havurah shel mitzvah, the meal following a brit mila or the meal of a marriage between the daughter of a Cohen with a Cohen. Thus the seouda of brit mila and the seoudah of a marriage are typical seoudot mitzvah. However the Talmud made a restriction and considered that in the case of bat cohen le yisrael or bat talmid Hakham le am ha-arets we have an unsuitable alliance and then the meal would not be a seoudat mitzvah. Rambam in hilkhos Deiot 5 ;2 ruled accordingly but Shulhan Arukh did not. And indeed today I have never heard about such a difference. Probably there are no more Cohanim meyoushasim, and people don't care. The second case, the daughter of a scholar to an ignorant corresponds to the more general problem of the intellectual and social level of both spouses for which parents generally care or should care but we, or the society don't judge.

I suppose that you slowly begin to understand the problem. I want to examine with you if our seoudat bar Mitzvah is a seoudat mitzvah or not. The stake is huge. If god forbids, the seoudat

bar Mitsvah has not the status of seoudat mitzvah, then the talmidei hakhamim, and I suspect most of you to be among them, are not supposed to take part in this meal. The situation is stressful and full of suspense, we are held breathless. We are in real difficulties, we don't know if most of you are allowed to take part to the meal, but anyone must have a meal as we are on Shabbat and people did not prepare and we have no B solution.

Calm down we will find a solution, otherwise I would not dare raise the problem.

In the Talmud The main seoudot mitzvah beside the marriage meal are the seoudat brit mila and pidion ha.ben. It is told that Rav, The first and the main amora, of whom it is said, that he had still the status of Tana and could contradict another Tana, did not eat at a seoudat ha reshout. And the gemara in Bava Kamma 80a tells us:

רב ושמואל ורב אסי איקלעו לבי שבוע הבן ואמרי ליה לבי ישוע הבן.

Rav, Shemuel and Rav Assi ate at the meal given at the end of the week of the child, thus seoudat brit mila, and at the meal of the salvation of the child, the meal of Pidion ha ben when the child reached a month. They called it the salvation of the child because at 1 month the child is considered as viable. Under this age it is doubtful if it is viable. A last seoudat mitzvah mentioned in the gemara is סיום מסכתא

אמר אביי, תיתי לי דכי חזינא לצואבא מדרבנן דשלים מסכתא, עבידנא יומא טבא לרבנן, שבת קיה ע"ב

Abayé said: may the reward come to me for that when I saw that a disciple of the Rabbis completed a tractate of the gemara, I made a festive day for the scholars.

There is no mention of seoudat bar Mitsvah in the Talmud. Even the word Bar Mirsvah in the gemara means someone who must keep the mitsvot, but the Bar Mitsvah with the meaning the transition from the age of 13 and 13 years and one day corresponding to the thirteenth anniversary does not appear before the fifteenth century. There is a hint to seoudat Bar Mitsvah in Bereshit Rabbah 53, 10, about yishak on the Passuk: רב הושעיה רבה: ויגדל הילד ויגמל, אמר נגמל מיצר הרע, רבנן אמרי נגמל מחלב. ויעש אברהם משתה גדול...

Rav Oshaya the great understands that he grew and became an adult, a boy of 13 and he explains ויגמל, he dominated his yester ha-ra and received the yetser ha Tov and Avraham made a great seoudah at this occasion. Rabanan understand simply, according pshat, that he was weaned from maternal milk at the age of about three.

This does not answer our interrogation, what about the status of the seoudat Bar Mitsvah. The only rabbi, to the best of my knowledge, who raised the issue, was Maharshal, R. Solomon Luria, one of the greatest Polish rabbis of the 16th century and heir of a prestigious descent of German rabbis of Worms, in Yam shel Shelomo, his commentary on notably Bava Kamma about the quotation רב ושמואל ורב אסי איקלעו לבי שבוע הבן ואמרי ליה לבי ישוע הבן. Maharshal examines the status of other modern meals. He notes that seoudat Bar Mitsvah is a German custom which is unknown in Poland. He notes further that a meal given at the occasion of the accession of the boy to the mitsvot should be a seoudat mitzvah. He proposes the following justification based on the conduct of Rav Joseph in Massekhet Kiddushin p.

Rav Yossef was the Rosh Yeshiva of Pumbedita durind 2.5 years after the reign of Rabbah during 22 years. He was reputed for his high ethical standards and his humility. At the end of his life he became blind. The gemara quotes Rav Yossef:

אמר רב יוסף, מריש הווה אמינא מאן דהווה אמר לי הלכה כרב יהודה דאמר סומא פטור מן המצוה, עבידנא יומא טבא לרבנן דהא לא מיפקידנא והא עבידנא. השתא דשמעיתא להא דאמר רבי חנינא: גדול מצווה ועושה יותא ממי שאינו מצווה ועושה אדרבה מאן דאמר לי דאין הלכה כרבי יהודה, כלומר דסומא חייב במצוות, עבידנא יומא טבא לרבנן.

Thus in the beginning Rav Yossef had heard that Rav Yehudah had taught that a blind is free from the mitsvot- Therefore he said that if someone confirmed him that the halakhah is like R. Yehudah he would organize a festive day (thus a meal) for the rabbis because, although he is not obliged to, he continue to accomplish the mitsvot and he understood that performing mitsvot when you are not obliged to, is certainly more deserving. And it makes sense, think

about. In your class of math what is more deserving, solving the obligatory exercises or the extra additional exercises for the most advanced pupils?

Rav Yossef pursues: now that I heard that Rabbi Hanina taught that accomplishing mitzvot when you are obliged is more deserving than when you accomplish mitzvot without being obliged, because mitzvot is not like math exercises, when you are not obliged you don't perform mitzvot with the same seriousness and application. For example as long as you are not obliged, you daven at school, but on Sunday you forget sometimes and must be recalled. Now that you are obliged I hope you won't forget, it is the rule and it will become an automatic reflex. Thus says Rav Yossef, now that I heard that is more deserving, if someone confirms me that the halakhah is not according to Rav Judah and the blind is obliged to perform mitzvot, I will organize a festival day for the rabbis and sponsor a Kiddush at Lincoln square Synagogue.

Maharshal, who was quoting Rav Yossef, concludes the following: Rav Yossef was ready to organize a festival day for the rabbis, thus a seoudat mitzvah, if someone told him that he was in the status of מצווה ועושה which is more meritorious, then the bar Mitzvah, who without any doubt is passing from the status of מצווה ועושה אינו to the status of מצווה ועושה which is more meritorious, deserves a seoudat mitzvah. Maharshal adds that if this seoudah is accompanied by divrei torah, and especially if the Bar Mitzvah tells divrei torah, then you cannot have a better seoudat mitzvah. All's well that ends well! It is a seoudat Mitzvah! Mazal Tov.