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מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן
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By the Grace of G-d
3rd of Adar I, 5733
Brooklyn, N.Y.

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Sholom uBrocho:

I was pleased to be informed of your forthcoming Bar Mitzvah celebration.

You surely realize the significance of reaching the age of maturity as a full-fledged Jew, with all the privileges and responsibilities that it entails in all matters of Torah and Mitzvoth.

Included, of course, is also the "great principle" of our Torah, v'ohavto lre'acho komocho - the obligation to serve as a source of good influence to your friends, bearing in mind that the most effective influence comes from showing a living example of daily life and conduct.

I want to take this opportunity of sharing with you some thoughts which are highly relevant to a Bar Mitzvah.

Considering the significance of the occasion, as mentioned above, becoming Bar Mitzvah is not simply reaching a further milestone in the Jew's life. To reach the privileged status of becoming a fully qualified member of the Chosen People, whom G-d has singled out to receive His greatest treasure, the eternal Torah and Mitzvoth - is certainly a deeply joyous occasion, a real Yom Tov, comparable to the Yom Tov when all Jews first became "Bar Mitzvah" at Mount Sinai.

It seems strange, therefore, that such a happy occasion should not be marked by the omission of Tachnun. For Tachnun is not said on all joyous days in our Hebrew Calendar, even on the so-called "minor" festivals. (If the day of Bar Mitzvah happens to be Shabbos, when Tachnun is not said, it is due to Shabbos, not to the Bar Mitzvah.)

(more)

However, there is a profound lesson in the custom of saying Tachnun on the day of Bar Mitzvah.

You see, in matters of Torah and Mitzvoth one must never be satisfied with the achievements of the past, although these were the best that could have been accomplished in that stage of development. For, the Torah and Mitzvoth are endless, since they originate from G-d Who is Infinite. Consequently, there is no limit to the devotion and joy with which a Jew can fulfil G-d's Will. This is why there is always room for advancement in all matters of goodness and holiness in the daily experience of Torah and Mitzvoth.

Thus, while reaching Bar Mitzvah is indeed a great Yom Tov, the Bar Mitzvah boy does say Tachnun on this occasion, to ask G-d's forgiveness for not having done better in the past; for Tachnun, as you know, is a prayer for forgiveness which all Jews say every day (except on Shabbos and Yom Tov) for the selfsame reason.

On the other hand, if for some reason the past was not as good as it should have been, there is certainly good reason to say Tachnun. For, in such a case, the Yetzer, which is shrewd and cunning, and whose job it is to confuse and discourage, tries to do so by saying, "Look here, you've failed in the past; it's no use. You might as well continue as before." The best answer in such a case is, again, to say Tachnun most sincerely, in the fullest confidence of G-d's forgiveness, for we have the assurance that nothing stands in the way of Teshuvah. Thus the Bar Mitzvah boy can start with a clean slate. Indeed, our Sages of blessed memory, tell us that after Teshuvah one becomes even more endeared and beloved by G-d.

I trust that the above thoughts will also be your guiding principles in life, as you begin your adult life as a Jew. Thus you will be a source of constant joy - true Yiddish Nachas - to your parents, your community, and all our people.

Wishing you Hatzlocho to go from strength to strength in the study of the Torah and the observance of the Mitzvoth,

With blessing,

M. Schwartz