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How To Be A Man

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Note to the reader: In this translation, a number of original paragraphs have been combined into one, so that the total number of paragraphs differs from the original. However, in all other respects it is a full translation of the original sichah.

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KABBALAS OL — THE FOUNDATION OF AVODAH

(adapted from Likkutei Sichos Vol. XV, pp. 289ff.)

1. On the verse in *Parshas Vayishlach*,¹ “Shimon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, each took his sword...”, the *Midrash*² notes that at the time Shimon and Levi killed the people of Shchem they were only thirteen years old, this being the Biblical source for a thirteen year old being obligated to perform *mitzvos*.³ This is derived from the fact that the verse refers to them as “*Ish*”⁴ which is a term used only in reference to a grown and intellectually mature person⁵ who is therefore obligated to keep the commandments.

Although there does exist a possibility that a child before the age of thirteen may be intellectually developed, nonetheless, since he is lacking in maturity, he still lacks the feel both for the precious nature of fulfilling the *mitzvos* and also the great loss incurred by not keeping them.⁶ He therefore cannot be held fully responsible for

1. 34:25.

2. *Bereishis Rabbah* 80:10. *Midrash Lekach Tov* and *Midrash Seichel Tov*.

3. *Rashi*, *Nazir* 29b section beginning “and R. Yosi.” See also *Rashi* and *Bartenura* on *Pirkei Avos* Ch. 5:21 (and according to the text of the Alter Rebbe in his *Siddur Mishnah* 22), *Machzor Vitri*, *ibid*. Well known is the question (quoted in the Responsa of the *Maharil* No. 51) that how do we know that less than the age of 13 is also not called an “*Ish*”?

4. In the wording of *Rambam*, *Laws of Ishus* 2:10, “he is called a *Gadol* and called *Ish*.”

5. *Rashi* and *Bartenura* in their commentary on the *Mishnah* in *Avos* *ibid.*, quote the verse in *Bamidbar* 5:6, “A man or woman who commits any of man’s sins...” which implies that only a man (*ish*) or woman (*ishah*) are liable for punishment. Since the same term *Ish* is used in this verse we can deduce that a 13 year old is considered responsible enough to be liable for punishment. From this cross reference it is clear that the age 13 is learned from a Biblical source. However not necessarily is this deduction without reason as shall be seen later.

There are other verses that also indicate that the term *Ish* is used in reference to maturity, e. g. *Shmos* 2:14, “Who appointed you as a dignitary (*ish*) a ruler and a judge over us,” — see *Rashi* and *Rabbeinu Bachaye* *ibid.*, unlike *Shmos Rabbah* *ibid*. See also *I Melachim* 2:2, and *Radak*, *Sefer HaShroshim* entry *Ish*.

6. In *Kuntres HaTefillah* of the Rebbe Rashab — printed by Kehot 5752 “Tract on Prayer” — Ch. 5, the Rebbe explains at length the concept of *Daas* being the third intellectual soul power (*Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Daas*). *Daas* is in fact the faculty that enables a person to bind himself to an idea or concept, and is the medium through which

his deeds and conduct, and is not developed enough that we should place upon him the full obligation to keep the *mitzvos*.

2. On many occasions⁷ the Rebbes of Chabad delivered a *Chassidic* discourse on the occasion of a Bar Mitzvah opening⁸ with the verse,⁹ “Let us make man (*Adam*).” It is explained in many places that there are four names that Scripture uses to describe man — *Adam*, *Ish*, *Gever*, *Enosh* — and the greatest title is *Adam*.¹⁰ From this we may understand that a Bar Mitzvah has a connection not only with the level of “*Ish*” but also with the level of *Adam*. However

emotions are born. *Daas* is a distinct intellect and ensures that a concept is more clearly felt and discerned. To quote:

“For a person may understand something very well, yet he may not feel it, just as an intelligent child whose understanding is broad nonetheless does not sense the core of the matter. And for this reason, a child under the age of thirteen years is not punishable by Jewish law. He may be astute, bright and perceptive, and fully knowledgeable of all the regulations concerning the positive and negative commandments. Nevertheless, he is not culpable if he transgresses a commandment. For possessing no *daas*, a child can neither recognize nor feel the essential aspect of *mitzvos*..... Similarly in worldly concerns: a child may show a keen understanding of monetary matters and prestige; nevertheless their true significance is foreign to him, since unlike an adult, he cannot discern and sense them. The same applies to the opposite qualities, namely lowliness and poverty. Unlike an adult who can sense these shortcomings very clearly, a child, though he understands their demerits, cannot feel them.”

See also *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5670, p. 115; *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5672, Vol. III, p. 1227.

7. For example the *Maamar* “Let us make man” of year 5640. However, we do find that by the *Rebbeim* a *Maamar* on the verse, “Be strong and be a man (*Ish*)” was said on a day when tefillin were put on for the first time — 11 Iyar 5653, (see *Likkutei Dibburim*, Vol. I, p. 107b), also 2nd Day of Chanukah 5696.
8. The Previous Rebbe related that when a *maamar* was said by a Bar Mitzvah of the *Rebbeim*, the *maamar* always started with the opening “Let us make man” even though when later the *maamar* was written and copied, the opening words were deleted.
9. *Bereishis* 1:26.
10. To quote from *HaYom Yom*, entry for 4 Elul: “In describing the unique qualities of humankind, four terms are used: *Adam* refers to the quality of mind and intellect; *Ish* to the quality of heart and emotion;

Enosh, weakness in either intellect or emotion or both; finally *Gever*, who overcomes inner weakness and removes obstacles and hindrances to the attainment of an intellectual or emotional quality. That is, *Gever* works upon *Enosh* to elevate him to the plane of *Ish* or *Adam*. Since it is possible to turn *Enosh* into *Ish* or *Adam*, it is obvious that *Enosh* already possesses the qualities found in *Ish* and *Adam*.”

For further references see: *Zohar*, Vol. III, p. 48a; *Likkutei Torah*, *Shir HaShirim* 25a; *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5629, *Maamar Ish Key Yimmarate*; *Kuntres Toras HaChassidus* Ch. 7; *Sefer Arachim Chabad*, Entry *Adam* para. 8-9.

this poses a difficulty. If it is sufficient for obligation of *mitzvos* to reach the level of “*Ish*,” then why did the *Rebbeim* connect Bar Mitzvah with the level of *Adam*?¹¹

Furthermore; the difference between “*Ish*” and “*Adam*” lies in the fact that the term “*Ish*” is used to describe *seichel*-intellect which has a connection with *middos*-emotions, and the feelings of the heart.¹² There are many different levels of “*Ish*”, and in fact one only attains a full level of “*Ish*” at the age of twenty. However the term “*Adam*” is used to describe the faculty of *seichel* as it stands higher than the *middos*. This magnifies the question even more. What is the connection between the level of “let us make man (*Adam*)” and a Bar Mitzvah — how can one confer the title of “*Adam*” upon someone who is only thirteen years old?

We must therefore answer that, although by the age of Bar Mitzvah the boy attains the level of “*Ish*,” nonetheless, in order to fulfill the *mitzvos* properly one must also be under the influence of the level of “*Adam*,” as shall be explained.

3. The source from which we may learn that the level of “*Ish*” does not suffice for *mitzvah* performance is the very same verse quoted above: “Shimon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, each took his sword.” Superficially this verse poses a problem: it is the extra dimension of *seichel*-intellect and *daas* (intellect that affects the emotions) that is added when a boy reaches the age of thirteen that allows him to take the responsibility for *mitzvah* performance. How, therefore, can we derive this from a verse whose content — each one taking his sword and killing all the males — is an action which was motivated by strong emotions?¹³

We must therefore say that from this verse we may learn that not only does a Bar Mitzvah have to be an “*Ish*” but that the verse

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11. See also *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5711, p. 246 and *Chanoch LeNaar* p. 10 regarding the Rebbe Rashab: “then he became an *Ish*. When he became Bar Mitzvah the Rebbe Maharash blessed him to become an *Adam*.”
 12. *Pirush HaMilos* (by the Mittlerer Rebbe) Ch. 2. See at length *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. IV, p. 1117 and footnotes *ibid*.
 13. See *Vayishlach* 34:7 “And they were very angry.” *Rashi* on *Vayeichi* 49:6 “in their anger.”

also hints at a level of “*Adam*,” and it is for this reason that the *Rebbeim* started the *maamarim* with the words “let us make man (*Adam*),” to tell us that the level of “*Ish*” is not enough — there must also be *Adam*.

The explanation:

Regarding the source from which we learn that a boy is obligated to keep the *mitzvos* at the age of thirteen, there are in fact two opinions: the first, as derived from the above-mentioned verse, and the second, that the age of thirteen is not derived from any Scriptural source, rather, this is the age that has been received as tradition from Moshe on Sinai as the *halachic* age of obligation for *mitzvos*.¹⁴

The difference between the two: According to the first opinion, the age of thirteen is an age at which there is a natural intellectual maturity, and the verse, by describing Shimon and Levi as an “*Ish*,” indicates that at the age of thirteen they had reached that level of maturity. Whereas, according to the second opinion, that the age of thirteen has been received as Mosaic tradition, the age has nothing to do with a natural change, rather it is a *halachah*.¹⁵

The practical *halachic* difference would arise in the case of a non-Jew, concerning the age at which he is obligated to keep the commandments which are incumbent on non-Jews. According to the first opinion, that the obligation of *mitzvos* is dependent on human nature, it would follow that non-Jews would also be obligated to keep their commandments at the age of thirteen. However according to the second opinion — that the age of obligation for Jews has been received as Mosaic tradition — it would seem that since non-Jews do not have such a tradition,¹⁶ their age of obligation would be subjective, dependent on each one’s

14. This is the opinion of the *Rosh* in Responsa Principle 16. See also Responsa of *Maharil* No. 51 and the explanation of *Rashi* on the *Mishnah* in *Avos*, *ibid*.

15. One may perhaps explain this opinion by saying that this opinion holds that signs of puberty (and years) make one into a *gadol* — not that it is proof of a *gadol* — see *Tzofnas Panei'ach* on *Rambam*, Laws of *Ishus* 2:9.

16. *Rambam*, Laws of *Melachim*, 9:10.

understanding and maturity — possibly even at an earlier age than thirteen.¹⁷

In *avodah*, these two opinions represent two different approaches to the question of how a Jew should commence his performance of *mitzvos*. According to the first opinion, which holds that the obligation to keep the *mitzvos* is dependent on intellectual maturity,¹⁸ it follows that the approach to the performance of *mitzvos* must be within the realm of the intellect. However according to the second opinion, the reason a thirteen-year old must keep the *mitzvos* is because that is the Mosaic tradition — it is a *halachah* — and that is the will of the Almighty — which is an approach of *kabbalas ol* — accepting upon oneself the yoke of heaven.¹⁹

4. From the very fact, however, that the first opinion derives the age of thirteen from the account of Shimon and Levi drawing their swords — which in itself is an act of *mesirus nefesh*, it is clear²⁰ that even according to the first opinion, in addition to the intellectual dimension, there must also be an element of *mesirus nefesh* transcending the intellect. This is in no contradiction to the aforementioned, namely, that the age of thirteen represents a level of intellectual maturity, it is only adding the detail that the foundation of all *avodah* must be *kabbalas ol* and only when the foundation is one of *kabbalas ol* will the *avodah* with intellect be as it should be.²¹

The proof for this lies in the verse²² in *Parshas Nitzavim* where the people are warned to keep the *mitzvos*: “See — I have placed

17. Responsa of *Chasam Sofer Yoreh Deah* 317 in explanation of the opinion of *Rambam ibid.*, and 10:2. Note comment of *Tosafos Sanhedrin* 69a, that in earlier generations the signs of puberty were seen much earlier.

18. And although there may be exceptions that even at the age of thirteen the boy has not reached a level of maturity, even so the Torah speaks of the majority. See *Moreh Nevuchim*, Vol. III, Ch. 34.

19. Like the saying of the Sages *Yevamos* 76b, that if it is Mosaic tradition we will accept it even though intellectually it may be challenged.

20. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. V, p. 162 footnote 74; *ibid.*, p. 421.

21. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. II, p. 428. Vol. IV, p. 1211.

22. *Nitzavim* 30:15-19.

before you today life and good, death evil... and you shall choose life.” The wording of the verse poses a problem: if a person can see for himself that the way of Torah and *mitzvos* is “life and good” then why is it necessary for him to be told to choose life? The answer: if a person’s choice to keep Torah and *mitzvos* is based on his intellect and his understanding that they are “life and good,” he has not yet achieved becoming an *oved* (servant of G-d). The concept of a true *oved* is that of one who acts only because the master has commanded him to do so,²³ and therefore true *avodas Hashem* is serving G-d only because G-d has commanded us to “choose life.”

However, since the verse begins with the words, “See — I have placed before you...” and also finishes with the words: “choose life” it is clear that it is the will of G-d that Torah and *mitzvos* should permeate the entire being, and it is therefore necessary that the intellect, also, must appreciate that Torah and *mitzvos* is “life and good.” To summarize: there must be both dimensions. The foundation must be *kabbalas ol*, and inherent in that *kabbalas ol* is the fact that it is the will of G-d that the Torah should also be understood intellectually.

5. We will now understand the connection of the verse “Let us make man” with Bar Mitzvah. In the explanation of the title “*Adam*” there are two dimensions: 1) “*Adam*” represents full intellectual maturity, as explained above; 2) “*Adam*” (אדם) has the same letters as “*m’od*,” (מ’וד)²⁴ the dimension of the infinite that transcends the intellect.²⁵ Since both concepts are represented in the same word, one must say that they are related to each other.

The idea in *avodah* is that even when a person reaches the highest levels of intellect as indicated by the title “*Adam*” — which is higher than the *seichel* of “*Ish*”, nonetheless, he must also attain the

23. See *Tanya*, Ch. 41.

24. *Bereishis Rabbah* 88:5; see *Rashi, ibid. Torah Or*, p. 46d; *Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim*, p. 29b; *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5637, Ch. 22.

25. *Likkutei Torah, ibid.* This entity expresses itself in the power of speech which stems from the power of the infinite invested in the soul which transcends intellect — *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5637, *ibid.*

level of *mesirus nefesh*, which transcends intellect.²⁶ And so is it in the obverse case. Even when he is illuminated with the powers of *mesirus nefesh* which transcend intellect, he should not rest content with that level, rather he should also strive to make this *mesirus nefesh* permeate his inner powers and, primarily, his intellect.

And this is one of the reasons why the *Rebbeim* said a *maamar* beginning with the words “Let us make man (*Adam*)” on the occasion of a Bar Mitzvah, to show that even when one has reached a level of intellectual maturity — “*Ish*”—it is not enough, one has still to strive for the level of *mesirus nefesh* indicated in the words “*Ish charbo*” each one his sword, an *avodah* of *mesirus nefesh* that transcends intellect, which is connected with the level of “*Adam*”—the same letters as “*m’od*.”²⁷

- From the *sicha* of Tammuz 5711, at the celebration of a Bar Mitzvah.

26. See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5672, Vol. I, Ch. 100.

27. See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5670, p. 122 where it is explained that the level of *daas* stems from *ratzon* and *pnimiyus haratzon*. This fits in very well with that which has been explained that the level of *mesirus nefesh* “*m’od*” being the same letters as *Adam*, transcending intellect applied to a thirteen year old who has reached a level of *deah*.