

"Bar/Bat Mitzvahed" and Married as Experiential Verbs

Whether we like it or not, complain about it or not-***"Bar/Bat Mitzvahed"*** is an experiential verb for our people. We are symbolic exemplars of the God who is the source of Mitzvah. As God's representatives we need to be comfortable with that power and the priceless opportunity. to build Jewish life that the experiential verb ***"Bar/Bat Mitzvahed"*** gives us. Our discomfort with the "fact" that we ***"Bar/Bat Mitzvahed"*** them is another area in which we shy away from the power that we are vested with, a power which is an indispensable part of being a rabbi.

We all know what an experiential verb means. I had a wonderful Jewish education. Ramaz, (a modern Orthodox day school, which luckily did not have school on Sunday, which my father loved because to him, Sunday was family day, Massad (a Hebrew speaking camp for those too young to know.), yet experientially it was Rabbi Joseph Spevack z'l who ***Bar Mitzvahed"*** me on that Shabbat Shuvah, Parshat Haazinu, many years ago.

I know that I could have married my first wife, according to Halachah by doing one of a sometimes embarrassing variety of things in the presence of two witnesses. Experientially I was ***married by*** Rabbis Abraham Halpern, z"l and Bernard Lipnick, assisted by Rabbis Neil Gillman, Shelly Schiffman, Alexander Goldstein z'l, and Moshe Tutnauer z'l. That their ***marrying us*** only held for 22 years is not a comment on them or the Halachah.

The second time around, Rabbis Joseph Glaser z'l and Rabbi Alan Lovins, ***married*** Ingrid and me. We take it for granted that the clergy who do that, have the authorization of the state to engage in the act of marrying two people to one another. That is legally true and is represented in the English expression used by virtually all officiants. rabbis included, who under the rules of whatever jurisdiction they find themselves in, which has determined who may marry folks to one another recite;

"Therefore By The Authority Vested in me"¹

I do pronounce you...Husband and Wife

It is essentially irrelevant that the item of value, which must pass between the two parties, (albeit in the presence of two witnesses) “marries” the loving couple in a “modern” up to date venue.

Ingrid and I, after I bought the rings joyfully exchanged them in private.

My ring reads;

JACK♥ INGRID followed by **פְּרָט**, the German word for treasure, used as a term of endearment between those who love one another. **Ingrid’s ring reads; INGRID♥JACK** with **פְּרָט** following. Despite this beautiful and to us meaningful exchange, accepting symbols of who we are, and what our love and commitment to each other was and is, we did not under Jewish or civil law marry each other. We were *married* by two rabbis. authorized “legally to do so by both State and Halachah. Those are experiential facts. We all experience many such events in our lives.

We are not living in 19th century Eastern Europe when all that was needed was for a child to be called to the Torah to mark his new legal status in a community in which everyone shared a common religious and cultural heritage. We are not living on the lower east side in early 20th century America, where one was called to the Torah on a Thursday morning in recognition of having passed one’s 13th birthday, recited the b'rachot, had a piece of herring and then headed to the sweat shop, to sew on shirt collars.

The experiential fact that we as rabbis **“Bar/BatMitzvah”** our young, offers us a number of priceless opportunities. Among these are; conducting an induction ceremony to Jewish adulthood; setting standards for that induction; using our pulpit presence to make the ceremony a community of Israel celebration which the family celebrates because their child has been inducted into the community of Israel; rather than a family celebration only; using the leverage on the **“Bar/BatMitzvah”** and the attendant congregation to persuade and coax or whatever else works, the new teenager toward furthering one’s adult Jewish education; blessing our young people; making a lifetime mark on them by creating a synagogue experience they will never forget; and yes, though it is not technically so, owning and using our own power to **“Bar/Bat Mitzvah”** a young person.

I would have preferred if *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* age were 18. That is not so, though we would do well to create another ceremony at age 18, that would be a bookend for *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* at 13. We dare not abdicate to either the family or the caterers what the folk have decided is a precious birthday.

However it might have been in the past, however it might be legally, becoming an adult Jew in this society is a process and not a given fact. We have only to check in with those of our kids who talk about who "*Bar/Bat Mitzvahed*" them or where they were "*Bar/Bat Mitzvahed*". All we need to do is look around to know how true that is. Being symbolic exemplars of the God of Israel gives us power to influence that process. Experientially we have the power to "*Bar/Bat Mitzvah*" each young person. We abandon that power at our peril and the peril of our people.

1. In the Central Conference of American Rabbis manual of 1988;

I (the rabbi) therefore pronounce you, ___and you____married in keeping with the laws of _____

2. In the Rabbinical Assembly Manual of 1998...

."In accordance with the laws of this (Commonwealth/Province/State) of _____, you_____and you, _____, are now husband and wife.

Yes, experientially, we *marry* them.
And hopefully years earlier we "*Bar/Bat Mitzvahed*" them.

Jack H Bloom