



Harry Golden's "Only In America"

A DRASHA....

Time passes all too quickly.

Fortunately the passage of time has its rewards as well.

The years may have been difficult, as they have been no doubt with all men, but all troubles fade it seems into forgetfulness when we stand on the threshold of naches. First there was the naches

of leading the children to the chupa, and now the first-born of the grandchildren is about to enter the Jewish fold as a full-fledged member at the age of thirteen.

There were moments of course of fear and apprehension. What would the path of our young be in a country whose divergent cultural currents are so frightening-

ly strong? Would they walk in the path of their parents or would they seek their own ways no matter what their direction?

No man carries the secret of the future. But a generation whose children still walk to the altar of the bar mitzva need not despair of what lies ahead.

There are those who would abolish the ceremonial in bar mitzva observance or even the bar mitzva ritual itself. The vote in this corner is a resounding no, not alone because it would deprive us of festive moments in a world of darkness but primarily because it would mark the breaking of a most significant link in the chain of Jewish living, of Jewish hemshech, continuity.

The origin of the term bar mitzva in the modern sense rests in obscurity. In Biblical times the age of responsibility began at twenty and wherever the word bar mitzva appears in the Talmud it simply refers to an adult. Most likely the term bar mitzva as we understand it today was first introduced in the 14th century. According to the late Dr. Solomon Schechter, the word bar mitzva in its present connotation was unknown to the Talmud, the Geonim and even to Moses Maimonides, who liv-

ed in the 12th century.

Nor does anyone know the exact origin of the bar mitzva speech custom. However, the first reference to this custom appears to have been made in the 16th century by Solomon Lurie, but most likely it goes back to a somewhat earlier period.

If we know little about the origin of the speech-making custom, we are not wholly in the dark about the origin of another bar mitzva custom -- party making. That custom was originated by the Jewish community in Germany late in the 16th century and it spread like wildfire throughout the Jewish communities in Europe. Obviously everybody liked a party even then. Life was dull and bleak for Jews in those days and when they found reason for joviality they would not of course cast it aside.

In time, however, the custom of making bar mitzva parties spread so widely that it became an economic burden on the Jewish communities. To use a modern coinage, the party became a status symbol and even the poorest of Jews would not forego the distinction. In time the practice ran out of hand, compelling the Jewish community of Cracow, Poland, to place a community tax on bar mitzva affairs in the hope of curtailing the attendant extravagance.

Let this, then, be my drasha at the bar mitzva of Leigh Jonathan Ziprin.

The PTA

The school teachers are getting smarter. At the monthly PTA meeting the more experienced teachers advise the new ones, "Keep talking until the bell rings. Do not allow a lull in the proceedings. The moment a parent rises to say something, interrupt. Say, 'By the way, there's another point I must make now.' Just keep chattering."

The teachers are learning. Recently a parent ask-

ed a teacher, "And how is my little Lloyd doing?" and the teacher said, "Oh, playing the fool as usual."

Usually teachers say, "fine" because the parent asks this question in front of all the other parents, expecting a standard answer. But this teacher fooled them.

Teachers resent those calls at dinner time, the callers asking what they think of the college boards? How about looking at that examination paper again? Maybe it was a mistake marking Lloyd?

Some of the teachers say, "I never discuss school problems over the telephone. I'll be glad to see you after school."

There's more guts in the I'll brick schoolhouse, less intimidation. The teachers are professionals. Doctors and lawyers don't take any guff; why should teachers?

One of the answers to how to make high school a serious preparation for what is yet to come is to transform every single high school into a working democracy, a working democracy insofar as the age of the child permits.

Young people should feel it in their bones and practice it. The principal should practice it in their work with the administrative officials.

Children should conduct meetings based on Roberts' Rules of Order, learning to listen without boos or cat-calls. Every child should have a chance to express himself and have a turn at chairing.

One of the reasons children behave badly is because parents too often criticize the teacher openly. Parents should understand their children often exaggerate; they should be skeptical about what their offspring reports about school and teacher.

Children enjoy exciting parents, the parents must learn the children also tell their teacher about what goes on in the home. If parents

knew it was a two-way street they would not criticize the teacher in front of their children.

When the teachers listen to the stuff the kids tell about their mothers and their fathers, they understand the source and do not react. But the parents are not professionals, they do not have this understanding. They open their big blue eyes at anything the kid says about the teacher and grab for the telephone to relay this gossip.

In my passion for better education in America I am certain that some of my observations misfire once in a while and are faulty, but at least I try all the time.

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