

A CHILD'S OBLIGATION IN MITZVOS

EMOR

VAESCHANAN

EKEV

RE'EH

CHINUCH / LEARNING TORAH / BIRKAS HAMAZON / SUKKAH
WOMEN'S REWARD FOR TORAH LEARNING / PREPARATION FOR A
MITZVAH / HELPING PERFORM A MITZVAH / OBLIGATIONS MIN
HATORAH / OBLIGATIONS MIDERABANAN

לע"נ זאב אר"י ע"ה בן יבלחט"א שניאור זלמן גליק

In Hilchos Talmud Torah the Rambam¹ writes, “Someone who wasn’t taught Torah by his father is obligated to learn when he reaches the age that he can understand, as it says in the passuk, ‘ולמדתם אותם...ושמרתם לעשות,’ that you need to learn Torah before doing mitzvos.”

The Tzemach Tzedek points out in his chidushim on the Rambam, that the Rambam doesn’t write “כשיגדיל”, when he grows up, rather “כשיכיר,” when he comes to an age of understanding. This means as soon as he reaches the age that he can understand what he learns, which may already be before Bar Mitzvah, he is mechuyav in Talmud Torah.

The question arises, how can there be a chiyuv on someone before they are Bar Mizvah?

2 We find a similar concept elsewhere, by the mitzvos that a child does because of chinuch.

There is a story brought down in Brachos² about Rabbi Shimon ben Shotach. King Yannai wanted him to bentch for the people eating, even though Rabbi Shimon hadn’t eaten a kezayis and was only mechuyav to bentch miderabanan, and King Yannai was mechuyav mideoraysa.

Rashi asks on this story, “How can someone who is only mechuyav miderabanan be motzi someone who has a chiyuv mideoraysa? We know that only a person that is mechuyav badavar (obligated in the same thing) is able to be motzi someone else.” He answers, “Since Rabbi Shimon



1. 2, 1

2. 48a

had a chiyuv (even though it was only miderabanan) he was considered a mechuyav badavar and was able to be motzi King Yannai.”

Rashi continues and asks, “Earlier, it is implied that a child cannot be motzi an adult. Isn’t a child mechuyav miderabanan due to the mitzvah of Chinuch? Why can he not be motzi an adult?” Rashi answers, that the reason a child can’t be motzi an adult is because the chiyuv of chinuch is not on the child, rather his father has a chiyuv to educate him, and if the child doesn’t have any chiyuv, obviously he wouldn’t be considered mechuyav badavar.

Tosfos, however, disagree and hold that a child can be motzi an adult, as long it is a mitzvah miderabanan, as the chiyuv of chinuch is a mitzvah miderabanan on the child himself. Therefore since both the child and the adult are mechuyav miderabanan, the child can be motzi the adult.

The result is, that according to Rashi, when a child does a mitzvah because of chinuch, it “doesn’t count” as a mitzvah. However according to Tosfos, it is a mitzvah miderabanan. This is also how the Rambam paskens.³ The practical difference is, as above, whether he could be considered a mechuyav badavar and therefore could be motzi someone else.

On this we have the same question as before, how can there be a chiyuv on a child, who is not Bar Mitzvah, up to the point that he can be motzi an adult (even if it is only with a miderabanan?)



3. Hilchos Brachos 5, 15-16

3 We can understand this by first explaining the concept of “מכשירי מצוה” (things that are required to prepare for a mitzvah):

In Talmud Yerushalmi⁴ there is a halachah that when someone prepares their lulav or builds their sukkah they need to recite the brachah, “אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעשות סוכה” or “לעשות לולב.”

The question is, if Hashem gave us a mitzvah to dwell in the sukkah and to shake the lulav, and not to bind the lulav or build the sukkah, how can we say tzivanu? The answer is, that since these steps are necessary to do fulfil the mitzvah, they become part of the mitzvah.

(However, we pasken according to the Talmud Bavli, that machshirei mitzvah are not themselves mitzvos. Nevertheless, they are considered part of the mitzvah they are necessary for, and are still called “mitzvah.” We therefore find in Menachos⁵ regarding preparing tefillin that “Any mitzvah (action) that doesn’t complete the mitzvah does not require a brachah,” and the Gemara uses the lashon of mitzvah for this preparation.)

There is a similar concept with enabling others to mitzvos. With regards to talmud Torah, the Alter Rebbe writes⁶ that someone who is not able to learn the whole day should pay someone else to learn, and it is considered as if he himself learnt the entire day. We also find that women, who are not mechuyav in talmud Torah, can still get the mitzvah by helping their husbands and children with their learning.



4. Brachos 9, 3

5. 42b

6. 3, 4

In the lashon of the Alter Rebbe, “If she helps her husband or son physically or otherwise she receives a part of their reward, as they are fulfilling their obligation through her.”

4 In the Yerushalmi that we mentioned earlier, the building of the sukkah or the binding of the lulav, while one does say a brachah, it isn't the same brachah as the mitzvah itself. This is because there is, after all, no mitzvah to do these things, rather they are a necessary step to fulfill the mitzvos which they are a preparation for.

This is the chiddush by the mitzvah of chinuch, that the mitzvah is for the father to educate his son, and therefore the son keeping mitzvos as he is taught is fulfilling the mitzvah of chinuch for his father! Without the son the father cannot keep the mitzvah of chinuch, nor does even have the mitzvah.

This means that the father's mitzvah of chinuch is only fulfilled when the son does mitzvos as educated by his father. Therefore, the mitzvos that the son does have the same importance as the mitzvah of chinuch that the father has.

5 We can now understand the opinion of Tosfos and the Rambam that a child can be motzi an adult by bentching (if the bentching is a chiyuv miderabanan). Since the child is mechuyav because of chinuch, and by bentching he is fulfilling his father's mitzvah (miderabanan) of chinuch, his bentching has the same importance as the chiyuv miderabanan of the other person who he is motzi.

(All this was only talking about a mitzvah miderabanan, however there is an even bigger chiddush, that we find a similar rule with regards to a mitzvah mideoraysa: About the chiyuv of simchas Yomtov for a woman,⁷ Rashi writes that the chiyuv is only for a husband to make sure his wife is happy. Tosfos disagree and hold that since this chiyuv of simchas Yomtov is through her eating the meat from the korbanos, the wife also has a chiyuv to eat the korban. According to this we can say that,)

This is the explanation for that which the Tzemach Tzedek writes, that there could be a chiyuv on the child to learn Torah. Since Talmud Torah is different from all other mitzvos, in the sense that it is the only mitzvah that is a chiyuv from the Torah for a father to be mechanech his son, as opposed to all other mitzvos where the chiyuv of chinuch is miderabanan, as the Alter Rebbe writes in the beginning of Hilchos Talmud Torah, therefore the learning of Torah by the son is fulfilling the mitzvah mideoraysa of “ולמדתם אותם את בניכם.”

6 From all the above we can see the importance of chinuch, that it can even bring a young child into the category of a mekayem mitzvos, through him keeping mitzvos as he is taught. And when he learns Torah he is able to become connected with Torah. This all shows that through chinuch you can change the entire metzius of a child.



7. Rosh Hashanah 6b

STUDY AID

1. The Rambam writes that there is a chiyuv for a child to learn Torah, and the Tzemach Tzedek explains that this is even under Bar Mitzvah. This raises the question of how there can be a chiyuv for someone under Bar Mitzvah?
2. Similar question regarding a katan being motzi a gadol in brachos.
3. The preparations for a mitzvah are part of the mitzvah.
4. The chiddush of chinuch is that a child has a part in the mitzvah.
5. We can now explain how a child has a chiyuv.
6. The lesson in the importance of chinuch.

Source:

לקוטי שיחות חלק י"ז קדושים ד