

When is a Bar Mitzvah in a Leap Year?

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The Jewish calendar has 12 months. In a leap year, there are 13 months. Each month has either 29 or 30 days, and the first month is the month of Nissan (Shemos 12:2.) If a boy is born on the 29th of Cheshvan (in a year when Cheshvan has 29 days) he becomes a bar mitzvah on his birthday even if that year Cheshvan has 30 days. The fact that it isn't the last day of the month is halachically irrelevant.

Born in a Regular Year, Bar Mitzvah in a Leap Year

What if a boy is born in the 12th month, Adar, in a year that has 12 months, and becomes a bar mitzvah in a year that has 13 months? Logically, he should become a bar mitzvah in the 12th month, just as the boy in the previous example becomes a bar mitzvah on the 29th day of the month. The fact that it isn't the last month of the year should be irrelevant. In fact, the Pri Chadash (OC 55:10) quotes the Maharash HaLevi who rules that he does become a bar mitzvah in the first month of Adar, the 12th calendar month. However, the Rama rules that he becomes a bar mitzvah in the second month of Adar, the 13th month of the year.

The Mishna Brurah (55:45) states that the gemara (Megillah 6b) supports the ruling of the Rama. The Gemara there discusses whether, in a leap year, the megillah should be read in Adar I, the first opportunity to do so, or Adar II, based on the reasoning of celebrating the redemption of Purim and Pesach in consecutive months, and concludes to read it in the second Adar. Therefore, just as the megillah is read in Adar II and not Adar I, so too a boy doesn't become a bar mitzvah until Adar II.

This proof is questionable, as the plain reading of the gemara is that both months have the status of Adar. In fact, the Rama himself rules (568:7) that a yahrtzeit for one who passed away in Adar during a 12-month year is observed at the first possible opportunity, in Adar I, in a leap year, while the Gra (568:16) rules that it should be observed in both months.

Therefore, if a boy born in Adar becomes a bar mitzvah in Adar, it should occur in Adar I, the first opportunity, according to the Rama. In fact, since the months in the Torah are numbered and not named, the paradigm of 29 and 30 day months should apply. This, too, indicates that the bar mitzvah should occur in month 12, Adar I, parallel to the 29th day of Cheshvan. The existence of a subsequent day, or month, in the bar mitzvah year should be irrelevant.

The Pri Chadash suggests a support for the opinion of the Rama from the Yerushalmi (Megillah 1:5) which suggests, in the context of the requirement to bring an animal as a korban within a year of its birth, that Adar I is the added month, and therefore an animal born in Adar can be brought until Adar II of the following year. So too, he writes, the 13th year of a boy born in Adar isn't reached until Adar II. How can this be explained?

Perhaps there is a set number of 12 months in a year, and in a leap year the 12th month occurs twice, 12a and 12b. Since, according to the Yerushalmi, 12a is the additional month, the bar mitzvah status is not conferred until 12b, otherwise known as Adar II.

This innovative definition of a year may help answer another question as well. The Mishna Brurah (55:45) rules that a boy born on the 30th day of Cheshvan who becomes a bar mitzvah in a year where Cheshvan has 29 days becomes a bar mitzvah on the 1st day of Kislev and not on the 29th day of Cheshvan. The fact that Kislev is the next month is irrelevant for this case.

Born in a Leap Year, Bar Mitzvah in a Regular Year

What is the halacha in the reverse case, where a boy is born in Adar II and becomes a bar mitzvah in a "regular" year with only 12 months? Logically, based on the previous example, he should become a bar mitzvah on the first of Nissan, just as he becomes a bar mitzvah on the 1st of Kislev if he was born on the 30th day of Cheshvan. The fact that it's not the same month he was born in should be irrelevant, as it was for the boy born on the 30th day of Cheshvan. In fact, Rav Hershel Schachter shlit"a (B'ikvei Hatzon p. 12) does suggest such a position.

However, the Shulchan Aruch (55:10) assumes that the boy becomes a bar mitzvah in Adar. How can this be explained? Perforce, we define his birth month of Adar II as month 12b, the last month of the year, not the 13th. Therefore, he would become a bar mitzvah in Adar, the 12th and last month of the year.

Born in a Leap Year, Bar Mitzvah in a Leap Year

What if a boy is born in Adar I and becomes a bar mitzvah in a leap year? Most authorities rule (Mishna Brurah 55:43) that since he was born in Adar I he becomes bar mitzvah in Adar I. However, the Magen Avraham (55:10) disagrees. He is of the opinion that the 13th year ends in Adar II, one year after the boy's 12th birthday, since Adar I is considered the additional month. Just as an animal born in Adar I can be offered until Adar II, so too the boy would become a bar mitzvah in Adar II. The fact that he was born in Adar I is irrelevant. This position seems perfectly logical and perhaps should be followed.

Born on Rosh Chodesh Kislev

What if a boy is born on the 1st day of Kislev in a year when Cheshvan had 29 days, and becomes a bar mitzvah in a year when Cheshvan has 30 days? The Mishna Brurah (55:45) rules that he becomes a bar mitzvah on the 30th day of Cheshvan, while the Sha'arei Teshuva (55:11) disagrees and holds that he becomes a bar mitzvah on the same calendar day he was born, the 1st day of Kislev. How can the Mishna Brurah's position be explained?

The answer lies in the precise formulation of the Shulchan Aruch (55:9). A boy must be 13 years and one day old to be a bar mitzvah. In this context, the Mishna Brurah (55:42) explains that one day means that the 13 years have passed and that the first day of the 14th year has begun.

If a boy is born on the 1st day of Kislev in a year when Cheshvan had 29 days, then 13 years have passed on the 29th day of Cheshvan, the anniversary of the day before he was born. On the next day, he becomes a bar mitzvah, whether it is the 1st day of Kislev or the 30th of Cheshvan. The first day of the 14th year has begun even when the anniversary of his birth, the 1st day of Kislev, is not until the next day.

Born on Rosh Chodesh Adar

What if a boy is born on the 30th day of Adar I, and becomes a bar mitzvah in a plain year when Adar has only 29 days? This seems to resemble the aforementioned case of a boy born on the 30th day of Cheshvan who becomes a bar mitzvah in a year where Cheshvan only has 29 days. As noted, the Mishna Brurah (55:45) rules he becomes a bar mitzvah on the first day of Kislev. Here too, since Adar has only 29 days, he becomes a bar mitzvah on the 1st day of Nissan.

However, the Binyan Zion (158) rules that he becomes a bar mitzvah on the first day of Rosh Chodesh Adar, which is the 30th day of Shevat, since he was born on the first day of Rosh Chodesh Adar. This novel view, which makes him a bar mitzvah over a month earlier, is based on an unproven thesis that the status of Rosh Chodesh can determine a birth day.

On this basis, the Binyan Zion rules that a boy born on the first day of Rosh Chodesh Adar in a 12-month year becomes a bar mitzvah on the first day of Rosh Chodesh Adar II in a leap year, based on the opinion of the Rama that those born in a regular Adar become bnei mitzvah in Adar II in a leap year.

If the status of Rosh Chodesh is not a determining factor, the boy would become a bar mitzvah a full month earlier. Since he was born on the 30th day of Shevat, he would become a bar mitzvah on the 30th day of Shevat, which is the first day of Rosh Chodesh Adar I.

May the double Adar of this year increase the joy that Adar heralds in, in particular the joy of learning Hashem's Torah.