

## **When is someone grown up?**

Erev RH 2022

Rabbi Nancy Rita Myers

A Jewish mother calls out, “Wake up, David! You’ve got to go to school!”

David sheepishly replies, “I don’t want to.” Shaking him, “Dovid, you have to get up.”

With arms crossed over his chest, he exclaims, “Give me one reason that I have to go to school.” Shaking her head, the mother replies, “Because you are fifty-two years old and the principal!”

When is someone considered to be a grown up? For sure, one who is middle-aged certainly is but at what age does one cross over from being a child to an adult? Is it eighteen, twenty one, or thirty? In Judaism, we are well aware of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony celebrating how a thirteen year old has come of age. More specifically in the Talmud, we are taught that when a girl turns twelve and a boy turns thirteen, they are responsible for following God’s mitzvot, God’s commandments. Close to this ceremony, I tell our youth that they are now responsible for all the things they do. God no longer holds their parents responsible for their actions. As a Jewish adult, they now get all the privileges such as being called up for an Aliyah, counted as part of a minyan, and being a witness for religious document such as a Ketubah. These young teenagers look more like a child than an adult and we know that despite this ceremony, they haven’t grow up quite yet.

To be an adult in the United States, for the most part, is to be eighteen years of age. This is the time that one can move out on their own, vote, enlist in the military, or as I have warned my kids, be incarcerated. And so, be careful you, young adults. At eighteen, though, most of our kids are not living independently. They are hopefully in college, a trade school, or starting to work. In our country, the drinking age is interestingly not at eighteen but rather at 21. And then if you want to rent a car, one must be twenty five.

Why twenty five? Is this when one becomes an adult? According to more recent understandings from neuro biology, our brains do not mature at 13, 18, nor at 21 but closer to twenty five. Yes, according to Sandra Aamodt, a neuroscientist, who states that, “So the changes that happen between 18 and 25 are a continuation of the process that starts around puberty, and 18 year olds are about halfway through that process. Their prefrontal cortex is not yet fully developed. That’s the part of the brain that helps you to inhibit impulses and to plan and organize your behavior to reach a goal.”<sup>1</sup> She explains that around age 25 our brain’s reward system matures and so we become more circumspect in uncertain situations.

This helps explain why late teens and young adults, can be more impulsive and risk taking. The idea that it takes a while for people to mature into full-fledged adults is not surprising to any of us who have children of that age or who like to reminisce on our own youthful days. In retrospect, we may gasp at our own stupidity from decades ago or reminisce gleefully at our folly but then again our brains were still maturing.

On that note, perhaps not everything needs to be divulged to our children. There's an SNL skit from this past Mother's day, called, Just Like You<sup>2</sup>, where a mother is chastising her teenage daughter about coming home from a party where she drank some alcohol. The mother insists that she never drank even a sip at her age. Then a clip shows the young mother as a youth partying it up. The grandmother enters the room and declares as she looks at her granddaughter that there are ways a young lady should act. And then a clip shows Grandma as a young woman at David Bowie concert throwing her panties at the performer. Basically the skit demonstrates that even parents and grandparents were young once.

I'll never forget my grandfather, Saul Myers, the wise patriarch of our family who worked so hard over the years to provide for his family. One day we were talking about college and he made a reference to bootlegging in his fraternity during the prohibition. My eyes grew wide. How can this be? My grandfather whom we all admire and look up to was engaging in illegal activity as a young man. Well, it can be.

When is someone grown up? Interestingly, in the Talmud, there is another demarcation of when one is considered an adult. There's a situation where one's adult son/daughter finds something of value and the question is who gets to keep it. One who is a minor must turn over the found item to their father. However, Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba in the words of Rabbi Yohanan asserts that the word, 'adult' in the Mishna is not referring to an actual adult but rather one who is **סמוך על שלחן אביו** still dependent on his father's table for support. A person still being supported by his father is considered, in this case, as a minor and must turn over the found item. The phrase, **סמוך על שלחן אביו**, dependent his father's table, is an intriguing one.<sup>3</sup>

What does that mean today? For sure, an adult child living with us counts. One whom we provide essential financial support counts. I find it fascinating that over 1500 years ago, some of our ancestors were also supporting their 'adult' like kids as well. And so, this was a relevant topic then as it is today.

For you, when is one grown up? Is it an age thing? Is it one who has graduated college and is paying his/her own bills? Is it when one is married or has children of their own? There are different ways to look at this as we reflect on our children and our own lives. One can make the argument that no matter how old your children become, you will still see them as, well, children. My grandmother, Elsie, in her old age would gleefully make my father his favorite chocolate roll

whipped cream cake and see him as her little, “Jim’elle.” Even though he was middle age with kids in college, still, she fussed over him.

For me, when my kids have finished college and are able to support themselves, I will see them as full adults even though that won’t stop me one iota from giving them lots of unsolicited advice and worrying about them. Parental prerogative.

As I reflect on my life, I wonder when did I feel like a grown up. I certainly didn’t feel like an adult in college. Yes, I did well in my academic classes and took seriously my summer jobs, but still had lots of fun. Even in rabbinical school, I felt a bit like an imposter at my student pulpit in Dubois, PA where the congregants called me rabbi. It was uncomfortable for me because until I led services, I had never actually sat through an entire Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur service. To be fair though my parents always brought me to Herkimer, NY where my grandparent’s synagogue was very conservative and the morning worship could go on for four hours. Even when I was ordained and I got a full time pulpit in the suburbs of Chicago, I’m not sure I felt like an adult. Even when I purchased my first car, a home, and got married, I not sure that I believed that I was grown up.

It really didn’t hit home for me until I became a mother to Gabriel. I remember holding her in my arms in my home in I.L. and thinking that I had crossed some kind of imaginary line in the sand. For years, I took delight in being a little rebellious, skirting my parent’s rules or advice, and now I realized that I am responsible for her. I am now the enforcer of rules and safety. Gosh, it was more fun to be on the other side of things.

Even though it is undeniable that I am a grown up, I still feel like a kid at times. How many of you are still in touch with that fun loving youth within? It’s a rare day when Aaron Kern doesn’t have a joke to share. David Smith commented in his words on the bimah at his daughter Sophia’s Bat Mitzvah, that now that she is a grown up, he looks up to her because he is striving to be one too. Afterwards, I laughed with him that I am still inspiring to grow up too to which he answered, “Naw, I don’t want to be a grown up, I only said that for the audience.”

Do you want to grow up? Perhaps for those of us who are responsible in our work and family, can let inner child laugh. Maybe on some level, we haven’t fully grown up yet and that’s a good thing. We ask children, what do you want to be when you grow up. Oh, they readily give answers such as firefighter, astronaut, truck driver and more. Josh Pinkwasser’s father, Rabbi David Pinkwasser, always wanted to be a flight attendant. And so he retired early and got to live his dream of being on airplanes as a middle aged man. If I were to ask you what do you aspire to do, accomplish, or to be, how would you answer?

Maybe growing up is a process that doesn’t have to end. Dreams can continue, aspirations can still flourish. I point out to my adult children examples of congregants who have their fun, work in their professions, and are loving spouses and parents. Eric Schiffer, Phillip Schnell,

Robin & Mulu Harrison, when they are able, love to act and sing. And they are quite good at it. Keep an eye on the Shavua tov for their next performances. Life doesn't have to be drudgery. There are things we can learn, new things we can do. For some of you it's travel, culinary discoveries, developing your green thumb, volunteering, philanthropy, or new work initiatives. Anne Katz, for one, is a talented poet and we see her writing in our Women of Beth David service. Monty Fisher is back from South America filming his latest movie, Jews of the Amazon. Lois Abrams took up the ukulele in recent years and still enjoys playing.

For me, when I grow up, I still want to be a rabbi of course but I would like to become a good writer as well. Yes, I finished my novel, *Awake, Awake, Deborah!* but I would like to develop the skills to do more. I feel like I have a lot of passion and ideas that I would like to express in words.

It feels rather important as we move through life to have something that keeps that spark of life lit. Growing older doesn't mean that we can't be learning, living, and experiencing new things. Why should the young have all the fun? I know we are aware of taking care of our health and finances and we worry about the people we love but still sometimes we need to take off the jacket of responsibility if only for a little bit, feel the breeze of excitement, and to know that we still have much growing up to do.

There's a famous teaching out of Pirkei Avot, chapters of our fathers, the 3rd century collection of the wisdom of the ancient rabbis. In chapter five<sup>4</sup> we see a description of milestones or things to strive for in every age.

JUDAH B. TEMA USED TO SAY ρνυτ ωηω τυω τυη, ιχ ωσυωη

ΑΝΦ ΙΧ At age 5, one studies Bible. This suggests that one is ready for formal learning. This could be seen as starting Kindergarten.

ΡΑΥ ΙΧ At ten one is old enough to study the Mishna. This is the beginning of learning about rabbinic Judaism.

,υμνκ ωραγ ακα ιχ At thirteen, one is responsible for the mitzvot. Yes, this is the age of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, however the ceremony can still take place even years later as our adult Bnei Mitzvah students can testify.

ωραγ ανφ ιχ At fifteen, one studies Talmud. Now one is ready for in depth studies.

ωραγ ωβυνα ιχ At eighteen, one is ready for marriage. Well, I think most of us would disagree with getting married at such a young age. Especially since our life spans are longer and we hope our children to be independent first.

;υσρκ οηραγ ιχ At twenty, one begins a career. Or for us, one is moving through college or trade school.

/φφκ οηακα ιχ At thirty, one is at the height of one's powers. Yes, how did you feel at thirty? I felt physically quite good, less than in my twenties, but we always have the tendency to compare ourselves with the past. I often think that instead of comparing myself when I was ten years younger, perhaps I should imagine myself a decade older and then be at peace about where I am at today.

ωβηχκ οηγχερτ ιχ At forty, one achieves understanding [bina]. There is a deeper understanding after four decades.

ωμγκ οηανφ ιχ At fifty, one is prepared to give wise counsel [aitzah]. Yes, after five decades, we now have some significant life experience. We at least can tell others what not to do and how not to repeat the mistakes that we have made.

ωβεζκ οηαα ιχ At sixty, one is given the deference of seniority. Hmmm, I'm looking forward to my sixties and the senior discounts that will be available to me.

ωχηακ οηγχα ιχ At seventy, one is considered a sage. Wisdom can only come with experience and hopefully after 7 decades of life, one can help instruct others from the lessons of their lives.

ωρυχδκ οηβυνα ιχ Eighty is the age of heroic strength. We hope that we have physical and mental capabilities as we reach our eight decade of life. It's hard because by this point we have lost loved ones but hopefully we can look back on decades of friendship and even take pride in the generations of our families.

And then, we say the hope that *ad meah esrim*, until 120 like Moses, expressing that we and others will be full of vitality for the rest of our natural lives.

Growing up is complicated to be sure. For us trying to fluff the feathers of our adult children as we prepare them to fly solo, can be challenging. However, we all do our best in helping prepare them for rigors of responsibility. And then for us, we try to do what we must as we strive to find joy and purpose at every stage and age of life. The years, months, and days that God gives us, is a blessing. May we be able to utilize the time of our life spans for maximum meaning and happiness. And may we never fully grow up but have things that we can aspire to do in the year ahead. *Shanah Tovah*.

**Notes:****1 Neurobiology-25** <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=141164708>

Sandra Aamodt, neuroscientist and co-author of the book *Welcome to Your Child's Brain*.

COX: *Is this idea that the brains of 18 year olds aren't fully developed a matter of settled science?*

AAMODT: *Yes. The car rental companies got to it first, but neuroscientists have caught up and brain scans show clearly that the brain is not fully finished developing until about age 25.*

COX: *To not be too clinical in the spin that we put on this, what parts of the brain are we talking about and what changes happen between the ages of 18 and, let's say, 25?*

AAMODT: *So the changes that happen between 18 and 25 are a continuation of the process that starts around puberty, and 18 year olds are about halfway through that process. Their prefrontal cortex is not yet fully developed. That's the part of the brain that helps you to inhibit impulses and to plan and organize your behavior to reach a goal.*

*And the other part of the brain that is different in adolescence is that the brain's reward system becomes highly active right around the time of puberty and then gradually goes back to an adult level, which it reaches around age 25 and that makes adolescents and young adults more interested in entering uncertain situations to seek out and try to find whether there might be a possibility of gaining something from those situations.*

**2** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtHjmrWve0A>**3 Baba Metzia 12a-12b**

**MISHNA:** With regard to **the found item of one's minor son or daughter**, i.e., an ownerless item that they found; **the found item of his Canaanite slave or maidservant**; and **the found item of his wife, they are his**. By contrast, with regard to **the found item of one's adult son or daughter**; **the found item of his Hebrew slave or maidservant**; and **the found item of his ex-wife, whom he divorced, even if he has not yet given her payment of the marriage contract that he owes her, they are theirs**.

12b

The Gemara comments: **And Shmuel, in his above explanation of the mishna, disagrees with the opinion of Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba. As Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba says that Rabbi Yoḥanan says:** The word **adult** in the mishna **is not** referring to **an actual adult, and the word minor is not** referring to **an actual minor. Rather, with regard to an adult son who is dependent on the food of his father's table for support, this is considered a minor** in the context of the mishna. It is appropriate for one who is reliant on his father's support to give items that he finds to his father. And with regard to **a minor son who is not dependent on the food of his father's table for support, this is considered an adult** in this context, and any lost item that he finds is his.

**4 pirkei avot**

Chpt. 5 MISHNAH 21. Pirkei Avot:

JUDAH B. TEMA USED TO SAY ρνυτ ωηω τυω τνη, ιχ ωσυωη

/τρενκ οηβα ανφ ιχ

FIVE YEARS [IS THE AGE] FOR [THE STUDY OF] Bible,

TEN-FOR [THE STUDY OF] MISHNAH, /ωβανκ ραγ ιχ

/,υμνκ ωραγ ακα ιχ

THIRTEEN-FOR [BECOMING SUBJECT TO] COMMANDMENTS,

FIFTEEN-FOR [THE STUDY OF] TALMUD /συνκ,κ ωραγ ανφ ιχ

EIGHTEEN- FOR Marraige /ωπυφκ ωραγ ωβυνα ιχ

TWENTY — FOR PURSUING /;υσρκ οηραγ ιχ

THIRTY-one attains [FULL] STRENGTH /φφκ οηακα ιχ

FORTY — FOR UNDERSTANDING /ωβηχκ οηγχετ ιχ

FIFTY- FOR [ABILITY TO GIVE] COUNSEL /ωμγκ οηανφ ιχ

SIXTY-FOR MATURE AGE /ωβεζκ οηαα ιχ

SEVENTY-one reaches the fullness of age /ωχηακ οηγχα ιχ

EIGHTY one reaches strong old age /ωρυχεδκ οηβυνα ιχ