

Can a Father Take His Son's Bar Mitzvah Gift Money to Pay for the Bar Mitzvah?

Rav Baruch Fried

Question: Reuven is making a bar mitzvah. He has an idea that since the bar mitzvah will be very expensive, he'll use the gift money his son receives to pay for part of it. Is there any problem with him doing that?

Answer: Obviously, if the child agrees to go along with this, it wouldn't be a problem. The question would arise if the child doesn't agree or if the parent wants to do this without telling him.

Regarding the gifts that come in while the child is still a *katan*, the rule is that a *matanah* given to a minor is presumed to have been given with an understanding that the father has jurisdiction over it and can do whatever he wants with it. Thus, gifts that come in before the boy turns bar mitzvah can be used by the father towards the expenses, even without the son's consent.

Regarding gifts that came in after the child turned bar mitzvah, the opposite is true: the presumption is that such gifts are given to the child and the father has no halachic jurisdiction over them.

Having said that, there's another important factor. Once a child is six years old, the father has no real obligation to support them. Accordingly, the father can tell the child, "You can keep your bar mitzvah presents but from now on, supper will cost you \$10 a night, and room and board will be \$50 a night." Within a short while, all of the bar mitzvah money will belong to the father.

(Although Rav Moshe Feinstein writes in a famous *teshuva* that one of the obligations a husband accepts in his wife's *kesubah* is that he will support her children who are still living at home; however, if the wife is on board and agrees to it, the husband can use this strategy.)

Still, to do this, a conversation will need to be had with the child and the father cannot just take the money without discussing it with him.