Shalom Zachor

A Shalom Zachor is a party that is held on the first Friday night of a boy's life. Please read the article below, by The Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, for a brief overview of why we have this custom.

In Bereishit Chapter 25, we read how Esau came in from the field to find Jacob preparing a pot of lentils. The Midrash tells us that Abraham had just died and Jacob had made the stew with the mourners in mind. Rashi explains that just as lentils are closed, so, too, a mourner finds it difficult to open his or her mouth at a time of intense grief.

A similar reason is given for the custom to serve chick peas at a Shalom Zachar. According to the Taz, in the name of the Derisha, a *Shalom Zachar* is held on the Friday night following the birth of a baby boy as an act of consolation. The Gemara (Nidah 30b) states that a baby loses all his knowledge of Torah just prior to his birth. As he is now bereft of all that knowledge and spirituality, we come to console him through the Shalom Zachar.

Like lentils, chick peas are a food of comfort, seeing as they are round, symbolising the continuous cycle of life and they are closed, representing closed mouths, which are silenced through grief.

But why do we celebrate specifically on a Friday night and why just for a boy?

Another approach is presented by the Terumat Hadeshen, the first to refer to a *Shalom Zachar* as a *Seudat Mitzva*. The Rema, in the Shulchan Aruch, adds three crucial words, "*Nichnasim etzel hatinok*", which imply that the baby's presence is required for the celebration to take place in its purest form.

The Terumat Hadeshen explains that it is important for the baby to enjoy one Shabbat prior to his Brit Milah and the *Shalom Zachar* is celebrated in this context. Thus, there is no such celebration for a girl. We can add the following dimension to his explanation: Before entering the Covenant of Abraham the baby is given a beautiful and moving Shabbat experience. Just before he takes on the mantle of Jewish life, the *Shalom Zachar* presents to him the essence of true and authentic Judaism. The joy of Shabbat, with words of Torah, joyful singing and gracious hospitality reflect our finest attributes of faith, spirituality, consideration to others and community awareness.

The disruption to an already stretched household through the *Shalom Zachar* is worthwhile so that we can usher a new arrival into the world of the highest ideals of our faith.

We wish you mazel tov and every happiness with your new son. Don't forget to apply for a free baby gift pack [1] as well!

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