



Bar and Bat Mitzvah

There are many customs and ceremonies that happen during the life of a Jew. One of the most important is the Bar Mitzvah for boys, and the bat mitzvah for girls. It is the coming of age ceremony.





Bar Mitzvah



When a Jewish boy is 13, he starts his adult religious life. A Bar Mitzvah ceremony is held for him in the synagogue. Bar Mitzvah means 'Son of the Commandments'. The boy is called up to the Bimah to read from the Torah. Then he is blessed and reminded of his new duty to obey all the Jewish laws.



Boys read a prayer in English during their Bar Mitzvah ceremony. In this prayer, the boy states his commitment to the Jewish faith and community in public, witnessed by the rest of the congregation who are present at the ceremony.



Bat Mitzvah

Jewish girls are thought of as adults when they are 12 years old. To mark this, they have a ceremony called a Bat Mitzvah.



This ceremony did not develop until the beginning of the 20th Century. Like boys, girls often read aloud from the Torah, or give a speech based on the teachings of the Torah.



New Responsibilities

Once a person is Bar or Bat Mitzvah, they have the responsibilities of an adult Jew under Jewish law. These things include:

They are morally responsible for their own actions.

They can own what they possess as personal property.

They must follow the 613 laws of the Torah.

They are eligible to be called to read from the Torah, and to participate in a Minyan.

They are old enough to be legally married according to Jewish law.

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Gifts



As with weddings, it is common to give the boy or girl who is having the Bar or Bat Mitzvah a gift to commemorate the occasion. Traditionally, common gifts included books with religious or educational meanings, religious items, writing implements, savings bonds or gift certificates. Gifts of cash are more common in recent times.



Many Bar/Bat Mitzvah participants also receive their first tallit from their parents to be used for the occasion. A tallit is a beautifully made prayer shawl with tassels on each corner.

