

Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah



Bar Mitzvah literally translates from the Hebrew as Son of the Law, whereas Bat Mitzvah translates as Daughter of the Law.

Bar Mitzvah usually happens in a synagogue. It represents the coming of age of a Jewish boy when he is 13 years old. Some Jewish people will also have a Bat Mitzvah ceremony for Jewish girls when they are 12 years old, although this is not practised in all forms of Judaism. This ceremony represents the Jewish child beginning to follow Jewish laws and take on the obligations of the religion fully. They essentially become an adult from the perspective of the religion. They can start to take part in services in the synagogue and become a member

of the minyan (the ten men who are needed for worship to proceed within the synagogue). This will also mean that, according to Jewish law, they will also be able to get married and own property.

In preparation for the ceremony, the Jewish boy will visit the synagogue to attend lessons in how to read in Hebrew and understand how to read from the Torah. This is in preparation for reading the Torah for the first time in the synagogue.

The ceremony will take place on the Shabbat (sabbath) closest to the boy's 13th birthday. He will read from a portion of the Torah for the first time. This reading will be aloud for all his friends and family to hear in the synagogue. He will also wear the tefillin for the first time. These are the phylacteries, or prayer boxes, which are made of leather and the straps wound around the arm. They are used in Jewish prayer and worship.

The rabbi will say some words about the importance of this ceremony and welcome the boy into adulthood within the Jewish faith. A prayer will be recited by the boy's father to give thanks for his boy now coming of age and becoming an adult. The ceremony will end and a party will usually take place to celebrate, often with music and food.

Different Forms of Judaism

A Bat Mitzvah ceremony will not be accepted in all forms of Judaism. However, within reform Judaism, it will generally be a common occurrence. The difference between the Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremony is that the Bat Mitzvah will happen just before the girl's 12th birthday and she will not wear the tefillin. Orthodox Jews do not accept the Bar Mitzvah due to the belief that women should not be able to lead services in the synagogue. Instead, they have a Bat Chayil ceremony, meaning 'Daughter of the Valour'. This will take place in an Orthodox synagogue but it will not be during a Shabbat service. Instead of reading from the Torah, it will involve a talk on an important Jewish subject. It will also happen just before the 12th birthday.

The emphasis of this ceremony will be to allow the girl to become an adult and to take an active role in the Jewish community, to learn the laws of Judaism and to prepare herself to be able to keep a good Jewish home.