

**Yoma 82a states:**

**Rav Huna said: One trains a healthy child of eight years and nine years to fast for several hours; at ten years and eleven years, they complete the fast by rabbinic law; at twelve years they complete the fast by Torah law.** This applies to girls who reach maturity and become obligated in mitzvot at age twelve. **And Rav Nahman said: At nine years and ten years one trains them to fast for several hours; at eleven and twelve years they complete the fast by rabbinic law; at thirteen years they complete the fast by Torah law.** This applies to boys. **And Rabbi Yoḥanan said: There is no obligation with regard to children completing the fast by rabbinic law.** Rather, **at ten and eleven years, one trains them to fast for several hours; and at twelve years girls are obligated to complete their fast by Torah law.**

From here we learn that boys starting at 13 and girls starting at 12 are obligated to complete a fast. This mitzvah, as well as many others, are reserved for those who are considered Jewish adults. This occasion and transition into Jewish adulthood is now celebrated with a coming-of-age ceremony called a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, literally meaning son or daughter of the commandments. But what is the origin of the term and the ceremony?

There is no direct mention of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah in the Tanach. The term "Bar Mitzvah" is first found in Bava Metzia 96a, however it is merely used to indicate someone who is subject to the law, rather than a coming-of-age ceremony. However, there are some allusions to children beginning to take on communal and personal obligations in the Torah, which would indicate they are considered an adult. In *Bereisheit* 34:25, Yaakov's son Levi was estimated to be 13 years old according to the Tosfos Yom Tov to Avos 5:21. In the same *passuk*, he is referred to as an *ish* (man), implying he is a Jewish adult. *Bereisheit Rabba* 63:10 brings another example of alluding to thirteen years old being a marker of taking on responsibility. It states, "Up to thirteen year Yaakov and Esav went to school together. After thirteen, one went to the Beit Midrash to study and one to the house idols." Rabbi Eleazar adds, "Until thirteen, it is the father's job to train his son. After, the father must state, "Blessed be He who has taken from me the responsibility for this boy", which is similar to the *Baruch Sh'p'tarani* blessing recited nowadays.

We also learn from various Mishna's regarding the significance of this age. Pirkei Avot 5:21 states, "...at thirteen, there is an obligation to observe the mitzvot" and similarly in Mishnah Niddah 5:6 we learn that a girl's vow is only binding at twelve years and a day and boy's at thirteen and a day.

Bar Mitzvah began to take shape as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century. In Talmudic era, mitzvot that were once permissible for any minor deemed fit, suddenly became reserved for thirteen-year-olds to differentiate a Jewish minor from a Jewish adult. The term Bar Mitzvah was first used as a coming-of-age ceremony and is credited to 15<sup>th</sup> century Rabbi Menahem Ziyoni. Similarly, Bat

Mitzvah is first found in *Ben Ish Chai*, a legal code by Joseph Chayim ben Elijah in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Bar Mitzvahs began to be structured with three components. Being called up to the Torah for an aliyah, a public *dvar Torah*, and a festive meal. As a result of the integration of newly emancipated Jews during the Enlightenment Period, communities began to emphasize the importance the Bar Mitzvah, as it was the last life-cycle event they could control before the child decided whether to carry on the faith and religion into adulthood.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bar Mitzvahs became formulaic as they became center-stage at synagogues in North America. They typically included the reading of the Torah and Haftarah, a speech, and a lavish party. While there were always versions of a Jewish coming-of-age for girls, the first public Bat Mitzvah in the United States was in 1922 by Judith Kaplan. This laid the groundwork as women began to gain equal access and equal responsibilities in many Jewish communities in the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the eventual shift and egalitarianization of Jewish communal life. Therefore, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs in liberal spaces began to look identical from the learning done in preparation to the ceremony itself.

The evolution of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As technology has allowed new ways to learn and pray together, Jewish institutions began to integrate them into these ceremonies. As synagogues and party venues were forced to close during the novel COVID pandemic in 2020 and 2021, this coming-of-age ceremony had to reinvent itself again. Many began to host “Zoom-Mitzvahs”. While the pomp and circus of a traditional affair was not present, suddenly these ceremonies became more accessible for people to attend, participate, and have access to ADA features.

Regardless of what the Bar or Bat Mitzvah looks like, the most important part is that it marks the beginning of a child’s Jewish journey into adulthood and the first of many opportunities to participate and engage in both individual and communal aspects of Judaism.

-Ben Miller

**Sources:**

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/bar-mitzvah-bat-mitzvah>

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/history-of-bar-mitzvah/>

From this week's Daf Yomi, Yoma 87a:

It is stated in the mishna that if one says: **I will sin and Yom Kippur will atone** for my sins, **Yom Kippur does not atone** for his sins. The Gemara comments: **Let us say that the mishna is not in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, as it was taught** in a *baraita* that **Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says: Yom Kippur atones for all transgressions of the Torah, whether one repented or did not repent.** The Gemara answers: **Even if you say** that the mishna is in accordance with the opinion of **Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, it is different** when it is **on the basis** of being permitted to sin. Even Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi agrees that Yom Kippur does not atone for the transgressions one commits only because he knows that Yom Kippur will atone for them.

Our intentions matter and affect who we are and who we become. It would seem from the above that the individual in question is out of luck since he won't be able to atone for his sin. However, Teshuvah is always available. The individual who thinks he has gamed the system and states "I will sin and I can always use the ultimate get out of jail free card, Yom Kippur, to atone for my sin," is not without hope. He will be able to return. However, he may have a harder time doing so since his mindset is wrong.

While Yom Kippur is a holy day, simply being present and accounted for is not enough without the difficult work of teshuvah which can start now. We can use our time before Yom Kippur (and throughout the year) to reflect on our lives and always consider ourselves as on the border between good and evil, such that one more good deed will push us towards a life of righteousness, G-d willing.

Rabbi Akiva said a single hour of teshuvah and good deeds in this world is better than all the world to come.

May the year ahead be one of insight so that we can number our days and achieve a heart of wisdom. My prayer for all of us this year is that we increase our commitment to learning, come together as a kehillah, a holy community, and be able to count our blessings and feel gratitude to Hashem for all the good in our lives.

-Bill Jaffe

**July 8, 2021 ~ כ'ח תמוז תשפ"א**

**הִדְרֹו עֵלְךָ יוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים**

**וּסְלִיקָא לֵה מַסְכַּת יוֹמָא.**

**We will return to you, Tractate Yoma,**

**and you will return to us.**