

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

Bar and bat mitzvah mean, literally, "son and daughter of the commandment." Bat mitzvah is Hebrew, while bar mitzvah, historically a much earlier ceremony, is Aramaic. The word bar is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew *ben* (son of). Thus, a boy is referred to as a "bar mitzvah" and a girl as a "bat mitzvah."

Historically, first bar mitzvah and later bat mitzvah represented a ceremonial recognition that a young person had reached the age when he or she was no longer a minor according to Jewish law and thereby took on new religious privileges and responsibilities of an adult. For boys, this age was 13, for girls, 12.

WHEN DOES A BAR OR BAT MITZVAH TAKE PLACE?

In Reform synagogues, girls and boys mark symbolic entry into Jewish adulthood at age thirteen. The bar or bat mitzvah is usually celebrated on the Shabbat closest to the child's thirteenth birthday. Congregations usually schedule these dates a couple of years in advance, giving the family plenty of time to plan for the day.

WHAT DOES THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH DO IN THE SERVICE?

Depending on the congregation, boys and girls may conduct all or part of the service, read or chant the *b'rachot* over the Torah, read a section from the Torah portion for that week, read or chant the *b'rachot* for the haftarah, read a section from the haftarah, and deliver a sermon.

Most families consider the synagogue the most meaningful, appropriate, and moving setting for a bar/bat mitzvah. Bar/bat mitzvah has significance both personally and communally. A bar or bat mitzvah holds great significance for a synagogue community. It celebrates the congregation's efforts to educate a child.

While the custom of each congregational community most often dictates the form of bar/bat mitzvah parties, more Jewish families today invest the celebration with deeper Jewish feeling.

WHAT IF YOU NEVER HAD A BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

It's never too late to have a bar or bat mitzvah. Whether you are sixteen or sixty, if you want a bar/bat mitzvah, you should have one. Many congregations have created adult bar/bat mitzvah programs for individual or group instruction. As a result, rabbis throughout North America have reported officiating at bar/bat mitzvah services for members well into their eighties. If you did not celebrate becoming a bar/bat mitzvah, speak to your rabbi. It can be one of the most fulfilling experiences of your adult life.

Source: Reform Judaism website