

Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah (coming of age ceremony)



Coming of age for a Jew, happens automatically at age 13 for a boy and 12 for a girl, and is termed *Bar Mitzvah* for boys or *Bat Mitzvah* for girls.¹ This term refers both to the honoree and the ceremony. In the case of multiple honorees, the term *B'nai Mitzvah* is used (for two or more boys or a combination of boys and girls) or *B'not Mitzvah* (for two or more girls). This literally means "son of or daughter of the commandments."

The most common ceremony marking the first performance of *mitzvot* is being called up to the Torah to say the blessings (known as "having an *aliyah*"). This is often followed by recitation of the *Haftarah*, a selection from the writings of the prophets that relates to the weekly Torah reading. The Bar Mitzvah/Bat Mitzvah may or may not lead other parts of the religious service as per the customs of the specific congregation.

Please take note:

- Dress for the ceremony modestly and as you would for an important business affair – jacket and tie for men and dress with sleeves, skirt or dress pants for women.
- The time on the invitation is often the starting time of the weekly Shabbat, or Sabbath, service (or, in some cases, weekday service). The service will start as it would on any other day, and the Bar Mitzvah ceremony will occur sometime later in the service. If ceremony is in a Reform congregation, one should arrive at the time stated on the invitation. In Conservative or Orthodox congregations it is usually OK to arrive up to one hour after the stated time. If in doubt simply call the congregation or ask the parents when to arrive.
- Male guests of all religions are requested to wear a *kippah* (a skullcap). In some Conservative synagogues, women wear a lace head covering. Where needed, these will be available at the synagogue or *Bar Mitzvah* venue. Non-Jews are not expected to participate in the service per se, but should stand and sit as others do. Toward the end of the service the mourners' prayer will be said. In Conservative and Reform congregations only those who have recently had a death in the family or are observing the anniversary of a death will stand. In Orthodox congregations it is customary for everyone to stand
- Cell phones and other devices should be set to silent (or turned off). Refrain from writing or taking pictures during the service.
- After the *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* finishes reciting the *Haftarah* or giving a speech, it is customary not to applaud.
- Candy may be passed out as the *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* approaches the end of the *Haftarah* reading. This is not for eating, but for throwing at the *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* after the reading is completed. "The custom is connected with the idea of showing a child sweetness at such a sweet moment. Try not to leave a mark that will show up in pictures, and it's not nice to throw candy at the rabbi." says jewishjournal.com
- *Bar Mitzvah* gifts vary significantly depending on the community. A good rule of thumb is that the gift should reflect that the recipient is entering adulthood and should be something that can

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be enjoyed as the young man or woman matures. When in doubt, it never hurts to ask the parents or the synagogue's rabbi what is customary within the community.

ⁱ Although a girl comes of age at age 12, in some communities it is customary to wait until age 13 to mark the occasion with bat mitzvah ceremony.