

Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation How-To

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

The bar and bat mitzvah ceremony really begins with the time of bar/bat mitzvah preparation. Synagogues vary greatly in what is required on a bar/bat mitzvah. In general however most boys and girls will be required to lead certain prayers, chant Torah and/or Haftorah, and deliver a d'var Torah. Some synagogues also require additional projects such as volunteer work, written papers, and/or religious service attendance.¹

Generally the bar/bat mitzvah will take place on the child's 13th birthday for boys and 12th birthday for girls. The date is calculated according to the Hebrew calendar.* The actual celebration will usually take place either during the Friday services or Saturday services closest to the child's birthday. It is important to note that when making a list of requirements for the bar/bat mitzvah the parent should be given enough advanced warning so the child can properly prepare. Remember to include the child in the preparation of the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony so he or she can learn to budget time and set priorities and goals.¹

The requirements for the bar/bat mitzvah will include the following (some of these may be changed, removed, or added to):

1. Attendance at religious ceremonies
2. Outside project (volunteer work, research papers, etc.)
3. Prayers and blessings during service (i.e. candle lighting, Amidah, etc.)*
4. Aliyah and chanting of the Torah by the bar/bat mitzvah*
5. Blessings and chanting of the Haftorah by the bar/bat mitzvah*
6. D'var Torah by the bar/bat mitzvah*

The parents and/or grandparents also have a role in the bar/bat mitzvah. These roles are expanding and new trends are occurring within individual synagogues. Traditionally the only role for a parent is for the father to say a blessing (baruch she-p'tarani) over his son declaring the son is now responsible for his actions. However, in more liberal movements this blessing is either said over a boy or a girl by both parents or it is not said at all.²

“The baruch she-p'tarani blessing reads, "Praised are You, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe who has excused me (from being liable) for this one (meaning, the child)." The blessing was traditionally recited by the father, and today is said by both parents in some liberal synagogues.”² In most liberal synagogues the parents say the shehecheyanu blessing during the ceremony in addition to – or as a substitute for – the baruch she-p'tarani blessing.²

Over time the role of the parents (and grandparents) during the bar/bat mitzvah has expanded to include the following:

1. Presenting a tallit to the bar/bat mitzvah
2. Passing the Torah from generation to generation
3. Receiving an aliyah to the Torah
4. Participation in leading the worship service
5. Personal statements/speeches about the bar/bat mitzvah

The bar/bat mitzvah ceremony is really a personal experience for the bar/bat mitzvah and his or her family. There is great flexibility within the ceremony and it should be tailored to the community standards and the families' needs. It is also important to remember that some children may be special needs and the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony may need to be altered to accommodate the child and his or her parents.*

Confirmation

Confirmation ceremonies (also known as Kabbalat Torah – Accepting the Torah) are generally held for Jewish teens that have finished Hebrew high school (usually 16-18 years old). Confirmation ceremonies are usually a group ceremony involving teens who have finished Hebrew high school at

the same time. Part of the preparation for the ceremony involves a tzedakah project where the group of students volunteers on various projects. This part of confirmation emphasizes the need for communal responsibilities within Judaism.³ The preparation period generally includes an emphasis on mitzvot, communal responsibilities, and Jewish dogma. In general this preparation is done as part of an extended Hebrew school education within the synagogue but it can also be done individually between a teacher and a student.

Customarily confirmation ceremonies are held on Shavuot as part of the celebration of the giving of the Torah. In most confirmation ceremonies the teens will lead part of or all of the religious service. Often there will be a theme – God, community, Israel – that the entire service will revolve around.³ In addition, the teens may be given certain responsibilities such as handing out siddurim or chumashim or acting as ushers.⁴

The requirements for the confirmation class will include the following (some of these may be changed, removed, or added to):

1. Attendance at religious ceremonies
2. Outside tzedakah project
3. Prayers and blessings during service (i.e. candle lighting, Amidah, etc.)*
4. Aliyah and chanting of the Torah by the confirmand*
5. Blessings and chanting of the Haftorah by the confirmand*
6. D'var Torah by the confirmand*
7. Profession of faith
8. Blessing given by the rabbi/darshan and/or parents

Parents may also participate in the confirmation ceremony by offering blessings and leading parts of the service. This is especially important if the confirmation class is small or involves only one teen. The confirmation ceremony may also be adapted according to the needs of the teens and/or parents and the standards of the community. It is especially important to adapt to circumstances that may include teens with special needs.

*Additional Resources:

+Bar/Bat Mitzvah – My Jewish Learning

(http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life_Events/BarBat_Mitzvah.shtml)

+Gregorian-Hebrew Date Converter – Hebcal

(<http://www.hebcal.com/converter/>)

+Prayers/Blessings – Siddur Audio (<http://sidduraudio.com/>)

+Beginning Trope – Learn Trope (<http://learntrope.com/>)

+Torah Trope – Navigating the Bible II

(<http://bible.ort.org/books/torahd5.asp>)

+Haftorah Trope – Navigating the Bible II

(<http://bible.ort.org/books/haftarotd4.asp>)

+How to Write a D’var Torah – Reform Judaism

(<http://www.reformjudaism.org/how-write-dvar-torah>)

+Planning a Special Needs Bar/Bat Mitzvah – My Jewish Learning

(http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life_Events/BarBat_Mitzvah/Practical_Aspects/Planning_Guide/Special_Needs.shtml)

+Special Needs Bar Mitzvah – Union for Reform Judaism

(http://urj.org//learning/teacheducate/specialneeds//?syspage=article&item_id=2841)

¹Rachel Solomin. “Parents and Bar/Bat Mitzvah Preparation.” *myjewishlearning.com*. My Jewish Learning, n.d.

(http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life_Events/BarBat_Mitzvah/Practical_Aspects/Parents_Role/parents-bar-mitzvah-prep.shtml?p=0)

²Daniel Kohn. *The Parents’ Role in a Bar/Bat Mitzvah Service*. My Jewish Learning, n.d.

(http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life_Events/BarBat_Mitzvah/Practical_Aspects/Parents_Role.shtml?p=0)

³Lisa Katz. *What is Judaism’s Confirmation Ceremony?* Judaism, n.d.

(<http://judaism.about.com/od/barandbatmitzvah/f/confirmation.htm>)

⁴Rivka Berman. *The Confirmation Ceremony*. Jewish Celebrations, n.d.

(<http://www.jewishcelebrations.com/mitzvah/reform/ConfirmationCeremony.htm>)