

Rites of Passage

Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah

When a boy reaches the age of 13 years plus one day or when a girl reaches the age of 12 years plus one day, according to their birthdays on the Jewish calendar, they become Bar Mitzvah (for a boy) or Bat Mitzvah (for a girl). Literally, this means "son (or daughter) of the commandments." From that day on, they become responsible for observing all of the mitzvot (commandments) of Judaism. Prior to becoming bar or bat mitzvah, their parents were responsible for their religious behavior.

Preparing to celebrate a Bar and Bat Mitzvah in the synagogue requires years of study. The content of the synagogue celebration varies, but it commonly includes one or more of the following: reading from the Torah scroll, reading a selection from the prophets, leading a portion of the service, and delivering a speech, called a *d'var Torah* ("word of Torah") about the scriptural readings. In Orthodox synagogues, only boys celebrate Bar Mitzvah by taking part in the synagogue service. Following the conclusion of the service, family, friends, and the congregation join together for a festive meal.

Marriage

Marriage in the Jewish tradition is called *kiddushin*, which means sanctification. A wedding is a public ceremony in which the bride and groom commit themselves exclusively to each other. It is done publicly because the community is expected to help the couple live a life of loyalty and devotion to God and Jewish traditions.

Before the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom formally accept the provisions of the *ketubah*, the Jewish marriage contract which stipulates, among other things, that they agree to cherish, honor, and maintain each other (physically, emotionally, and spiritually) according to the customs of Jewish marriage. The *ketubah* is then signed by two witnesses.