

Meaningful milestones

Elliot and Sarah share with us an important milestone in their lives

Welcome to the latest in our series of articles where we explore an important day in one of our readers' lives and learn about the day through their eyes.

For many young people who belong to a religious group, the day you make promises for yourself about what you believe is extremely significant. For many Christians, promises are made as a teenager during confirmation. In the Sikh community, the Amrit Sanskar ceremony of commitment can be taken whenever a person feels able to understand and take on extra responsibilities and wear the 5Ks.

In the Jewish community, ceremonies take place in the early teens. A boy becomes bar mitzvah at 13 and this is usually marked by taking part in a bar mitzvah ceremony at the synagogue just after his thirteenth birthday. Girls also become bat mitzvah, but at the age of 12 or 13.

Bar mitzvah

In the Jewish community a boy is thought to be an adult when he reaches 13. Bar mitzvah, which means 'son of the commandment', is a person who has reached this age. Usually there are special ceremonies on a boy's bar mitzvah day. After this day he is expected to be responsible for his own behaviour.

Usually during the bar mitzvah a boy reads the portion of the Torah for that day. His father or both parents say blessings as the boy becomes a man. The boy will often walk around the synagogue with the Torah scrolls. The boy makes a speech and usually there is a big party. In many Orthodox synagogues this is also the day that a boy is given his tallit to wear for the first time.

Bat mitzvah

In Orthodox Jewish communities, girls become bat mitzvah which means 'daughter of the commandment' at about the age of 12. They too are expected to be responsible for their own behaviour after this age. A girl will make a speech on the day about the portion of Torah that is being read or on another important topic.

In non-Orthodox Judaism, girls become bat mitzvah at either 12 or 13, depending on the community they belong to, but they read their portion of the Torah in the synagogue in the same way as the boys do at the age of 13. They will also make a speech and, as this is such an important day, there is often a party to celebrate this significant event.

What has been your meaningful milestone in life so far? We would love to hear about your day for our magazine. Please write in with your meaningful milestone so we can share it with our readers.



Find out more about bar and bat mitzvah at www.reonline.org.uk/specials/jwal/

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Sarah



We spoke to Sarah just after her big day and asked her to tell us a little bit about it.

Why is your bat mitzvah so important?

My bat mitzvah is important because it is a milestone in the Jewish religion and it is a great personal achievement. It is a sign that I am becoming an adult and have to take on some responsibilities for myself. My bat mitzvah was an amazing weekend which I will never forget!

How do you prepare for your bat mitzvah?

For a year I attended lessons where I learnt about Judaism. In addition to this I also wrote my script which I would read on the day of my bat mitzvah.

What do you have to do in synagogue on the day of your bat mitzvah?

On the day of my bat mitzvah I had to give two speeches to the community. The first was a talk about the portion of the Torah which was being read on that day. The second was a talk on a subject of my choice. I chose to speak about Sarah Schenirer, who was an influential role model and helped introduce Jewish learning to girls and women.

How does the experience of becoming bat mitzvah make you feel?

The experience of my bat mitzvah made me feel proud to be Jewish and proud of completing a year of study. It was enjoyed by my family and friends.

Elliot



Elliot shared with us why his bar mitzvah day was so important to him.

Why is your bar mitzvah so important?

It is a very special event for any Jewish child to become bar or bat mitzvah – it represents the progression from childhood to adulthood within the Jewish religion. When you are classed as an adult you are able to participate more within the services and take a more active role.

How do you prepare for your bar mitzvah?

For a year I had lessons with one of the rabbis from my synagogue. The lessons weren't only for me to learn my portion to be read on the day but to understand many aspects of the Jewish religion and my role within it.

What do you have to do in synagogue on the day of your bar mitzvah?

I gave a synopsis of the portion of the Torah that was being read on that morning, in English so everyone could understand what the service was about. Later I read Maftir and Haftarah which were sections read from the Torah in Hebrew.

When you are in synagogue on the day of your bar mitzvah, will you use any special objects?

I read from the Torah and because you cannot touch the Torah with your hands I used a yad which is a metal pointing hand which was used to keep track of the words. I used the lectern to read my synopsis from and stood on the bimah to read my portion. The bimah is a platform where the morning service is taken from.

When you are in synagogue on the day of your bar mitzvah, do you wear any special garments?

I wore a tallit which is a prayer shawl which all men have to wear when reading from the Torah. I also wore a kippah which is a skull cap that all boys and men wear to cover their heads.

How does the experience of becoming bar mitzvah make you feel?

I feel proud of completing my bar mitzvah after a year of hard work. It was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do!