Mazel Tov!

A *bar mitzvah* is the coming of age ceremony for Jewish boys, and the *bat mitzvah* is the coming of age ceremony for Jewish girls. Both take place at around age thirteen. Grounded in religious tradition, the teen being celebrated has studied hard and attended classes, and emerges from the experience ready to be a participating adult member of the congregation. It is one of the most important events in a young Jewish person's life, and the family generally makes every effort to make it as wonderful an occasion as they can.

The Ceremony

The religious ceremony takes place on Saturday morning, in the synagogue, during the regular Sabbath service. The young candidate reads from the Torah and delivers a speech to the congregation on the importance of attaining religious adulthood. He or she may also lead other parts of the service.

The Celebration

The religious service is usually followed by a reception in the synagogue's social room that is open to any member of the congregation who wishes to congratulate the young person and his or her family.

Later in the day, the family may host a luncheon or dinner at their home, or at a restaurant, club, or hotel. These are invitation only celebrations and range from the simple to the extravagant.

The Guest List

Family, members of the congregation, friends, and classmates usually make up the guest list. If you receive an invitation, it's expected that you attend both the religious service and the party.

Invitations

The rabbi may invite the congregation to a reception that follows the ceremony. Parents issue invitations to a party at their home or other venue. Send invitations four to six weeks ahead. The invitation should reflect the formality of the party. Printed invitations are sent for more formal occasions, and RSVPs or reply cards are recommended, especially for a large guest list. If the party is a formal evening event, do print “black tie” on the invitation in the lower right corner.

Some Frequently Asked Questions

What should I wear?

At the ceremony, guests wear the type of conservative clothing that they would ordinarily choose for a religious service. If men are expected to wear *yarmulkes* they will be available at the entrance. Some conservative synagogues require women to wear hats or head covering. If you’re unsure about appropriate clothing, ask your host or the honoree.

Generally, dress for the party is semiformal or formal. Men and boys wear suits or dark jackets and slacks, or black tie attire. Girls and ladies wear cocktail attire, or long skirts or dresses.

Do I bring a date?

No, only those who receive invitations attend the party.

Should I bring a gift?

All guests are expected to bring a gift. Religious charms (such as the Star of David or the *Chai* symbol), gifts of money, jewelry, and books are all appropriate. Contemporaries enjoy giving gift certificates, books, and music. Be sure to include a card in case the gifts are opened later so the honoree will know whom to thank.