



Make your mark
on the Jewish story

**JEWISH LIVES:
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY
TO EXPLORE CHANGING
LIVES OF JEWISH
SECONDARY SCHOOL
STUDENTS AND THEIR
FAMILIES**

**FOCUS:
BAR/BAT MITZVAH**

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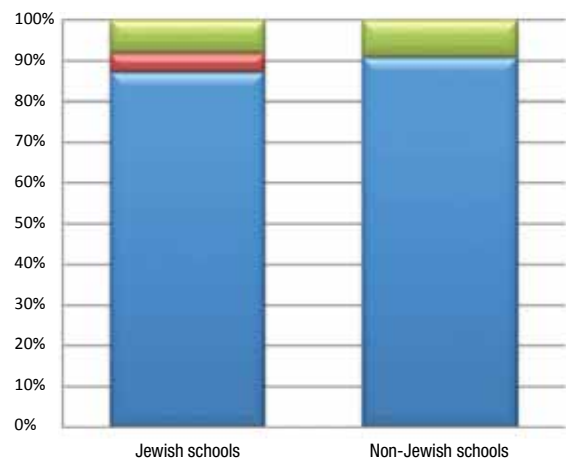
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JEWISH LIVES FOCUS: BAR/BAT MITZVAH

For the first time in the history of Jewish schooling in the UK, researchers are studying the Jewish lives of more than 1,000 children who entered one of seven Jewish secondary schools in 2011. We are also studying a comparison group of close to 100 Jewish families whose children did not enter a Jewish secondary school in 2011.

This publication focuses on what we have learned from parent surveys and family interviews about Bar/Bat Mitzvah – a key stage within the Jewish life cycle. When we surveyed and interviewed families in 2013–14, their children were in Year Nine. They reflected on the extent to which Bar/Bat Mitzvah played a role in their lives. We were able to ask if, where and how this moment was celebrated as well as the role their school played.

DID YOUR CHILD CELEBRATE A BAR/BAT MITZVAH?

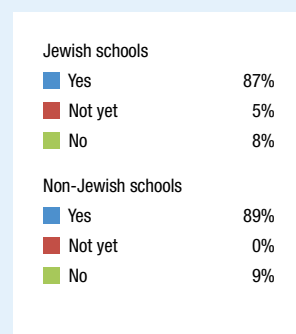


“
WELL, IT'S A TRADITION
IN MY FAMILY THAT WE
DON'T DO BAT MITZVAHS

”
Girl, Jewish school

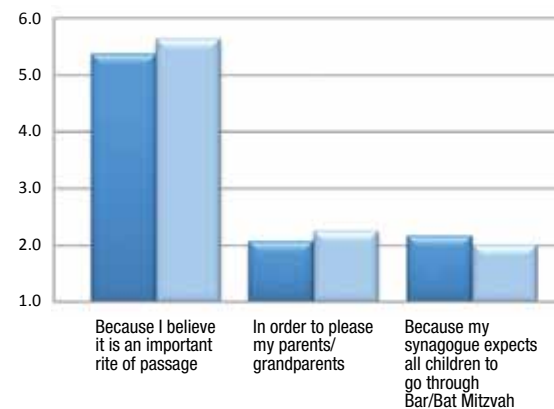
“
THERE WAS NEVER
ANY QUESTION THAT
HE WOULD BE
BAR MITZVAHED

”
Parent, non-Jewish school

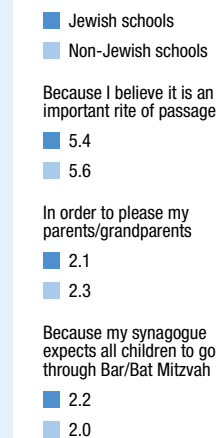


More than 90% of students celebrated or will celebrate their Bar or Bat Mitzvah whether or not they attend a Jewish secondary school. The results reflect how highly families value this Jewish life cycle event, although there are some exceptions.

REASONS FOR HAVING A BAR/BAT MITZVAH?



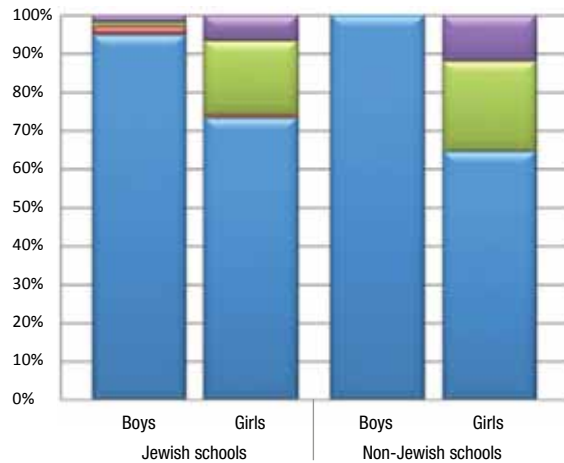
(1.0 = not apply, 6.0 = applies to a large extent)



“
I JUST THINK IT WAS
FABULOUS FOR MY DAD
TO SEE ANOTHER ONE
OF HIS GRANDCHILDREN
BAR MITZVAHED

”
Parent, Jewish school

WHERE DID/WILL YOUR CHILD'S BAR/BAT MITZVAH TAKE PLACE?



Almost every boy celebrates his Bar Mitzvah in synagogue. Fewer than 2% of those attending a Jewish school opt to celebrate in the synagogue at their school.

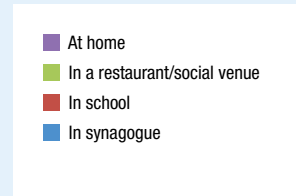
Nearly three-quarters of girls at Jewish schools participated in a religious ceremony in their synagogue compared to only 65% of girls at non-Jewish schools.

Almost 20% of girls at Jewish schools celebrated at a restaurant or social venue, this increased to nearly one quarter of girls at non-Jewish schools.

Parents whose children are not at Jewish schools rely to a large extent on the synagogue for inspiring students to engage. Families reported that their children learned a lot, and also that a rabbi or teacher could be very important to this experience:

“Our crafty rabbi realised that the way to our son’s heart is through his guitar... so there are a couple of friends who also do music, and they have a little band...”

– Parent, non-Jewish school



“

I HAD A SHABBAT SERVICE WHERE I DID A DVAR IN SHUL. WE HAD A BIG LUNCH FOR FAMILY AND A FEW FRIENDS AND THEN ON THE SUNDAY I HAD A PARTY

”

Girl, Jewish school

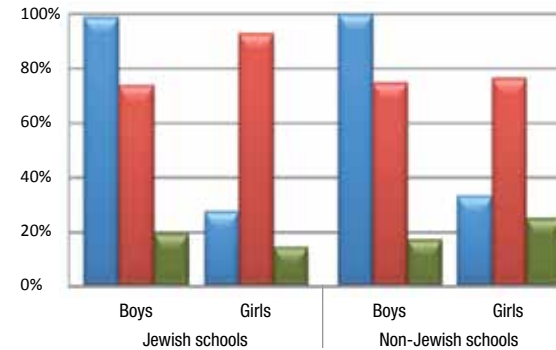
“

THERE WAS A FRIDAY NIGHT DINNER HERE, AND WE HAD A MARQUEE IN THE GARDEN FOR SHABBAT LUNCH TOO, AFTER LEINING IN SHUL

”

Boy, Jewish school

DID/WILL YOUR CHILD'S BAR/BAT MITZVAH INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING?



When asking how the Bar/Bat Mitzvah was marked, we see clear gender differences. Almost all boys (more than 95%) mark the moment in synagogue by being called up to read from the Torah. Far fewer girls (28%) mark their Bat Mitzvah in this way.

In interviews, some parents said that they were keen for their child to mark the occasion with a special family trip to Israel. 17% of students in Jewish schools and 21% in non-Jewish schools celebrated in this way.

AT SCHOOL

Jewish schools provide some formal and/or informal help during the school day for those children of Bar/Bat Mitzvah age. In addition some mark the occasion with an event such as a seminar with the Head Teacher.

There is no consistency across the schools. They have different ways of marking this life cycle event, for example, through teaching values in class and/or having an informal event or shabbaton. Rarely do the Jewish schools teach the individual portion/sedra to students.

Percentage of 'yes' responses

- Your child being called up to the Torah
- Your child giving a dvar torah/speech about his/her portion
- A special family trip to Israel

“

I WENT TO THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE NEXT TO THE WESTERN WALL AND HAD THE WHOLE CEREMONY THERE, IN FRONT OF ALL MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY

”

Boy, non-Jewish school

“

ON THE FRIDAY NIGHT IN SYNAGOGUE I READ MY DVAR TORAH AND I SANG FRIDAY NIGHT KIDDUSH

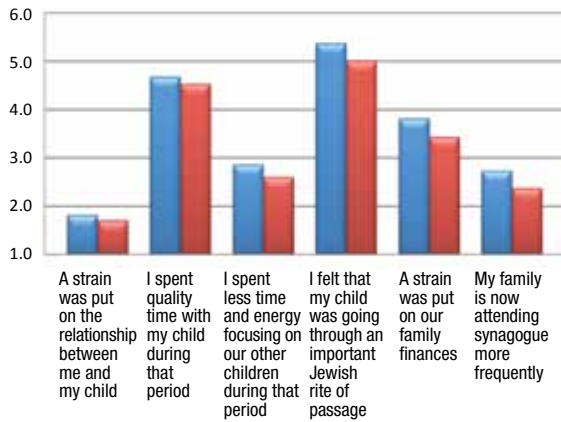
”

Girl, non-Jewish school

A POSITIVE AND AN EXPENSIVE EXPERIENCE FOR FAMILIES

As a result of my child's Bar/Bat Mitzvah...

(1.0 = not apply, 6.0 = applies to a large extent)



“

I MEAN NOT THAT WE'VE BECOME MASSIVELY RELIGIOUS PEOPLE. BUT WE'VE BECOME MUCH MORE OF A JEWISH FAMILY. WE'RE A JEWISH FAMILY NOW. BEFORE WE WERE A FAMILY THAT HAPPENED TO BE JEWISH

”

Parent, Jewish school

“

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN HARD TO SORT OF DO A LOT OF JEWISH THINGS IF I WEREN'T BAR MITZVAHED

”

Parent, non-Jewish school

■ Boys
■ Girls

A strain was put on the relationship between me and my child

■ 1.8
■ 1.7

I spent quality time with my child during that period

■ 4.7
■ 4.5

I spent less time and energy focusing on our other children during that period

■ 2.9
■ 2.6

I felt that my child was going through an important Jewish rite of passage

■ 5.4
■ 5.0

A strain was put on our family finances

■ 3.8
■ 3.4

My family is now attending synagogue more frequently

■ 2.7
■ 2.4

Many parents felt that they spent some quality time with their child around the time of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah and that it was an important Jewish rite of passage. This was more pronounced for parents with sons than with daughters. Parents with children at non-Jewish schools felt this more strongly, indicating the importance of this occasion for those whose children may not be integrated in Jewish institutions.



“

THE MAIN DIFFERENCE OVER THE PAST YEAR IS WE WENT TO SHUL A LOT MORE. WE ARE JUST AS JEWISH AS WE EVER WERE REALLY

”

Parent, non-Jewish school

“

IT'S A PROUD MOMENT FOR ANY JEWISH FAMILY, THE SON'S BAR MITZVAH. IT'S THE STAGES OF LIFE

”

Parent, non-Jewish school

“

HE HAD HIS BAR MITZVAH IN ISRAEL AS WELL

”

Parent, Jewish school

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Dr. Helena Miller, UJIA
Dr. Alex Pomson, Rosov Consulting

Data: Dr. Hagit HaCohen Wolf
Pamphlet editorial support: Karen Scott

FIND OUT MORE

For further information from Dr. Helena Miller please email helena.miller@ujia.org



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