



# THE AGES OF MAN AND THE STAGES OF LIFE

The Jewish Sages thought long and hard on this subject and their thoughts can be found in the Mishnah and in particular in the Pirkei Avot or The Ethics of the Fathers

At Mishnah Avot 5:24, we find the 14 Ages of Man

At five years of age the study of Scriptures,  
At ten years of age the study of Mishnah,  
At thirteen subject to the commandments,  
At fifteen the study of Talmud,  
At eighteen marriage,  
At twenty pursuit of career,  
At thirty peak of achievement,  
At forty wisdom,  
At fifty able to give counsel,  
At sixty becoming an elder,  
At seventy fullness of years,  
At eighty for special "strength" (Psalm 90:10),  
At ninety body bent,  
And at a hundred as good as already dead and gone from the affairs of this world.

Even today many of these are marked by Life Cycle Services and Rituals which have a spiritual significance and are an occasion for families and communities to gather together.

These are:

## **BIRTH**

The occasion of the birth is a very nervous time, so superstition crept into this element of the Jewish life cycle in a way not found at other times of life. If, God forbid, a child is born unhealthy and is close to death, one superstition is to rename the child so as to confuse the Angel of Death. It is surprising how many Jews will attest to the success of this method. With a similar thought in mind, we do not buy any items for the baby before the birth.

[More information...](#)

## **PIDYON HABEN (REDEMPTION OF THE SON)**

According to traditional Judaism every first-born child who is male belongs to God, and his parents should "redeem" him by making a symbolic payment. Today parents who observe this custom will use five silver coins to symbolically pay a descendant of the priestly families to redeem their son.

God spared the firstborn of Israel, and killed the firstborn of Egypt, during the last of the 10 Plagues. In remembrance of this fact, God declares, "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine."

Who Is Firstborn?

Although it seems like "firstborn" would simply refer to the first son born to a couple, Pidyon HaBen is only necessary if the following four things apply to the baby:

- He is the first child born to his mother.
- His parents are neither Kohanim nor Levites.
- He was born naturally (vaginally), not through a C-section.
- His mother has never had a miscarriage more than 40 days into a pregnancy

## **BRIT MILAH (BRIS)**

In Judaism, a baby's circumcision is much more than surgery. A Jewish baby's circumcision marks his entrance into the covenant (brit) with God. Brit Milah is a ritual which takes place in the home and obviously only involves baby boys.

Traditionally Brit Milah is carried out on the eight day after birth- i.e. the next time the same day of the week comes round, even if the eighth day were to fall on a Sabbath or Festival, though traditionally the mohel might need to make preparations the day before. If the circumcision has to be delayed, for medical reasons, then it will not take place on a Sabbath or Festival.

[More information...](#)

## **SIMCHAT BAT (NAMING A GIRL)**

As opposed to the circumcision of a newborn male on the eighth day, there are no explicit rituals for a newborn female. Instead, there are customs for a Simchat Bat, celebration of a birth of a daughter.

## **BABY BLESSING**

A ceremony of welcoming for a baby. Often, particularly for a girl, this is where the Hebrew name is officially given and announced. A baby blessing is a ritual in the synagogue, usually as part of the Shabbat morning service, which involves welcoming the infant into the congregation as a member of the Jewish people and giving them a Hebrew name.

The baby blessing may involve an aliyah (blessings for the Torah) for one or both of the parents. This often takes place a few weeks after the birth so that all parents and the baby can be present. In the naming of both boys and girls, the name of the new born

is the recited in the prayer together with the name of the parents. When a boy or girl is named, they are given two names. A holy or special name which will be in Hebrew and an English name.

[More information...](#)

## **BAR MITZVAH AND BAT MITZVAH**

Bar (Bat) Mitzvah literally translates to "son (daughter) of the commandment" and implies that a child has matured to the age where he/she is now a responsible and obligated part of the Jewish community. Contrary to popular parlance, a child does not have a bar or bat mitzvah. This usage is not only technically incorrect, it implies that there is some sort of one-off event that can be seen to exist in isolation. Rather, one becomes bar mitzvah. This is a status change within the Jewish community, one that lasts for the rest of his life. Becoming bar or bat mitzvah should, ideally, be the beginning of a deeper relationship with Judaism and an increased involvement in the Jewish community

[More about Bar Mitzvah...](#)

[More about Bat Mitzvah...](#)

## **WEDDINGS**

Perhaps it is the existential threat felt by the Jewish People over the centuries that has imbued Jewish weddings with a special communal and joyful feeling. Chuppah is the name of the canopy under which a Jewish wedding takes place and is used to refer to the entire Jewish wedding ceremony. The canopy itself may take many forms, from a tallit to a specially created cloth. The chuppah is held up by four poles. These can be secured to the ground or held by four specially appointed people.

[More about Weddings...](#)

[More about Ketubah...](#)

## **DEATH AND MOURNING**

Death is natural and inevitable, not a curse, according to Judaism. For those in mourning over the loss of a loved one, Jewish laws on death and mourning can help them to work through their pain even though at first sight the rituals may seem complex. On contacting the shul at this difficult time you will be given all the assistance needed to do everything required.

There are three distinct phases to the process, the burial, Shiva and the stone setting. The burial usually takes place whenever possible within 24 hours and the mourner will then sit Shiva for a week when friends and family will visit to support them with their company and gifts of food. The next 11 months is designated as the year of mourning and at the end of this there will be a stone setting for the headstone, which is in effect a gathering of all who perhaps could not attend the burial to come together to remember the one who has died.

[More about Burials...](#)

[More about Shiva...](#)

[More about Stone Setting...](#)