



THE BAR MITZVAH BOOK

EVERYTHING YOU'VE EVER WANTED TO
KNOW ABOUT A BAR MITZVAH AT
EMANUEL SYNAGOGUE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Emanuel Synagogue in Woollahra. As we believe that the family, regardless of configuration, remains the centre of Jewish life, we feel privileged that you are allowing us to strengthen your family heritage by enrolling in our programme. We thank you for entrusting your child to us for these years leading to him becoming bar mitzvah. Like any ritual which marks a transition in the stage of life of a family member, bar mitzvah can bring both joy and tension. You will receive great joy watching your son learn, grow and then read from the Torah on that special Shabbat that you share. But, there may be moments of tension because of some of the pressures that have unnecessarily become attached to the bar mitzvah, especially associated with the function afterwards. In this booklet, we offer you some guidance to assist in making this experience loving and meaningful for the whole family. Also, in this booklet, you will find our philosophy regarding bar mitzvah as well as the requirements and responsibilities that will need to be undertaken by both you and your son. Our aim is to create an experience which will be both meaningful and beautiful for the whole family and especially the person becoming bar mitzvah. This can only be achieved with the support, encouragement and enthusiasm of both you and your child. So please read this booklet carefully, discuss it together with your child and do not hesitate to contact us with any further questions or concerns.

WHAT IS A BAR MITZVAH?

It may surprise you to learn that there is no mention of bar mitzvah in the Torah, in fact, none of the patriarchs or even Moses actually had a ceremony anything like what we would call a bar mitzvah. So how did it all begin?

The Talmud teaches that upon attaining the age of thirteen, a child becomes bar mitzvah, literally, a son of the commandments, and thus responsible for his own actions under Jewish law. At this age, his parents are absolved of their burden. It was the custom, that upon the child's birthday, the father would recite a blessing in the synagogue wherein he declared that he was no longer responsible for his child's actions. Today, most legal burdens of a child and parent are governed by Australian, not Jewish, law. Nevertheless, from the age of bar mitzvah, a boy is held responsible for his Jewish life and destiny.

Two of the most important mitzvot are to study Torah and to recite prayers. Until two hundred years ago, a Jewish boy would learn these commandments, along with the ethics of Judaism, in his school studies – there was no mathematics, science, history or other subjects that form the basis of the contemporary school curriculum. Hebrew was the natural language of study. Being called to the Torah to read the lesson of the day and leading the congregation in prayer was an honour bestowed upon the bar mitzvah which did not require special preparation.

Today, we still honour a bar mitzvah by calling him to the Torah, having him read the Torah, the Haftarah, and leading the congregation in blessings and prayers. However, today's boy generally does not have the same background or Jewish self-understanding as a child of 200 years ago, and requires special instruction to be both mentally and spiritually prepared for the day.

REQUIREMENTS FOR BAR MITZVAH

1. EDUCATION

We see bar mitzvah not as an event but as a process. It is the time during which the congregation has an opportunity to welcome the bar mitzvah into its ranks as an adult member, and an opportunity for the bar mitzvah to mark and celebrate the process of religious development and study he has undertaken until this point. It is crucial that the day be a part of a greater educational and religious experience. It is for this reason that we require a variety of different activities to be undertaken by the bar mitzvah prior to the date of the service.

a. HEBREW AND RELIGION SCHOOL

If your child is attending a Jewish day school for Years 6 and 7, this requirement is waived.

If your child is not attending a Jewish day school, it is imperative that he completes a minimum of **two years** of education at our Hebrew and Religion School. Prior to bar mitzvah then, each child must have attended at least four terms of our school's grade 6 curriculum and four terms of grade 7.

Please note that our two-year requirement applies regardless of your child's age, independent study with private tutors or attendance at public school Jewish scripture classes.

GRADE 6

Meets each Sunday morning from 9 am until 12:00. The courses studied include Hebrew and Jewish Studies. It is also an important opportunity for the bar mitzvah to meet and interact with other Jewish people his age. Many of the friendships formed at the Hebrew and Religion School last a lifetime.

GRADE 7

Meets on a weekday afternoon from 4 pm until 5:30 pm. This course concentrates on the Jewish studies element of religious education and aims to create Jews who are familiar with the basic philosophies, texts and customs of our tradition. We hope that the bar mitzvah will be engaged enough with his heritage to pursue further study after bar mitzvah.

b. PRIVATE HEBREW TUITION

An integral part of the experience of bar mitzvah is the opportunity for the bar mitzvah to conduct part of the Shabbat services and to read from the Torah and Haftarah. To acquire the skills to lead the congregation in prayer, each bar mitzvah will have a period of private tuition in which he will study the parasha and the various prayers and readings for that Shabbat. On average, this tuition takes approximately nine months. We have a number of skilled tutors as part of our community and they are available to teach either at home at other venue by arrangement.

The tutoring arrangements are private, and you will be responsible for paying the tutor after each lesson. When you meet with the rabbis, they will allocate a tutor to you and you may then arrange with the tutor to begin at any time.

c. FAMILY PROGRAMME

ACTIVITY PACK

Each bar mitzvah student will receive a pack of 15 cards listing a broad selection of Jewish activities. It is the responsibility of the bar mitzvah student to choose at least 10 of these cards and to complete the activities with at least one other adult member of the family. These cards will allow your family to jointly experience fun Jewish activities together.

MEETING THE COMMUNITY

During the year there will be special b’nei mitzvah activities, such as a special Shabbat dinner or lunchtime activity with the rabbis for all the people in the bar mitzvah programme. You will receive invitations to each of these sessions. This will be a wonderful opportunity to meet other b’nei mitzvah families

2. SERVICE ATTENDANCE

As the bar mitzvah will be leading the community in prayer, it is important that he be familiar and comfortable with the Shabbat service. In order to facilitate this, we require the bar mitzvah to attend a minimum of 25 services throughout the year preceding bar mitzvah. He must attend at least 10 Friday evening services, 10 Saturday morning services and at least 5 other Emanuel synagogue services. We ask that the majority of services attended be in the synagogue in which you will be having the bar mitzvah ceremony. The attendance at services can be a wonderful time for your family to join together in an activity of learning and enrichment. Please do not let your child come to synagogue alone and sit solitary amongst the crowd. Attending services can be a very positive and beautiful experience but much will depend on your attitude and commitment. Please help us to give your child a meaningful and enriching time of Jewish involvement and participation.

Service Times:

Progressive	Service with a combination of English and Hebrew.	Saturdays at 10 ⁰⁰ am	Main Synagogue
Conservative	All in Hebrew and with equal participation of men and women.	Saturdays at 9 ⁰⁰ am	Neuweg Synagogue
Erev Shabbat Service	Following the traditional liturgy, but with some English.	Fridays at 6 ⁰⁰ pm or 6 ³⁰ pm summer time	Main Synagogue

3. MEETINGS WITH THE RABBIS

Each bar mitzvah will meet with the rabbis on a number of occasions during the year prior to the event. The first meeting will be in a group, at which time this handbook will be further explained, the process outlined, and an opportunity given to ask any questions you may have. Following that initial gathering, the rabbi who will be conducting the service on the morning of the bar mitzvah will arrange to meet with the bar mitzvah to check his progress, service attendance, family activity cards, answer any questions and also get to know him on a more individual basis. These meetings are also an opportunity to discuss the content of the Torah portion and the significance and meaning of bar mitzvah.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

a. MEMBERSHIP

In order to book a date for a bar mitzvah, it is necessary for you to be a member of the Synagogue. If you are not currently a member, just call the office and ask for the membership forms and they can be sent to you.

b. BOOKING A DATE

Due to the size of the congregation, the dates for bar mitzvah often begin to fill up with bookings as far as three years in advance. To be sure that you have the greatest choice in available dates, it is prudent to call as early as possible to book your child's bar mitzvah. There are forms accompanying this booklet to be filled in and a deposit of \$50 payable upon booking a date. To book a date, meet with our Director of Membership services (Belinda) at the office and be sure to bring the forms and deposit.

c. COST

The cost for bar mitzvah is in three parts:

1. The Administration Fee: a fee which goes to the synagogue to cover our costs.
2. The tutor payment: a fee charged on a per lesson basis and is a private arrangement between the tutor and the bar mitzvah.
3. Hebrew and Religion School Fee: a charge for the Hebrew and Religion School to cover teachers, text books and supplies.

Financial assistance is available for anyone who has difficulties with payment, and nobody is turned away because of economic reasons.

d. KIDDUSH AND THE HALL

It is customary in Jewish tradition, to celebrate any joyous occasion with a seudat mitzvah: a festive meal. Our congregation follows every Shabbat service with a kiddush consisting of wine and challah. Many families use the time of kiddush to bring in some special treats for the congregation to share, to enjoy and celebrate the simcha of your family. Generally, this kiddush consists of light refreshments but it can be as elaborate as you wish. The Kiddush must be kosher under our auspices, so we recommend vegetarian with kosher fish if you desire. If you intend to have a kiddush following the services, the hall must be booked.

There is a fee for a kiddush that is catered by an outside caterer, and all you need do is call our Director of Membership Services (Belinda) as early as possible and notify her of your plans for the kiddush.

e. PHOTOGRAPHS AND VIDEO RECORDINGS

Family photographs may be taken privately on Shabbat morning after the service. We do not permit any photography during the bar mitzvah ceremony, nor any photography in the hall or courtyard areas.

In the Neuweg shule it is not permitted to video tape the ceremony. In the main sanctuary, a video camera may be placed in the balcony on a fixed stand and the bar mitzvah taped. We require that the camera be turned on at the beginning of the service and left untouched until its conclusion.

A great opportunity to record the bar mitzvah ceremony and to take photographs is during the rehearsal which usually takes place on the Thursday preceding the bar mitzvah.

f. REHEARSAL AND MORNING MINYAN

A rehearsal will take place before the bar mitzvah. An appointment will be made with the rabbi and we ask that you attend with your child on that day. In addition, you and your child must attend either our Monday or Thursday morning service (from 6⁴⁵ am for about one hour) the week of the bar mitzvah.

g. PARTICIPATION IN THE SERVICE

The bar mitzvah will lead portions of the Shabbat service on both Friday night and Saturday morning. This will require familiarity with Jewish prayer and the prayer book, the Siddur.

Siddurim come in many different forms, and are modified according to the origin of their theological beliefs. Orthodox prayer books will contain different prayers from those in Reform prayer books, which will contain different prayers from those contained in Conservative prayer books.

The Reform "Gates of Prayer" was written in 1975 by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and is the Siddur used in the Main Sanctuary. The Conservative "Siddur Sim Shalom" was written in 1985 by The Rabbinical Assembly and is the Siddur used in the Neuweg Synagogue (and quite similar to an Orthodox Siddur).

It is important to be familiar with the Siddur. The best way to achieve this is to receive and learn from the Siddur prior to bar mitzvah. The bar mitzvah, will then understand the way the Siddur works and will be more familiar with the synagogue. Here are the prayers standard for all b'nei mitzvot:

Gates of Prayer:

Erev Shabbat Kiddush (Friday evening Kiddush)	p.136 (para 1) and p.719 (para 2)
Shabbat Morning Kiddush (Saturday morning Kiddush)	p.720 and pp.701-702 (at the bottom of the page)
10 Commandments	pp.701-702
Shema	p.303
Torah Blessings	p.419
Haftarah Blessings	p.420 (before Haftarah) pp.421-422 (after Haftarah)

Siddur Sim Shalom:

Erev Shabbat Kiddush (Friday evening Kiddush)	p.727
Shabbat Morning Kiddush (Saturday morning Kiddush)	p.735
10 Commandments	handout
Shema	pp.346-348
Torah Blessings	p.400-402
Haftarah Blessings	p.410

The bar mitzvah will also receive two other important Hebrew passages to recite. The first is the section read from the Torah and includes Rishon and Maftir. This has two sides – one with vowels, and one without. Eventually the bar mitzvah will learn to read it from the non-vowel side. The second passage the bar mitzvah will receive is called the Haftarah, and is a reading from the Prophets. The bar mitzvah will receive both of these passages as photocopied sheets, and should keep them with the Siddur at all times. Finally, the bar mitzvah will receive a recording of the various prayers, to help with the preparation of singing the prayers, Maftir and Haftarah for the service of bar mitzvah. Please treat this recording carefully, and do not lose or erase it - it takes a considerable amount of time and effort to record.

In addition to the bar mitzvah being involved in the service, family and friends may be included as well. On the morning of the bar mitzvah the parents of the child are called to the Torah. At that time you will be required to recite the blessings. If you are unfamiliar with them, you can learn them together with your child and participate with him in his learning. In addition, in the Progressive service, the parents present their child with a tallit and read a prayer.

There are various other honours which can be allocated to family members and close friends. About six weeks before the bar mitzvah you will receive a form for honours to be given on the day. Generally, aliyot are allocated to the parents, grandparents, siblings and other close relatives. Males called to the Torah must and females may wear a tallit and recite the blessings before and after the reading. Copies of the blessings may be obtained from the rabbis at any time prior to the bar mitzvah should anyone need to learn or practice them.

Moreover, any parent who would like to read Torah can also learn to chant some verses for the morning of the bar mitzvah.

Younger siblings and those friends and family members who have not yet turned thirteen may wish to be involved. You may nominate them to dress and undress the Torah. The honours of hagbah, the one who lifts the Torah, and ark openers are also available to be allotted to family members and friends. These names may be provided to the office when you return the aliyah forms.

Please ensure that honours form is returned to the office as soon as possible so that we can complete the paperwork and ensure everything will run smoothly on the day.

g. YOUR FUNCTION

It is important to remember the context and content of this occasion. The context is that your child is turning thirteen, not becoming married (although we look forward to celebrating the chuppah with you at the appropriate time). The content is that this is the time of accepting the mitzvot and the values of Judaism. A lavish party is inappropriate. While the rabbis can guarantee their attendance at the kiddush at the Synagogue after services, other commitments to the community generally preclude their attendance at functions at other times, particularly if held on Saturday night or Sunday.

We ask that you observe a level of kashrut at your function, as this is a Jewish celebration and event. There must be no traif: pork products or shellfish served at your function. It is not necessary to have kosher meat, but if you will be serving meat it is essential that no milk products be served alongside. Further, it is important to have a fish or vegetarian option for those who will not eat meat which is not kosher. If bread is being served, then the blessing should be recited as well as hand washing facilities made available. Finally, if the blessing for bread is recited then birkat hamazon, grace after meals, should also be said. If you have any questions about this policy, please ask the rabbi. It may also be a good idea to give a copy of the menu to the rabbi for perusal.

THE MITZVAH OF TZEDAKAH

The most important part of the bar mitzvah is the “mitzvah” not the party. Exhibiting one’s happiness through a gift towards a good cause is an ancient, revered custom, expressive of the best in Jewish tradition. There are many different ways in which you can give a gift to others on the occasion of your bar mitzvah. The significance is found in the act of giving and not the amount, so no matter how wealthy you are, it can be a part of the celebration to give to those who are not as fortunate. It is also a means of thanking God for bringing us all to this moment of sanctity and holiness, celebration and joy. We will offer a few suggestions of places to which you may wish to donate, but the act of giving is limited only by your imagination.

MAZON: is an organisation which, amongst other things, gives money for the hungry and the homeless in our community and abroad. Many people have chosen to donate a percentage of the money being spent on catering for the bar mitzvah to Mazon.

JNF: The Jewish National Fund works to create a better Israel for all by building infrastructure and offering assistance to those in need. They offer a number of ways in which money may be donated and a call to JNF will offer you all the assistance you may need.

MAGEN DAVID ADOM: The Jewish Red Cross. This Israeli based organisation provides emergency medical attention within Israel.

TEMPLE BENEVOLENT FUND: This is a tax deductible fund whose moneys are used to run programmes and activities at the Synagogue.

B'NEI MITZVAH FUND: This is a fund recently established whose moneys will be applied to the tuition and other expenses of bar mitzvah for those families who would otherwise be unable to afford them. With a donation to this account, you may be enabling another child to experience bar mitzvah.

SIMCHA TREE: Purchase a leaf on our beautiful simcha tree and inscribe it with the name of your child and the date of the bar mitzvah. This remains on the tree in our foyer as a permanent record of the day for you and your family to see every time you enter the synagogue.

CHILDREN'S LIBRARY: We are currently establishing a children's library. Donate a book or money for us to purchase one.

GLOSSARY

HAFTARAH (conclusion) – reading from the Nevi'im (the books of the Prophets) that supplements the Torah portion at Shabbat and festival services.

MITZVAH – one of the 613 commandments learned by tradition from the Torah.

MAFTIR – Concluding reading of that week's Torah portion/s.

PARASHA (portion) – a section from the weekly reading of the Torah.

RISHON – Opening reading of the weekly Torah portion.

TORAH (teaching) – the five books of Moses (the first 5 books of the Bible), also used to refer to the entirety of Jewish teaching.

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