

Mitzvah Project

Torah, Avodah, and G'milut Hasadim



5776/ 2015

Dear Bar/Bat Mitzvah student,

You are embarking on a wonderful journey and a new milestone in your Jewish life experience.

There is a mystical story that says that in the beginning before there were any people, before there was a world or anything, there was GOD. When God wanted to create the world, God created ten vessels then sent a divine light to each vessel. The vessels couldn't stand the intensity and they exploded. Sparks of light went all over the universe. The unity of the world was gone. Since that time, we, as partners with God, have had the responsibility of trying to bring back the unity through efforts to restore the world- tikkun olam.

You are studying to become b'nai mitzvah. Judaism teaches that we must also act through mitzvot- commandments.

This year you are working hard to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Becoming Bar/Bat mitzvah means that you become an adult in the community. This doesn't happen in one day with one ceremony; becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a journey of learning and doing. This journey begins through **Torah** (study, knowledge), **Avodah** (observance), and **G'milut Hasadim** (acts of love and kindness). These are the building blocks for repairing the world.

Enjoy your journey!

Noa Bourke and Rabbi David Senter

5777/2016

LETS GET STARTED!!!!!!

You are about to begin the 6th grade mitzvah journey-



You need to know the basics!

You are now only months away from being a Jewish adult, and it is important to be prepared for this transition. Its an exciting time; it can also be unnerving. Before you are allowed to drive an automobile, you have to take Driver's Ed; this mitzvah project is an opportunity for you to practice your adult role before your Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

This is *your* project and chance to shine! Show everyone the real YOU!

In this project you will complete mitzvot and learn about your responsibilities in the Jewish community. Contributing your time and talent to the world will make it more ethical, more beautiful, more prayerful, and more kind. *Your* participation makes the world more awesome!

You will be completing 13 mitzvot and writing about the experiences in a journal. Don't worry- you can do this! For each mitzvah, you will complete a paragraph describing what you did, and what you learned. Don't worry about getting the right or wrong answer in your journal entry. Do your best, take it seriously, and it will be great!



Does it have to be a paragraph?

Yeah, it has to be a paragraph *and* you need to write it down legibly, *and* you need it write it in your words (not your parents), *but* you can write it by hand, type it as a document, or send an email. This isn't a writing assignment for your English teacher in school; just write as if you were writing to a friend. The important thing is to share why you picked this mitzvah and how it impacted you.

You will be completing 13 mitzvot that fall into three categories (Torah, Avodah, G'milut Hasadim). You must complete three in each category. The

remaining four you can complete in any category. There are suggestions and examples in this packet, but there is some latitude when you are picking mitzvot. We didn't think of everything, so use your imagination. Get your idea checked and approved though, so you aren't disappointed or frustrated.

Are you worried your parents are going to be nagging you about this every week? Not a chance! This is your journey, you will be completing 13 mitzvot over the course of the next year and you will need to keep track and be responsible for your own progress. (This means you will need to nag yourself, LOL!)



Can you do any mitzvah at any time?

Well, not exactly. Some can be done at any time, but some might be day or holiday specific. You can make this program uniquely yours and taper it to fit your interests. There are lots of choices, and if you have an idea about something that should be added to the list- let us know! This program gets better when students like you share good ideas!

Are you thinking that you are already CRAZY busy, and you won't have time?

I hear ya, but you will!!

You already do many mitzvot that could count in this program.

You have a year, and we will help in any way we can- just ask!

We will help, but we won't do it for you. Don't wait until the last minute.

Plan ahead and stay organized. We are confident you are ready to direct this project!



Who are you working with during this program? You have everyone ready to work with you! The Head of School, the Rabbi, and Teachers, and your Mentor.

What exactly is a Mentor? There is some flexibility but the basic job is to listen to you, the student, as you complete the mitzvot. They will help you brainstorm ideas. They will encourage you and they will probably tell you to get going if you are falling behind. They might do a mitzvah with you.



Your Mentor will be a Temple member.

They will be working with you as you complete the mitzvot throughout the year. The Head of School will speak with you and your parents to find someone that you already know and is a good match. You are important part of this relationship, so start thinking about who you might like to work with! Once you have been matched with a mentor you should get started on your mitzvah portfolio. You can print out your paragraphs and keep them in this binder. A Mentor is *always* pulling for you, they want you to be successful, and they care about what you write. They will read everything you submit. You can meet with them a few times or many times. You will need to schedule your meetings with them. Try to do this yourself after you check with your parents to find workable times. Mentors like to hear from you directly. You can make this call, your parents have other things to do!

You will probably connect with your Mentor at the Temple but your parents can decide if other sites work for your family. We do not pay your Mentor, they work with you because they think you have things to say that are important!

Your Mentor will be presenting your certificate at your Bar/ Bat Mitzvah ceremony.



Its time to get started! Power ON and ENJOY the journey!!

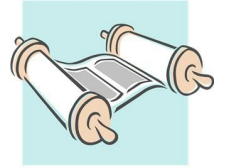


Torah: Study and Knowledge

1. Write about a favorite person from the Tanakh. What issues are you drawn to about this person? Use the following questions to guide you:

- What is the predicament?
- Who is in the predicament?
- What is the relationship between the people?
- How is God involved?
- How is the predicament resolved? (Is it?)
- How does the community affect the predicament?
- Does the predicament illuminate our contemporary life?
- What ethical and moral principles are posed by the manners in which the predicament occurs or is resolved?
- Does individual "free will" permit any other course of conduct?
- How can you retell the story?

(Torah with Love, Epstein and Stutman)



2. Visit a Jewish Museum or exhibit.

3. Read a fiction or non-fiction book with Jewish content. What issues are raised for you? How did it impact you?

4. Watch an educational program, video, or movie with a Jewish topic or concern. Write a description of the theme. What did you learn about yourself from your reactions to the content? See a partial list of books at the end of this section as suggestions.

5. Read two articles from Jewish magazines and write a response to what you read.



6. Research or write a question that you always wanted to explore about Jewish practice or belief or discuss one of these questions with a classmate and report your discussion.

- What is your most important Jewish value?
- What is your view of God?
- What makes Conservative Judaism different and what attracts you to Conservative Judaism?
- Examine a holiday in depth by looking at various commentaries. How does this change your view or practice of the holiday?
- What role does Israel play in your life?

- Does Judaism put a greater emphasis on doing or on believing?
- What are the benefits of ritual in Judaism?
- Create a question of your own!

7. Choose a selection from Pirke Avot in which Torah study is mentioned. Explain the passage and what it means to you. For example: "Without sustenance, there can be no Torah. And if there is no Torah, there can be no sustenance." (Pirke Avot 3:21)

8. Interview a grandparent, or "adopted" stand in. Write about the Jewish aspects of his or her life in your journal. What surprises you? How does your grandparent's experience differ from your own experiences growing up Jewish? See the outline at the end of this section.

9. Ask the Rabbi a question about something you never understood about Jewish practice of belief. (See ideas at the end of the section.) Write the answer in your journal.

10. Read a book/ research a Jewish hero/heroine. Write about what this person did that is inspiring.





GRANDPARENT INTERVIEW



Interview one grandparent and find out about the Jewish aspects of his/her life. Write a letter in which you tell about your grandparent. The letter can be written to your friend, a parent or a teacher. Use the following questions as guidelines.



For a grandparent born outside of the United States:

1. In what country were you born?
2. When did you come to the United States?
3. Why did you come to the United States?
4. What was most memorable about your journey to the U.S.?
5. Where did you settle when you first arrived?
6. What was your religious upbringing?
7. How would you describe your religious practices after settling in the U.S.?
8. What does being Jewish mean to you?



For a grandparent born in the United States:

1. In what kind of neighborhood did you grow up?
2. What was your religious upbringing?
3. What are your religious practices today?
4. What does being Jewish mean to you?
5. What do you feel is most important for American Jews to do to maintain their religious identity?



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ASK THE RABBI

Here are some suggested questions. If you have one of your own, ask that one first!



1. In your opinion what is the most important Jewish value?
2. Is it true there are 613 commandments that Jews must obey?
3. Is there a Jewish view on God?
4. What makes Conservative Judaism different?
5. Do Jewish children have to become Bar/Bat Mitzvah?
6. Do I have to believe in God to be Jewish?
7. Why did you decide to become a Rabbi?
8. What is the real meaning behind the holiday of
9. What does Israel play such a central role in Judaism?
10. Why is study stressed so much in Judaism?
11. Does Judaism put greater emphasis on doing or believing?
12. Why are there are so many Jewish rituals?
13. Why is it important to study Jewish history?
14. Why are services important, isn't praying by myself just as powerful?
15. Do Jews have to believe the Torah is true to be a good Jew?
16. Can you tell me how you think knowing Torah will help me today, in my life?
17. What does the word, "Messiah" mean to Jews?



Avodah: Observances

1. Examine Passover practices and Haggadot. Add in something this year that you have not done before.

2. Help your family with Pesach by helping to prepare for the holiday with seder, preparing food, or other activities. Describe in detail what you did with your mentor.



3. Select a favorite prayer. What meaning does it have for you?

4. Make challah for Shabbat. How did it make you feel to make one? Did it add to your Shabbat experience?

5. Add a new experience to your Shabbat. (No shopping, walk to temple, have people over for lunch, or go out together, don't write or handle money, no electronics, etc.) Incorporate it into your life for at least four weeks. You can do more than one thing too!

6. Take a Shabbat walk with your family. Write about how this felt. Was it different from your usual Saturday afternoon.

7. Write a personal prayer. If you want, talk to the Rabbi about including it in your service.



8. Make and use a Jewish ritual object (or buy a new one). How does the use of the object impact you? Why did you pick this particular object?

9. Visit another synagogue. What branch of Judaism is represented? How did it make you feel? What was comfortable, what was uncomfortable? Did you see anything you would like to do here?

10. Attend a morning festival service. What was the meaning of the festival as it was conveyed to you through the worship experience? What differences did you notice between this and the Shabbat service. What was interesting to you? Was there anything you didn't understand?

11. Recite the Shema (3 paragraphs) in Hebrew (if you are able) and English every night before going to bed for at least two weeks. How did it make you feel?

12. Make Havdalah for one month. How did it impact on your feeling of Shabbat and the remainder of the week? If this is a new ritual for you, how did it make you feel to incorporate a new ritual into your life?

13. Study a prayer. Is there something in the prayer that you can apply and do? Especially an act that can improve something in the world?

14. Make a family hanukiah and use it during Hanukah.



15. Pick one or all of these and write your thoughts and reactions in your journal.

- Light Shabbat candles every Friday night for at least one month
- Lead your family in kiddush every Friday for at least one month
- Lead your family in the motzi before your main meal for at least two weeks.

16. Visit a Jewish summer camp. What made it special? Record the highlights in your journal.



VISITING ANOTHER TEMPLE

1. The name of the synagogue I visited is _____

2. I/We went there because: _____

3. It was different from TIP because: _____

4. One thing I really liked/ disliked about the service was: _____

5. The D'var Torah was about _____

6. The most important thing I learned by visiting another synagogue was: _

7. I also think: _____

PILGRIMAGE FESTIVALS (SUKKOT, PESACH, SHAVUOT)

Where, What and How was it? Things to think about for your festival worship experience....

1. The festival service I attended was _____.

2. The festival is about _____

3. The differences in this worship service were _____

4. What I liked about this service was _____

5. What I did not understand about this service was _____

6. The festival of _____ is important to us today because

7. To celebrate this festival at home, I think families could _____

8. When I asked an adult for their response to the service, they said

G'milut Hasadim: Acts of Love and Kindness

Tzedakah: Righteous giving; justice based gifts



1. Make a contribution to a charity or service agency. How did you decide what institution to give tzedakah to? See the Head of School for a list if you need help finding one.
2. Donate books to the TIP library. Is there a reason you selected these books?
3. Make a contribution to a TIP fund. If the contribution is in honor or memory of a special person, write about that person in your journal. See the Doorpost for a list of funds.
4. Remember Christian rescuers who helped during the Holocaust by being part of the twinning program from the Jewish Federation for the Righteous. (See info at the end of the section).
5. Remember children who died in the Holocaust and were not able to become Bar/Bat Mitzvah. (See end of this section)
6. Help Russian children acquire a Jewish education by helping to provide basic materials.
7. Help Seacoast Family Promise provide food for special events for families unable to afford this.
8. Sponsor a Jewish Ethiopian child for lunch. Contact the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) 202-362-1906.
9. Pass a tzedakah box around at Tuesday Minyan; explain why its important.

Mazon: Feeding the hungry and the homeless



1. Contribute 3% of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration costs or gift money to Mazon a Jewish response to Hunger.
2. Donate Passover chametz to a food pantry.
3. Help volunteer at Seacoast Family Promise.
4. Contribute leftovers from your Bar/Bat Mitzvah to a Crossroads or other local food pantry/ soup kitchen.
5. Collect and contribute canned goods to a food drive. You can have your guests bring a canned good to your Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
6. Prepare and donate a food package to a needy family at a holiday.

Bikur Cholim: Caring for the sick and those in need



1. Organize a group activity for a long term care facility or nursing home
2. Check with the office for a list of people sick and send a get well card. Give someone a call and wish them a full and rapid recovery- refuah shelaymah
3. Bring flowers to a long term care facility, or someone who is ill at home. Give them out for Shabbat, or just to pick up someone's spirits.
4. Help a classmate who is ill. Give him/her a call, visit, send a card, or help with homework.
5. Help out an elderly neighbor with a chore in the house or yard.
6. Donate your Bar/Bat mitzvah flowers to a hospital.

7. Clean out your drawers and closets and donate clothing, toys and books to a charity.

8. For your centerpieces use canned goods, books, or sports equipment that will be donated to needy people.

9. Plan a collection for a particular clothing item- winter coats, mittens, socks, etc. Put a display in the lobby of the Temple. Decide where the clothes will be donated.

Hachnasat Orchim: Welcoming the stranger



1. Invite new TIP members for Shabbat dinner. (You help cook and do most of the work!)

2. Invite someone to your house for your Passover Seder. Make sure they are comfortable throughout the evening.

3. Serve as an usher during a TIP event.

4. Send out welcome card to new members of the temple. Check with the Office for addresses.