

The 13 Mitzvot Program

@ Temple Israel of Natick

The world depends on three things:
Torah (study...)
Avodah (prayer/rituals...)
and **Gemilut Hasadim** (acts of
lovingkindness, interpersonal *mitzvot*)

--Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel

Pirkei Avot—Sayings of the Sages; 1:2

Dear Bar or Bat Mitzvah student:

Perhaps the most important part of becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah, is becoming officially responsible for the practicing of *mitzvot*. Mitzvot, while sometimes translated as “good deeds,” comes from the Hebrew meaning “commandments” or the Aramaic meaning “connections,” and they have been the Jewish way of connecting with other people, with the community, and with something greater than ourselves for many generations. We hope that our mitzvot will shape our lives and our identities as Jews and human beings, while connecting to Jewish tradition and text, all in an effort to make the world a better place. We hope that the 13 Mitzvot program provides an opportunity to re-visit familiar *mitzvot* and try out new ones, and to help set a foundation for a lifetime filled with Jewish values and action.

Here is what it entails:

1. Look through the suggested list of mitzvot, and try to pick at least one from each category, for a total of 13. Some may be ones you have done for years, but try to have some be new ones that you take on as well. Try to have a combination of some that are interpersonal (Gemilut Hasadim), some that are ritual-based (Avodah), and some that are study-based (Torah). Some may be larger projects or long-term commitments, and others may be one-time events. Some may take careful planning, and other mitzvah opportunities may pop up when you least expect it.
2. Circle at least 13 mitzvot that you are planning to do. If it is helpful, start a Google Doc or other list of your mitzvot, that you can fill in as you fulfill them.
3. For each mitzvah, you can categorize it (which of the six groups, Torah/Avodah/or Gemilut Hasadim), say where it comes from in the Torah (you may need to look up the verse in a Bible or online: here is a good resource: <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Tanakh> - and write a few sentences about your experience performing this mitzvah. You can write it out by hand in the attached pages, or just type it up and email it in. Cantor Ken will be your main point person for checking in about your projects during the year, and you let Rabbi Liben know what you have been doing as well when you meet with him to work on writing your *d'var Torah*.
4. If there is a mitzvah you would like to do that you are not sure how to categorize, check in with Cantor Ken. There is almost always a way to include it. If you get stuck with your write-ups or in finding the source of the mitzvah, please check in as well.
5. Enjoy!

TO THE PARENT/S:

You play a central role in the success of the 13 Mitzvot Project. Although it is your child who will be doing most of the work, you will be asked to assist with encouragement, guidance, participation in some of the projects (help with driving, planning, remembering to write down each mitzvah...), and occasional cheerleading. We hope that while your bar/bat mitzvah is trying out mitzvot, that you may do so as well, and that there may be mitzvot that become meaningful or more meaningful for your family in the process. The word for “parents” in Hebrew, *horim*, is based on the same root as the word Torah, and can mean “the ones who show,” or “the ones who pass on tradition,” and as you are your children’s best guides and teachers in all things, we hope that you will enjoy being their 13 mitzvot guides as well.

THIRTEEN MITZVOT PROJECT

A. Mitzvot in Your Home – Ethical/ Environmental

1. Assume a special new job or responsibility in your home that will be continued. (Exodus 20:9)
The Shabbat Commandment not only tells us to rest on Shabbat, but it also instructs us: “Six days shall you labor and do all your work.” This is a commandment to spend the other six days of the week, excluding Shabbat, productively and creatively.
2. Show special honor or consideration for your parents. (Exodus 20:12) How do you plan to do this?
3. Assume a new and ongoing responsibility to free your home of a harmful or polluting practice (start recycling, carpooling, walking/biking, convince someone to quit smoking...). (Exodus 23:2)
“You shall not follow after a multitude to do evil.” Even if there are many people who allow an unhealthy practice to become commonplace, the Torah instructs us not to follow their example, but to forge our own path.
4. Plant and care for a garden or trees through one season. (Deuteronomy 20:19)
5. Care for your pet animal by taking on a new responsibility. (Deuteronomy 22:4, 6)
If a mother bird watches as her young or her eggs are taken from her, it causes her much grief. We are therefore commanded to treat her with kindness and let her go before taking them. The other verse tells us to treat a fallen donkey or ox with kindness. These verses apply to all animals that are in our care.
6. Work out a technique or plan to make your home a safer place (a fire escape route...?) (Deuteronomy 22:8)
7. Introduce themes and ideas of Jewish interest to be discussed by your family at the Sabbath evening meal on several occasions. (Deuteronomy 6:7)

B. Mitzvot in Your Home – Ritual

1. Take a step up in your observance of *kashrut*, at home and/or outside. (Leviticus 11:3 (actually, all of Leviticus Chapter 11, verses 1-47))
2. Build a sukkah and eat some meals in it (Leviticus 23:42)
3. Recite blessings before eating: (*hamotzi* before meals with bread, “*borei minei m’zonot*” for snacks with grain, “*borei p’ri ha’etz*” for fruit... (Deuteronomy 8:10)
The Torah tells us that we should eat and be satisfied, but we must not do so without blessing and thanking God for the good land from which the food grew.
4. Recite *Birkat Hamazon*, the grace after meals, on Shabbat. (Deuteronomy 8:10)
5. Take on a major role in preparing for a Passover Seder. (Exodus 13:8)
6. Remove and sell all leaven in your home before Passover. (Exodus 12:15)
7. Observe the Passover food restrictions during the entire festival. (Exodus 13:3, 7)
8. Recite the Shabbat *kiddush* regularly on Friday night. (Exodus 20:8)
9. Learn and recite Havdalah at the end of Shabbat. (Exodus 20:8)

10. Light the candles regularly on Shabbat and Festivals. (Exodus 20:8)
The Torah contains no direct instructions to light candles on Shabbat, or say Kiddush, or make Havdala, but these have been ways that we have tried to make Shabbat holy and mark sacred time for two thousand years.
11. Make a mezuzah and affix it on the doorpost of your home – include a kosher scroll. (Deuteronomy 6:9) Kiss the Mezuzah when you go in or out. If you already have a Mezuzah on the doorpost of your home, you can put one up for a bedroom.
12. Learn to bake challah and practice this skill (Numbers 15:20)
13. Daven the morning services at home—at least the *Sh'ma* and *Amida*-- wearing *tallis* and *tefillin*. (Deuteronomy 6:8)

C. Mitzvot in Your Community – Jewish or Secular

1. Work on a project that helps produce better government or civic improvement. (Exodus 22:28)
We are to bring the best of our produce to support the community, and give to God (or the Jewish leaders) the service of our children. The Rabbis tell us that supporting our government/community is a way to do God's work.
2. Work on the campaign of someone who you believe is a worthy political candidate. (Exodus 22:27)
We are not to curse a leader of our people. Instead, we should choose and support leaders who are worthy of our respect and whose goal is to bring about a better community and society.
3. Work to preserve the natural beauty of your neighborhood or area.(Collect litter; beautify a park, etc.) Or help with recycling efforts at Temple Israel or your school. Or promote an environmental cause... (Deuteronomy 20:19)
4. Work for or help support a charitable cause. (Deuteronomy 15:7-8)
5. Respect the elderly: Serve as a volunteer at an organization serving older people, offer an elderly person a seat on a bus or subway.... (Leviticus 19:32)
6. Organize a drive for food or clothing and deliver the goods to a charitable institution. (Leviticus 19:9-10)
7. Tutor a student. (Leviticus 19:17)
We are to refrain from criticizing others, or do so only in a gentle and constructive way, when it seems like it would be appreciated. One of the best ways to approach this command in a positive manner is to help others to learn a skill or master a subject.

D. Mitzvot in Relations with People.

1. Demonstrate honesty when it would be to your advantage to lie. (Exodus 20:7)
2. Treat someone with respect who you feel is not highly thought of by most people. (Leviticus 19:17-18)

3. Make amends to someone you have harmed. (Exodus 21:18-19, Exodus 21:33-4)
We are obliged to compensate anyone we have harmed or injured, not only to the extent of the injury, but also to make amends for the wrong we have done. The mitzvah is not only to pay for the cost of the injury, but also to make sure the person is healed, both physically and emotionally.
4. Help someone without expecting or accepting any reward or payment. (Exodus 22:6) *(as the guardian is attempting to do with someone else's money or goods)*
5. Make a special effort to be helpful to someone with whom you have had some conflicts. (Exodus 23:4-5)
6. Don't jump to conclusions about someone else. (Exodus 23:7, Leviticus 19:15)
7. Don't stand idly by when you see injustice happening (could be an incident at school, or something happening in the world...). (Leviticus 19:16)
8. Return a lost article to its owner at some inconvenience and without reward. (Deuteronomy 22:1)
9. Treat a stranger (visitor) with special kindness and helpfulness. (Deuteronomy 10:19, Deuteronomy 24:17)
10. Pay a shiva call. (Deuteronomy 14:1, Deuteronomy 21:23)
11. Visit a friend or relative who is sick, either at home or in the hospital. (Deuteronomy 26:17, based on Genesis 18:1, where God is said to be "visiting the sick" by sending an angel to Abraham when he was recovering from circumcising himself)
12. Don't take advantage of people's disabilities. Rather, go out of your way to help people with special needs. (Leviticus 19: 14)

E. Mitzvot in Your Synagogue

1. Attend weekday morning services, wearing **tallit** and **tefillin** on a weekly basis during your Gesher year. (Numbers 15: 38-39, Deuteronomy 6:8) **This one is expected of all Gesher students.** If you come at least 18 times, you will fulfill this mitzvah and also receive an Israeli bond. You can get 2 mitzvah points if you come 30 times or more.
2. Attend Shabbat services with at least one parent, at least 13 times between your Bar/Bat Mitzvah Orientation (when you receive this) and your Bar/Bat Mitzvah. (Leviticus 19:30) **This one is also expected of everyone.** This should include at least three Friday evening services as well as ten Saturday morning services in the sanctuary.
3. Help in building, repairing, or beautifying something in the synagogue. (Exodus 25:8)

4. Take a special role in the synagogue service such as becoming a regular Torah reader or learning to lead part of the weekday minyan services. (Deuteronomy 31:12)
5. Learn to blow the shofar. Bring your shofar to Neila services at the end of Yom Kippur and help mark the end of the fast. Ask the cantor or rabbi about other opportunities for you to blow shofar on the High Holidays. (Leviticus 25:9)
6. Attend Festival services (besides Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur) on a day when it requires your staying out of school. (Deuteronomy 12:6) You can get more than one Mitzvah credit for one more than one holiday. We'll also count the evening of Simchat Torah, even though it doesn't require missing school.
7. Buy a lulav and etrog and use them at services on Sukkot. (Leviticus 23:40)
8. Organize and direct a special project as a member of Junior USY. (Exodus 22:28)

F. Personal Study Mitzvot. (Choose 1-3 mitzvot)

1. Set aside a regular time for the study of some Jewish subject, and/or commit to attending Prozdor or a Jewish High School, or to be a "madrich" or "madricha" in the Hebrew School. (Deuteronomy 6:7)
2. Read a book of Jewish interest. Write a brief summary and explain whether you would recommend it. (Deuteronomy 6:7)
3. Learn the meaning and origin of three different Jewish rituals that you practice in the home. Describe them in writing. (Deuteronomy 31:12; Deuteronomy 31:19)
4. Make a tallit, including tying your own fringes, and learn their significance. (Numbers 15:38-39) **(you'll all do this in class)**
5. Learn the meaning of several Shabbat restrictions and practice them for a month. (Exodus 20:10) (no writing, no using money...) Find Shabbat-friendly activities to replace them with—like Shabbat meals, visiting with family and friends, games...
6. Go on, or plan a trip to Israel for the future, Keep a journal of your trip or write an itinerary for your future trip. (Deuteronomy 16:16) You may want to work Passport to Israel into your plans.
7. Study the Torah portion of the week and come up with several questions to discuss with your family, including the lessons you can learn from the portion. (Deuteronomy 6:7).
8. Attend a "Tikkun Leyl Shavuot"—a Shavuot eve session of Torah study, celebrating the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. See how many hours you can study (and eat cheesecake)! (Deuteronomy 16: 10)
9. Commit to reading Torah several times in the year following your bar/bat mitzvah

WORKSHEETS FOR 13 MITZVOT PROJECT

1. Mitzvah: _____ Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____/____/____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

2. Mitzvah: _____ Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____/____/____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

3. Mitzvah: _____ Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____/____/____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

4. Mitzvah: _____ Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____/____/____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

5. Mitzvah: _____ Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____/____/____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

6. Mitzvah: _____ Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____/____/____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

7. Mitzvah: _____ Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____ / ____ / ____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

8. Mitzvah: _____ Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____ / ____ / ____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

9. Mitzvah: _____ Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____ / ____ / ____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

10. Mitzvah: _____ **Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim**

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____/____/____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

11. Mitzvah: _____ **Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim**

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____/____/____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

12. Mitzvah: _____ **Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim**

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____/____/____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

13. Mitzvah: _____ Circle one or more: Torah Avoda Gemilut Hasadim

Torah Source: _____

Date/s ____/____/____

Description of project and its relationship to Torah Source:

Mitzvot

Name: _____

<u>Mitzvah</u>	<u>Date</u>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
11.	
12.	
13.	

Gesher Year: Monday/Thursday morning Minyan Attendance

<u>Date</u>	<u>Bar/Bat Mitzvah's Signature</u>	<u>Parent's Signature</u>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		
16.		
17.		
18.		
19.		
20.		
21.		
22.		
23.		
24.		

**Between Now and Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah:
Shabbat Attendance Record**

(10 Shabbat morning services in our sanctuary BEFORE your Bar/Bat Mitzvah and 3
Friday evening services)

(Wait until after Shabbat is over to record the date)

(

<u>Date</u>	<u>Bar/Bat Mitzvah's Signature</u>	<u>Parent's Signature</u>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		