

# The Thirteen Mitzvot Initiative

## Temple Beth Tikvah

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Preparing for bar/bat mitzvah is a process that begins well before the student's leads Shabbat services. An essential element of bar/bat mitzvah preparation at Temple Beth Tikvah includes understanding and practicing *mitzvot*. While a *mitzvah* is often referred to as "a good deed," the literal Hebrew meaning is "commandment" – an obligation that emerges out of the special covenant between the Jewish People and God. We feel it is important for our students to experience this view of *mitzvot* so that the bar/bat mitzvah celebration has deeper meaning than just practicing the liturgy and planning a party.

**Our bar/bat mitzvah program is centered around three fundamental categories of *mitzvot*:**

- ***avodah* (worship)**
- ***Torah* (study)**
- ***g'milut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness)**

The goal of this initiative is to encourage our students (and their families) to engage Jewish life and tradition in meaningful ways. As one becomes a bar mitzvah or a bat mitzvah, our sages expect that young person to take ownership of their actions. This 13 Mitzvot program is to encourage that process of ownership over their involvement and engagement in Jewish life, text and community.

### Requirements:

A total of 13 *mitzvot* are required by the end of the student's seventh grade year or when the student turns 13 years old, whichever is earlier. These experiences and the journal must be completed *prior to the Shabbat of the students' bar/bat mitzvah date*. The student must complete *at least* thirteen experiences that are on this list or that fall into our categories of Torah, Avodah, and G'milut Chasadim. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah must complete four experiences in each category. To get to a total of thirteen experiences, each student will be able to do a fifth experience in the category of their preference.

A mitzvah journal for recording the process is required. Just pick out your favorite notebook or journal to record your ideas, feelings, responses and questions. If your parents choose to set up a blog to record and share your experiences, that may also be acceptable.

Please look in your folders from Temple Beth Tikvah for organizations, charities, agencies, and initiatives that you can support.

### **THE MITZVAH OF TORAH – *Dedication to Jewish Study***

- Start a Jewish library-- add three Jewish books to your personal collection, read them and write about them in your journal. Contact the Rabbi, Cantor or Hassia Levin for suggestions.
- Research and write about a Jewish subject that interests you in your journal.
- Do a taped interview with a grandparent or older adult about Jewish life when s/he was thirteen years old.

- Attend lectures on Jewish subjects and write about them in your journal.
- Read Jewish books together as a family and write about one of them in your journal.
- Attend three sessions of our B.L.T. (“Bagels, Learning, and Torah”), our Torah study group every Saturday/Shabbat morning at 9:00 a.m.
- Go visit the Breman Jewish Museum in Atlanta or another Jewish museum during another family trip (U.S. Holocaust Museum, Washington, D.C.; Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York, NY; etc.)
- Help build our youth group program and have fun while building a Jewish community of youth.
- **I have my own idea that I will discuss with a Mitzvah Mentors.**

### **THE MITZVAH OF AVODAH – *Worship***

- Likvod HaShabbat/Honoring the Sabbath:
  - Light Shabbat candles, lead Kiddush and make a motzi every Friday evening for at least four consecutive weeks.
  - Reserve a half-hour on Saturday to study together as a family either from Pirke Avot (Sayings of the Fathers) or from the Torah portion of the week.
  - As a family, jointly discuss and create mitzvot for Shabbat. (i.e., avoid commercial transactions on Shabbat, such as business and shopping; turn off the TV or computer for Shabbat; make Shabbat into a day for visiting friends or family instead of engaging in entertainment.)
- K’dushat HaZ’man/Holiness of Festivals and Sacred Days
  - Enrich the Passover Seder with your family by writing a special reading or explaining a certain part of the Seder to the family and record it in your journal.
  - Write a prayer for your family to use when lighting the Chanukiah and record it in your journal.
  - Help build a sukkah in your backyard, decorate it and have dinner in it during Sukkot. Write about the experience in your journal.
  - Attend Purim services and spiel.
  - Plant a tree in Israel each year on Tu B’Shvat.
  - Fast all day on Yom Kippur and write in your journal what it meant to you.
  - Take a day off from school and come (with a parent) to services on our Festival Days (Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Passover, Shavuot).
- I have my own idea that I will discuss with a Mitzvah Mentors.

### **THE MITZVAH OF G’MILUT CHASADIM – *Mitzvot that connect us to people and the world***

#### **Suggested Experiences**

- Adopt a name of a child from the Shoah and recreate the story of his or her life, [www.remember-us.org](http://www.remember-us.org).
- *Bikkur Cholim*/Helping the Sick

- Visit someone who is ill and write about it in your journal.
- Help a classmate who is ill (bring homework, library books, messages between home and school, etc.) and write about it in your journal.
- Entertain sick children in a hospital and write about it in your journal.
- *Tikkun Olam/Repairing the World*
  - Bring *chametz* from your home before Pesach to a local food pantry.
  - Volunteer as a family at a soup kitchen for the homeless.
  - Ask guests to bring canned food/toiletries to your Bat/Bat Mitzvah party for distribution to the homeless.
  - Help our temple's Social Action Committee hand out bags on Rosh Hashanah to collect food for Operation Isaiah on Yom Kippur, benefitting the Atlanta Community Food Bank.
  - Give 3% of the cost of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah Celebration to MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, [www.mazon.org](http://www.mazon.org).
  - Volunteer to set up and collect food in your neighborhood, coats or start a clothing drive and bring it to North Fulton Community Charities, <http://nfcchelp.org/>.
  - Write to an elected official about an important social or political issue. Use a Jewish idea in the letter and include a copy of the letter in your journal. For ideas, go to [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org).
  - Participate in a peaceful rally or demonstration that supports a worthy cause. How does it connect to Judaism?
  - Go to [www.handsonatlanta.org](http://www.handsonatlanta.org) to see what age-appropriate volunteer experiences are available for your family.
- *Hachnasat Orchim: Hospitality for Passover, Sukkot, Shabbat, etc...*
- Tzedakah/Righteous financial giving
  - Pledge part of your gift money to the charity of your choice.
  - Contribute some tzedakah every Friday night before Shabbat into a family tzedakah box. Decide as a family where the money should go.
- *Hidur P'nei Zakein/Honoring the Elderly*
  - Call, write, or visit an elderly relative or friend.
  - Help nursing home residents hold services for Shabbat and Jewish holidays.
  - Deliver flowers to a nursing home before the start of Shabbat.
  - "Adopt" a resident of a nearby nursing home and send them cards and/or visit them regularly.
- *Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim/Caring for Animals*
  - Donate a portion of money from your bar/bat mitzvah to the local animal shelter and advertise it to your guests.
  - Adopt a dog or cat after educating yourself about this responsibility.
  - Volunteer at your local animal shelter.
  - Collect supplies for animals living at animal shelters and encourage others to do the same.
- *K'dushat HaAretz/Sanctifying our Relationship with the Land of Israel*
  - Regularly purchase and use Israeli products.
  - Plant trees in Israel and place the certificate in your journal, [www.jnf.org](http://www.jnf.org).

- Give tzedakah to Israel and write some information about the organization in your journal. Rabbi Shuval-Weiner, Cantor Kassel, and Hassia Levin will be glad to give you suggestions on their favorite Israel organizations.
- Travel to Israel as a family.
- Write letters of support to elected officials supporting peace in the Middle East for all people who live there.
- Establish a pen pal/e-mail relationship with an Israeli child.
- Support Reform Judaism throughout the world through the World Union for Progressive Judaism, [www.wupj.org](http://www.wupj.org).
- Become a member of ARZA, the Association of Reform Zionists of America, [www.arza.org](http://www.arza.org).
- *Darhei Shalom*/The Paths of Peace
  - Do a "*shalom* inventory" of your own home, and work with your family to revise habits that are not reflective of *shalom*.
- *Shomrei Adamah* / Environmental Stewardship
  - Do an environmental audit of your own home and see how you can save energy: [www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org)
- Write letters to wounded Marines at [www.OperationPAL.com](http://www.OperationPAL.com)
- Support American Jewish Soldiers through the JWB Jewish Chaplains Council, sending holiday packages, Shabbat packages, and essential needs packages to our Jewish soldiers overseas: [www.jcca.org/JWB](http://www.jcca.org/JWB).
- Volunteer through the JCC's Teen Community Service program, [atlantajcc.org/tcs](http://atlantajcc.org/tcs)
- Support the Jewish food pantry at Jewish Family & Career Services by supporting their Renterpieces program (instead of flowers for the bimah): [Renterpieces.org](http://Renterpieces.org)