



CONGREGATION
RODEPH
SHALOM

Mitzvah Project Packet

דרכי מצווה
Dar'chei Mitzvah

Introduction:

Welcome to thinking about a very important part of becoming and living life as *B'nei Mitzvah*, children of *mitzvot*. What does it mean to walk a path that encourages others to follow your example? What are the ways our actions lead to other noble actions? How can we help to ensure that the world we leave to our descendants is not the same world we are inheriting?

Here is the ten-word phrase you will want to remember and share with others: “If it is to be, it is up to me.” Each two-letter word, short but significant, remind us that our efforts matter. Every step we take towards fixing a part of the world is one closer than when we started. Of course... our journey is made easier when we are aided by others we have inspired to add their efforts.

This packet is designed to help you with most of the tools necessary for success with your projects. The real finishing touches will come through your process and your assessment of your work. You will have an opportunity to put your own spin on how you give precious resources, both time and financial, to your cause.

We look forward to hearing about your ideas and helping you take ownership of your projects. We are eager to join you.

Step One: Check Your Heart

If we were given the chance to carve out a swath of time from our busy lives and spend it doing whatever we wanted, where would we find *you*? Would you be sitting with camp friends, would you be playing a sport or perhaps visiting a beloved member of your family? There are many times we think about doing one thing and end up doing another along the way. This is natural so really consider what you enjoy most, not just what you might want impulsively.

Begin by identifying:

1. **What do I love to do?** What are the things worth the use of my time?
2. What do I recognize as issues that **need fixing**, and which ones bother me the most?
3. Where are places that these two areas potentially **intersect**?

The reason why we steer you towards activities and causes that you feel **good about already** is because you are more likely to continue working with these areas long after this important year of preparation and action. If you are excited about this work, you will not easily put it away on a shelf or become distracted by all the other things you will undoubtedly be tasked with. It is not easy being any age, but it is particularly challenging being a teen!

There are many ways that we make an impact on our world and our community, and sometimes the things we love most (ice cream) might be hurting the environment (cow emissions). Where is the path towards reducing that impact? How do I make sure my alternative choices are not putting potentially equally unsustainable demands upon the planet? (Ex: chemical, non-dairy alternatives that are used to make ice cream synthetically, but which are also more harmful to our bodies)

Step Two: Gather Your Resources

Please keep in mind that there are many things that we can consider to be “resources” and not all of them are sitting in a bank. Some of the most important resources are like all the people on your team during a tug-o-war. The more **people** you can rally towards your side, the easier it will be to make movement in the desired direction. Perhaps one of the most precious resources are measured in **time**. If we look at some of the biggest obstacles preventing us from accomplishing a task it is the limitations of our time. That is certainly why budgeting time is crucial to your success. Make sure you’re not setting yourself up for failure in other areas, such as school or family.

Most importantly, you will gain the skill of identifying where and when we too often make excuses for our failures. “I didn’t have time,” or “They never told me what to do” are very commonly heard in many homes but are these valid? Time is readily found for things we might ‘rather’ be doing (video games, texting) and **taking the initiative to ask** for clarification when you are not sure is the least you can do. Recognizing these excuses for what they are will help you better prepare to avoid using them.

Your connection to people is something that will sustain you well beyond these important moments. The impact we have on the world is amplified and reverberated exponentially because of these connections. Therefore, never underestimate how directly involving “just one more person” gives you access to everyone they know and then the people those people know. This is how kindness is spread. This is how change happens.

Keep in mind that money is not everything and does not fix every issue. However, having **access to money** is certainly **helpful** and is never a bad thing. If you and your family are utilizing money to help sustain acts of lovingkindness it is a most worthwhile use.

Step Three: Take Action

The story goes that God was shopping the Torah around to all the communities of the world, to find out who might be best suited to receive the Torah and all the ways it helps to live a life guided by goodness. Many of the nations are certainly worthy and came close to accepting the Torah as evident in their observing many of the very same customs. However, when God arrived to the Jewish people and asked, “will you accept my Torah and all of her rules,” the response was: “*Na’aseh v’nish’ma!* We will do and we will listen.” This demonstrates that Judaism is a faith that is steeped in action. We do not simply talk about the things we want to see happen. We get moving, to ensure that the task is done and to show others through example.

The longer you delay the necessary work, putting off today what we think we can do tomorrow, you are keeping the most deserving from receiving the benefits of your good intentions. “I have done” often feels a great deal better than “I am thinking about doing.” There are others who will be inspired by your actions, and they will want to join with you. The ripple effect of all these good deeds are precisely how things get better.

Make a **timeline** and an **action plan** and **organize** it month by month, eventually getting to week by week and day by day as you take on more and more responsibility. Having a plan will also help you understand that everything is more easily accomplished when anticipated and taken step by step rather than unknown or all at once.

Finally, remember that it is intentional that you should ask for help. Many of us think that we can do it all on our own, or that somehow it might show some form of weakness. The way you will show how strong you are is when asking others to partner with you. In truth, the person who is most strong can radiate their burden onto all the helping hands they can touch. We work best when we are working together.

Resources:

Please note that this is a sampling of some areas to explore. There will be many things that you will think of as a family or on your own that will motivate you and keep you focused. Make your own ‘Top Five’ or ‘Top Three’ lists and choose when it makes the most sense.

1. NFTY.org

The North American Federation of Temple Youth is the home for our Reform Movement’s youth initiatives and a major resource for youth groups all around North America and beyond. Every year they choose a common focus for their efforts to repair the world and they are always looking for good partners. Sometimes it overlaps with causes that are supported by the parent organizations within the movement.

2. RAC.org

The Religious Action Center is a major force for change for many important endeavors in the United States and is our Reform Movement’s political voice in Washington D.C. for all areas of social conscience. When a situation arises that may affect the Jewish people, it is often the RAC that is moved to act on behalf of millions of socially minded people to work within many pathways to bring about change. Their work is sometimes spread to various regions, and there are links on their website to offices in our state and others.

3. HIASPA.org

Founded in 1882, HIAS began as the “Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society” and was focused on helping Jews who came to America. Since then, HIAS has shifted by extending help to all refugees who are fleeing persecution and want to find a new life in America. Please check the website regularly, as there are many emergent needs as well as project ideas.

4. [Breaking Bread On Broad](#)

Since 2017, what began as a summer program to help feed neighborhood children has expanded to provide food, diapers and feminine hygienic supplies to over 100 households each Wednesday morning. It is extra-special that this homegrown effort is aided by many other local institutions, all working together help our community.

5. [WhyHunger.org](#)

Founded in 1975 by singer/songwriter/activist Harry Chapin and DJ Bill Ayres, World Hunger Year has been operating on the “fundamental belief that access to nutritious food is a human right and hunger is a solvable problem in a world of abundance.”

6. [The Seeing Eye](#)

The Seeing Eye is a philanthropic organization whose mission is to enhance the independence, dignity, and self-confidence of blind people through the use of Seeing Eye® dogs. They are involved in training the dogs, as well as orienting the blind in the use, handling and care of their dogs.

7. [Volunteers of America](#)

A clearinghouse of organizations and agencies that are eager receive your help.

Mitzvah Project Intake Form

Name of B'nei Mitzvah: _____

Date of B'nei Mitzvah: _____

**Take a moment and tell us a brief summary of your ideas surrounding your project. You do not need to go into greater detail here but give us a clear idea of what you might be working on and how it benefits others.

Basic Proposal: _____

Organization/Group Partner: _____

To-Do List: _____

Approved By (Clergy Signature): _____

Date: _____