

# 13 MITZVOT



## **Learning Through Doing BAR/BAT MITZVAH PROGRAM**

English Name \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrew Name \_\_\_\_\_

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Date \_\_\_\_\_

Torah Portion \_\_\_\_\_

13 MITZVOT Fulfillment Date \_\_\_\_\_

## WHY 13 MITZVOT

Many Jewish *brachot* (blessings) include the phrase “who sanctifies us through Your commandments.” As you get closer to becoming a b’nai mitzvah, “subject to the commandments,” this phrase will take on special meaning for you. Your becoming a b’nai mitzvah symbolizes your willingness to become more and more responsible for performing these commandments, the *mitzvot*, which are the duties and obligations of Jewish life. Performing *mitzvot* is the special way that the Jewish people try to make the world a better place. They also help us perpetuate our heritage by fulfilling our historic covenant with God. We do this **13 MITZVOT**, “through Your commandments.”

In our tradition, every Jew becomes a b’nai mitzvah, not just those who undergo a special ceremony. According to our tradition, when a child reaches the age of 13, they become responsible for performing *mitzvot*.

The ceremony at which a child becomes a b’nai mitzvah, held around the age of 13, or anytime afterwards in our congregation, celebrates the beginning of your transition from childhood to adulthood. You will not suddenly, magically, become an adult. But you will start the long process of growth that will help you reach that goal. On Shabbat you will help lead the congregation in worship and read a portion from the Torah. Your leading of the worship service and your mastery of Hebrew, the language of the Jewish people, are, in themselves, fulfillment of *mitzvot*. They symbolize your readiness to declare yourself a b’nai mitzvah.

During the next months, you will train and prepare for the service. You will also take part in **13 MITZVOT**. The core of this program is performing *mitzvot*. Just as we practice a musical instrument before playing a concert, or a sport before playing in a game, so we practice *mitzvot* before becoming a b’nai mitzvah. **13 MITZVOT** is designed to help you prepare to become a real b’nai mitzvah.

Because **13 MITZVOT** is designed to help prepare you for the responsibilities you will assume as you enter Jewish adulthood, the program is self-administered. We will help you understand the program and answer any questions you might have, but it will be up to you to fulfill the program’s requirements. Please set up a meeting with Morah Jess to present your project upon completion. Aim for at least 2 weeks prior to your b’nai mitzvah date.

## WHAT IS 13 MITZVOT?

**13 MITZVOT** is a learning-through-doing program based on rabbinic teachings. According to tradition, there are 613 *mitzvot* in the Torah. The Rabbis taught that all *mitzvot* fall into one of three areas: study, worship, and loving deeds. As they tell us:

“The world depends on three things: on Torah, on worship, and on loving deeds.” –Pirke Avot 1:2

**13 MITZVOT** has been created around these three categories of *mitzvot*. To help prepare you for becoming a bar/bat mitzvah, you will be asked to fulfill some *mitzvot* from each category.

**13 MITZVOT** offers you a choice of different *mitzvot* in each of three categories: Torah (study), Avodah (worship) and Gemilut Chasadim (loving deeds). You will be asked to fulfill 13 of these. Some *mitzvot* will be done with your classmates during religious school or a special event for your b’nai mitzvah class and some will be done personally, that is, you will decide which ones you would like to do and you will complete them on your own time by yourself or with your family. You might even have your own ideas for some *mitzvot*. If so, we will be glad to help you.

## TORAH (STUDY)

Choose Three

1. In order to begin to develop a Jewish library, add at least two Jewish books to your personal collection. Read them and then write a reflection on each.
2. Watch three educational programs with Jewish subject matter or two Jewish-themed movies and write a reflection on each.
3. Subscribe to a Jewish magazine or find articles on Jewish subjects on the Internet. Write a reflection on two articles.
4. Learn to play a piece of Jewish music or create a piece of Jewish artwork. Please share your artwork or take a picture of it to share. You may choose to perform the music at a *Mini Minyan* session on Sunday morning or by submitting a video.
5. Visit a Jewish museum with your family, and write a reflection on one of the exhibits that sparked your interest. The 7th grade will learn about the Holocaust and visit museums virtually, which also counts for this option.
6. Attend a Jewish-themed play with your family. Create a billboard for the play or write a review.
7. Attend an interfaith event in the community and write a report about your experience.

**Have another idea to show you were studying Judaism, share it!**

## AVODAH (WORSHIP)

### Choose Four

1. Choose one of the Shabbat *mitzvot* (*Kiddush*, *Motzi*, candles) each Friday evening for one month, and after performing the *mitzvah*, discuss it with your family around the table, finding out how each member of the family feels about that *mitzvah*. Keep a written diary of each week's conversation.
2. It is a tradition to recite the *Shema*, including *V'ahavta* in Hebrew and English before going to bed at night. For one month, keep a daily written record of thoughts you have while doing this *mitzvah*.
3. It is customary to say *Modeh Ani* (*Modah* feminine version) upon waking up in the morning. This helps start your morning off giving thanks. Try this for a week and reflect on how starting your day with gratitude made you feel.
4. Attend with your family at least 5 special services (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Simchat Torah, Sukkot, Purim, Passover, Shavuot, etc.) between now and becoming a bar/bat mitzvah.
5. Make and use a Jewish ritual object such as a *mezuzah*, *Havdalah* candle, *chanukiah/menorah*, *yad* or *challah* cover. Please share the object or even better a picture of it in use!
6. Lead part of your family's Passover Seder other than the Four Questions.
7. Learn to sound the shofar and take part in the High Holiday services.
7. Design an activity based on the Torah portion for a Bimah Club service. You must get permission in advance from the Director of Education and Youth Activities.
8. Write your own personal interpretations for two of the prayers in the Shabbat morning service.
9. Read from the Megillah at the synagogue's Purim service.

**Have another idea to show how you personally worship, share it!**

## GEMILUT CHASADIM (LOVING DEEDS)

Choose Six

1. Make a contribution to one of the Synagogue Funds in honor or in memory of someone.
2. Pledge a part of your gift money to the charity of your choice.
3. Start a clothing drive in your neighborhood and donate the clothes to charity.
4. Support a local recycling project by bringing in at least one month of your family's refuse (old newspapers, glass bottles, cans) to the appropriate drop-off center.
5. Read the daily paper for a week and determine the local issues in our community and current events that concern the world. Write to an elected official about an issue of concern either in the community, the country, or to help the Jewish people. Submit a copy to the Director.
6. Help a classmate who is ill. Bring homework, library books, messages between home and school.
7. Show hospitality. Invite another family from the congregation over for a Shabbat meal and help cook.
8. Prepare and donate a food package to a needy family.
9. Comfort a mourner by paying a visit or sending a card.
10. Help out your family or talk with your parents to figure out a *new* chore or task that will indicate your growing responsibility and maturity.
11. Help out an older adult who lives in your neighborhood by raking leaves, shoveling snow or running errands.
12. Help your parent grocery shop each week for one month, and select food items (non-perishable) to donate to feed the hungry.
13. Volunteer to help out at two synagogue events (babysitting, Chanukah party, Purim carnival).
14. Visit a nursing home and lead an activity for the residents.
15. Participate in an organized walk or run for a charitable cause.
16. Participate in the synagogue's annual Good Deeds Day.
17. Prepare a meal for the homeless shelter.

**Have another idea to spread loving kindness, share it!**

