

Mensches, Mitzvot and Making a Difference!

Mitzvah goreret mitzvah - One good deed will bring another good deed
(Pirkei Avot - Sayings of our Ancestors 4:2)

Mitzvah is a flame; Torah is a light. (Proverbs 6:23)

Justice, justice shall you pursue. (Deuteronomy 16:20)

It is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world,
but you are not free to desist from it either.
(Pirkei Avot- Sayings of our Ancestors 2:21)

What does God require of us? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.
(Micah 6:8)

It is a custom to take on a “Mitzvah Project” in honor of celebrating your b’nei mitzvah.

You probably do lots of mitzvot all day long and might not even know it!

Think about your whole day:

1. Do you say a kind or helpful word to your parents at some point every day and try your best to live the values they are trying to teach you? You’ve honored your parents. That’s a mitzvah (a commandment) called Kibud Av V’Aym
2. Are you conscious about your water consumption, use of electricity, not wasting food and paper, and not using too much plastic? You’ve done the mitzvah of Bal Tashchit (not destroying the earth)
3. Have you said Motzi over a meal? You’ve appreciated food.
4. Have you done mitzvot associated with Shabbat and Jewish holidays?
5. Have you practiced Jewish prayers and thought about or shared something you did in Sunday School? You studied Torah. That’s a mitzvah called Talmud Torah.
6. Do you reach out to friends or family when they are under the weather? That is the mitzvah of Bikkur Cholim- Helping the sick.

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7. Have you talked with your Grandparents or spent time with them on Facetime or in person? This is the mitzvah of honoring the elderly- Kibud Zekaynim
 8. Have you donated clothing or toys? Have you collected food for the food pantry? These are mitzvot!
 9. Do you have a mezuzah on your door that you look at and which makes you proud?
 10. Do you help care for your pets? This is a mitzvah called Tz'ar ba'alei Chayim- (To prevent) the suffering of living creatures
 11. Have you collected tzedakah and given it to a cause you care about?
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Think about all the things you do and the volunteering you have done in the past.

1. What projects/things have you done?

2. How did you feel when you gave back?

Here are examples of things you can do to fulfill the following mitzvot:

1. Hiddur P'nei Zakeyn - Rise before the aged

“You shall rise up before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall fear your God: I am Adonai.” (Leviticus 19:32)

Ecclesiastes - “It is always the aged who uphold Israel.”

Midrash on Exodus - “When does Israel stand upright? When they have their aged with them. For one who takes counsel with the old never falters.”

The first Jewish home for the aged in the United States was created in 1855 in St. Louis.

Projects:

Contact the volunteer coordinator at a nursing home or assisted living center:

<https://www.juf.org/guide/category.aspx?id=16168>

Some projects can be to make cards for residents.

- Make a tissue paper box holder and decorate with happy symbols, colors and words and bring tissue boxes for residents.
https://www.acherryontop.com/shop/product/273177-5%22X5%22%20-%20Paper-Mache%20Tissue%20Box?utm_source=google_products&utm_medium=product_feed&utm_campaign=google_feed&gclid=Cj0KCQiA48j9BRC-RIsAMQu3WRKuk39Xv5bM7heYBM7c_0uHoKo5DuA4o66QYVEINKAYtyNg4UpXiAaAvc6EALw_wcB
- Adopt a grandparent and see what is on their wishlist
- Interview your grandparents or grandfriends about their life growing up. What wisdom have they gleaned over the years? How was life different when they were your age? What was their connection with Judaism growing up? Make a picture book or video of their legacy that can be enjoyed by friends and family for years to come.

2. Bal Tashchit - Do not destroy the environment

“When you wage war in a city and have to take it over, you must not destroy its fruit bearing trees. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down.” (Deuteronomy 20:19).

“The earth is the Eternal One; all that it holds, the world and its inhabitants.”
(Psalms 24:1)

Projects:

1. Do a park/beach clean-up any time of year. Unfortunately, you'll find trash all the time.
2. Make stickers for reusable water bottles or pins to wear with sayings about protecting the environment and sell them to raise money for one of the organizations listed below.
3. Visit the local recycling center and learn more about it. Set up good recycling in your house and recycle as much as possible.
4. Create a recycled art project and either enjoy it in your home as a reminder of this mitzvah, give to a senior center or a grandparent, or sell to raise money for one of the organizations listed below.
5. Plant anything, care for it and watch it grow.

See the following sites:

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

<http://www.coejl.net/>

Each click helps preserve square feet of endangered rainforest. Learn more about the need for rainforests.

www.therainforestsites.com

Environmental Protection Agency

www.epa.gov

National Wildlife Federation, Kid Zone

www.nwf.org/kids

National Park Service

www.nps.gov

U.S. Forest Service

www.fs.fed.us/kids

National Audubon Society

www.audubon.org

3. Preventing Cruelty to Animals - Tz'ar Ba'alei Chayim

“When you see the donkey of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him.” (Exodus 23:5, Deuteronomy 22:4).

You cannot plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together. (Deuteronomy 22:10)

You cannot muzzle an ox while it is threshing. (Deuteronomy 25:4)

One's work animals should not do work on Shabbat. (Deuteronomy 5:14).

You cannot take an ox, sheep or goat from its mother to be sacrificed until it is eight days old. (Leviticus 22:27)

Maimonides talked about the pain of animals.

A person should not take both a mother bird and her eggs or baby birds, not but let the mother bird go free (so she doesn't have to see/know) (Deuteronomy 22:6-7).

You cannot cook a kid in its mother's milk. (Repeated 3 times- Exodus 23:19, 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21)

Projects:

1. Learn more about one endangered species.
2. Learn more about the homeless animal situation in Chicagoland:
<https://www.pawschicago.org/no-kill-mission/building-a-no-kill-chicago/animal-care-control-results/>
3. Contact a local animal shelter and see what they need for supplies. Write an email and flyer for friends and family and collect donations and drop off.

Extra Resources:

<https://rac.org/>

Religious Action Center - Arm of the Reform Movement

https://www.juf.org/teens/TOV_About.aspx

JUF Teens - Volunteer Opportunities

<https://leadasap.ysa.org/ideas/#rating=4>

Project Ideas

www.fillaheart4kids.org

They have hands-on projects year-round