

# B'MITZVOTAV

## THROUGH GOD'S MITZVOT

### A thirteen-step mitzvah program for TBZ *Bnei Mitzvah* children Family Guide

*“Shimon the Righteous was among the survivors of the Great Assembly. He used to say: The world depends on three things—on Torah, on the service of God (Avodah), and on deeds of loving-kindness (G'milut Chasadim)” Pirke Avot 1:2*

Becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah requires a great deal of hard work. It is true that a Jew becomes a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at the appropriate age with or without the ceremony. As a community, the TBZ congregation shares in the joyful celebration of your child's coming of age. At TBZ, we also want to make sure that the process that leads to the joyful celebration is a meaningful one. It is a process that will help you to connect to our Jewish path in the world; to ask questions about your Jewish identity, and to embrace our tradition with love. Becoming a bar/bat mitzvah marks the beginning of a person's Jewish accountability. But becoming responsible doesn't happen overnight; reading from the Torah or giving a *Dvar Torah* are not the only paths towards this transformation. It is the process that is transformative. Through this process we try to see how our being Jewish impacts on our everyday life.

Learning the Torah portion, the blessings, the *Haftarah*, and the prayers necessary to lead the Shabbat morning service takes time and commitment, and that part of the process is very important. But that's not all there is to becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. To be a Bar/Bat Mitzvah means embracing mitzvot. Mitzvot are not just commandments or obligations, rather they are the ways in which we connect to our Jewish tradition; how we connect to all those who came before us, to all those who will come after us and to the whole Jewish community in the world today.

*B'mitzvotav*—through God's commandments—is an eight-month learning-by-doing Bar/Bat Mitzvah program, which all B'nai Mitzvah students are expected to complete on their journey towards becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah at TBZ. This action-oriented project will enable you to begin your own program for Jewish doing through the performance of various *mitzvot* or actions in the world. Performance of *mitzvot* helps us to become partners with God in making the world a better place. We are able to move beyond self and connect with others. When we perform a mitzvah, whether by studying the Torah, worshipping God, or performing acts of loving-kindness we not only help to improve the world—we elevate ourselves as well.

*B'MITZVOTAV* is modeled upon a *mitzvah* project by the same name as designed by Temple Ner David in Bloomfield, new Jersey and inspired by the *B'Mitzvotav* project that TBZ tutor Jessica Slavin crafted for TBZ Bnei Mitzvah students, Wen-Wen Fisher, Dylan Frank & Rafi Michaels.

All students will complete thirteen *mitzvot* and record them in their *B'Mitzvotav* Journal. Families will be guided through this process during our monthly Saturday afternoon meetings. Students at the *Beit Rabban* programs will have a continued guidance by their teacher. Other students will arrange their own completion of this program in meetings with their rabbis and private tutors. Reb Moshe, Rav Claudia, your *Beit Rabban* teacher and/or your private tutor will assist you along the way, meet with you, discuss the *mitzvot* with students and parents and help you to find the answers to the many questions which will arise along the way.

**Mitzvot may be divided in three categories: *Torah* (study), *Avodah* (worship), and *G'milut Hasadim* (acts of loving-kindness)**

## **WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?**

We challenge you to complete 13 *mitzvot* in three different categories (four in each category):

- ***Talmud Torah***: Commitment to Jewish Learning: **4 *mitzvot***
- ***Avodah***: Jewish Living: **4 *mitzvot***
- ***G'milut Chasadim***: Acts of Love and Kindness: **4 *mitzvot***

The 13th mitzvah is: ***Aliyah la-Torah***: being called to the Torah on the Shabbat of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

Below, you will find a list of *Mitzvot* to choose from (4 mitzvot are expected for all *Bnei Mitzvah* students), you may choose from the other nine suggestions. This list is, of course, only a small fraction of the mitzvah connections we perform as Jews. If there is a mitzvah that you would like to perform and is not listed in this list, please let us know!

### **1. TALMUD TORAH/COMMITMENT TO JEWISH LEARNING**

#### **FOR ALL BAR/BAT MITZVAH STUDENTS:**

- D'VAR TORAH.** Study your Torah portion with your family, tutor and rabbis. Write a *D'var Torah* that exhibits your understanding of the portion and its meaning in your life. You will read it at your Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Four months prior to you Bar/Bat Mitzvah you and your parents will join Reb Moshe and Rav Claudia on a meeting to discuss the process of writing your Dvar Torah. But you don't need to wait for that meeting to begin reading and learning about you Torah portion!

#### **OPTIONS / CHOOSE 3 FROM THE LIST BELOW:**

- Read one Jewish Book** and write a review for your *Journal*. (Please check with the Rabbis or the *Beit Rabban* teacher, if the book qualifies for the mitzvah)

- Visit a Jewish museum, gallery or special Jewish cultural event** (play, recital, movie). Write about your experience in your *Journal*.
- Interview your grandparent(s)** (or other elders in your family if your grandparents are no longer with us or not capable of participating in this project). Learn about their Jewish roots and their stories. Where did they come from? What kind of Jewish life have they lived? Write about the interview in your *Journal*.
- Identify something about Jewish belief or practice** you do not understand. Research the answer using books, the Internet, the Rabbis, teachers and other resources. Present the question, the answer, and your own experience of research in your *Journal*.
- Write your own *Midrash*** (a creative story) about something in your *Torah* or *Haftarah* portion. Try writing your portion from one character's perspective, creating an alternative version, or answering some unanswered question. You can illustrate this story (if you want to) and make it part of your *Journal*.
- Go to at least two Torah Study sessions** at TBZ (Saturday morning 9-10AM). Write in your Journal about your experience and one new thing you learned.
- Art or Music project:** You may create a ritual object such as a *mezuzah*, *Kiddush* cup or knit/crochet a *kippah*. You can paint, draw, or sculpt a scene from your portion or reflective of your portion. You may also choose to study and learn to perform some Israeli, Sephardic, or Yiddish songs.
- Watch a Movie about a Jewish** theme at home or at The Boston Jewish Film Festival (<http://www.bjff.org/>) and write a review for your *Journal*. (Please check with the Rabbis or the *Beit Rabban* teacher to see if the movie qualifies for the mitzvah)

**Or, propose your own alternative in this category and have it approved by one of the rabbis.**

## 2. AVODAH/JEWISH PRACTICE

### **FOR ALL BAR/BAT MITZVAH STUDENTS:**

- SHAMOR V'ZACHOR SHABBAT.** Fulfill all Shabbat attendance expectations prior to Bar/Bat Mitzvah. This involves coming to Shabbat services twice monthly during the year of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation. If you are not able to come on a Shabbat that there is Yeladim services or/and Bnei Mitzvah group, come on a different Shabbat or to an evening/Friday night Service.

### **OPTIONS: CHOOSE 3 FROM THE LIST BELOW:**

- Attend a Jewish lifecycle event** (wedding, funeral, baby-naming, *brit milah*, *shivah minyan*, etc.) other than a Bar/Bat Mitzvah and write down your impressions in your *Journal*.
  
- Celebrating Shabbat at Home:** Light Shabbat candles and/or sing the FULL Shabbat evening *Kiddush*, and say *ha-motzi on the challah* every Friday evening for at least a month. Describe the experience in your *Journal*.
  
- Attend one festival** (*Sukkot/Pesach/Shavuot*) morning service if possible. [We understand that this may be difficult if the Festival falls on a school day. What was the meaning of the festival as it was conveyed through the service? What value is there to setting aside *Jewish* sacred days in a non-Jewish world? Comment in your *Journal*.
  
- Blessing for food:** Lead your family in *Ha-Motzi* before your main meal and every day for at least two weeks, and lead in the *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace After Meals) for four Shabbat dinners. Discuss the experience with your family. Write about how you and your family felt about this ritual in your *Journal*.
  
- Kashrut*:** Keep one (1) aspect of *kashrut* (refraining from eating pork products, or shellfish products, or not mixing milk and meat) that you do not normally observe for one month. What did it feel like? What was it like to give up something you enjoyed? Are there positive aspects to keeping *kashrut*? Share your thought in your *Journal*.
  
- Tie your own *tzitzit* on a *tallit*** (perhaps the one you will wear at your Bar/Bat Mitzvah). Is there any meaning to the way the *tzitzit* are knotted? Comment in your *Journal* as to what purpose you think this ritual serves.
  
- Likboah Mezuzah*:** If there is not one there already, affix a *mezuzah* to your bedroom door. What is the text of the handwritten parchment we put into the mezuzah case? How do you feel when you see it there? Think about what's inside. Write about this in your *Journal*.

**Or, propose your own alternative in this category and have it approved by one of the rabbis.**

### **3. GEMILUT CHASADIM/ACTS OF LOVING-KINDNESS**

#### **FOR ALL BAR/BAT MITZVAH STUDENTS:**

**TIKKUN OLAM (REPAIRING THE WORLD) PROJECT.** Participate in a substantial, individual *mitzvah* project, which you will choose with the help of your parents, teacher, tutor and/or rabbi. Write about why you chose this project, what you did, and how you felt about it in your *Journal*. **This is the heart of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah experience.** We recognize the unique

qualities of each of you and encourage you to use your talent and creativity in choosing and performing this *mitzvah*. We ask you to not only fundraise to support the charity you chose, but to make it a hands on experience.

**ADDITIONALLY, PLEASE CHOOSE 3 FROM THE LIST BELOW:**

- Love your neighbor as Yourself:** Help a classmate who is ill. Bring homework, library books and message between home and school. Help them keep up with notes in class by relaying information to them. Write about this experience in your *Journal*.
- Clothing those in need:** Go through your house with your family and collect clothing and household for donation. Reflect on this experience in your *Journal*.
- Honoring the Elderly.** Visit a Jewish nursing home. Speak with residents about their lives. You can join TBZ in our visit to the elderly at 1550 Beacon Street, bringing Holidays gifts (for Rosh Hashanah, Hanukah and Purim and Pesach). Write down their stories and your impressions in your *Journal*.
- Be kind to Animals:** Volunteer time at the local Animal Shelter or another organization that cares for animals. Write about what you did and how you felt doing it in your *Journal*.
- Comforting the Mourners.** Attend a *shivah minyan* at a house of mourning. Write down your impressions about your experience in your *Journal*.
- Taking Care of the Environment:** In honor of *Tu B'Shevat*, plant a tree or some flowers in your yard and buy at least one tree from the JNF for Israel. Write about this experience in your *Journal*.
- Participate in Remember Us: The Holocaust *Bnei Mitzvah* Project** offers an invitation to children preparing for bar/bat mitzvah to connect with the memory of children lost in the Holocaust before they could be called to the Torah. For more information go to <http://www.remember-us.org> or ask Rav Claudia (she will give you a name to remember).
- Support the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* of a Special Needs child in Israel.** For more information ask Rav Claudia or go to <http://www.masorti.org/about/bbmitzvahspecial.php>

**Or, propose your own alternative in this category and have it approved by one of the rabbis.**

## THE B'MITZVOTAV JOURNAL

Performing the mitzvot in the program is important, but *doing* alone is not enough. It is equally important that you reflect on what you did, how you did it, how it felt, and how it may or may not have changed your ideas about being Jewish. **That's why the *Journal* is important.**

In your *Journal*, you have a safe place to question, gain perspective, record your insights, and be creative. TBZ will provide all students with their own binder in which to keep their B'Mitzvotav guide and journal.

We want you to write about your experiences and learn from them. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Be honest about what happened and how you felt.

This journal will become a very important gift that you will give to yourself for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

You are also welcomed and encouraged to use some of your entries for the *D'var Torah* that you will share with the TBZ community on your bar/bat mitzvah day.

Here are a few guidelines to help you on your way. You can type out your reports and entries on the computer. You can write them by hand. Here are things to consider when asked to reflect on an experience:

- What did I think it was going to be like?
- What was it actually like to do a *mitzvah*?
- Did I feel comfortable performing the *mitzvah*?
- Who helped me do the *mitzvah*?
- How did my family react?
- What surprised me about the experience?
- Write a quick list of thoughts.
- Would I try this again?

These are just beginnings. Feel free to write from your own thoughts and to share your ideas honestly. Entries should be at least one page for each *mitzvah*.

Remember to make your mitzvah projects memorable and special. Make sure that your heart is into the project, and that it will be meaningful to both you and to those you help.

*B'hatzlacha!*