

Mitzvah Day Guide



Mitzvah Day is a chance for you, your family, your children's classes, or your entire community to come together to make a difference and make the world a better place. It's a day to bring together people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds, to volunteer side-by-side, building longstanding, genuine relationships as they perform acts of loving kindness.

Mitzvah Day has never been more important than it is now.

What is a Mitzvah?

A mitzvah is a commandment in Jewish law. In fact, Jewish tradition understands exactly 613 mitzvot (plural of mitzvah) derived from the Torah. The 613 are listed in Maimonides' Sefer Hamitzvot (Book of the Commandments), and are divided into "positive" (things one is required to do) and "negative" (things one may not do).

In other words, doing a mitzvah is an obligation. It begins with an understanding of core Jewish values.

1. Tikkun Olam

Jewish Tradition teaches us that humanity must play an active role in the world. Because the world is imperfect, we have not just an opportunity, but an obligation to help make it better, more whole.

There is nothing more important than taking action to repair and heal the world. Mitzvah Day can empower and introduce young and old to the fulfilling action of helping each other and their community.

2. Gemilut Chasadim

The giving of loving-kindness—what is more important than that? When we perform acts of kindness (without expecting a prize), we become more vested in the people we see every day. Mitzvah Day is an inclusive experience. People of all ages and faiths are welcome to participate. In fact, it is a great opportunity to bring the generations together.

3. Tzedek

Righteousness and justice are at the core of our Jewish faith—they are more important than charity. When we act to promote justice—not just for ourselves but for everyone else, too—we show our community that every person matters. We give everyone a voice. We give everyone a chance to participate in our communities.

Are you ready to get started?

Mitzvah Day projects offer a wide range of activities to engage participants of all ages. As you envision what will work for you, create projects that appeal to a wide variety of people and interests, talents, and experience. Look around your community.

- Do you know a fire fighter that can teach kids how to use a fire extinguisher?
- Is there a doctor that can teach people what to do in an emergency?
- Or what happens in the healing process?
- Is there someone in your community that makes great challah?
- Or ruggelach?
- Or knows Yiddish?
- Do you live near a park that needs cleaning?
- Or a food pantry that might need supplies?
- Any artists in the house?
- Or runners or skiers?

Step One: Pick a date.

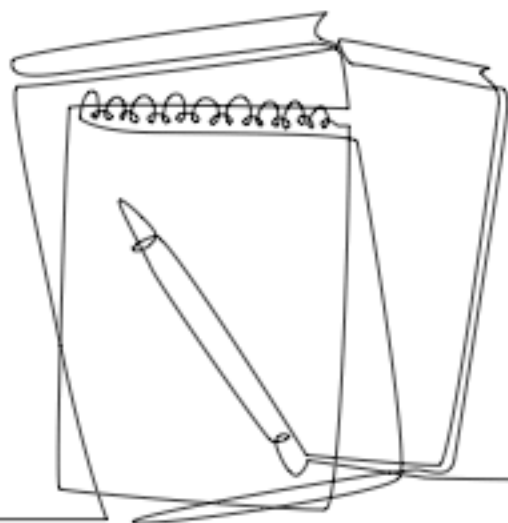
Don't forget to add FUN.
Mitzvah Day can also include things like a fun run to quilting or cooking to creating holiday cards.

Step Two:

Build excitement! Recruit your b'nai mitzvah class to help brainstorm, create a flyer and sign-up sheet, and take leadership roles!

Begin with a classroom, family, or community discussion about the meaning of mitzvot and its significance during the b'nai mitzvah year. Coming of Age: 13 B'nai Mitzvah Stories will offer lots of insight, motivation, and humor, too.

notes:



Discussion questions:

When you become an adult in your community, what responsibilities are you accepting? What does it mean to be a Jew? Connect one of the stories to the Torah parsha you are chanting. Discuss goals, hopes, and fears for this experience. A good place to begin: what do you want to say? Who do you have to thank? Who has been a great role model? What do you see in this world that needs repairing?

If you could time travel and meet someone from the Torah, who would you want to meet and why?

Do you help your parents make Jewish dishes and, if so, what do you make?

What is your favorite Jewish food? Latkes? Hamantaschen? Lox?

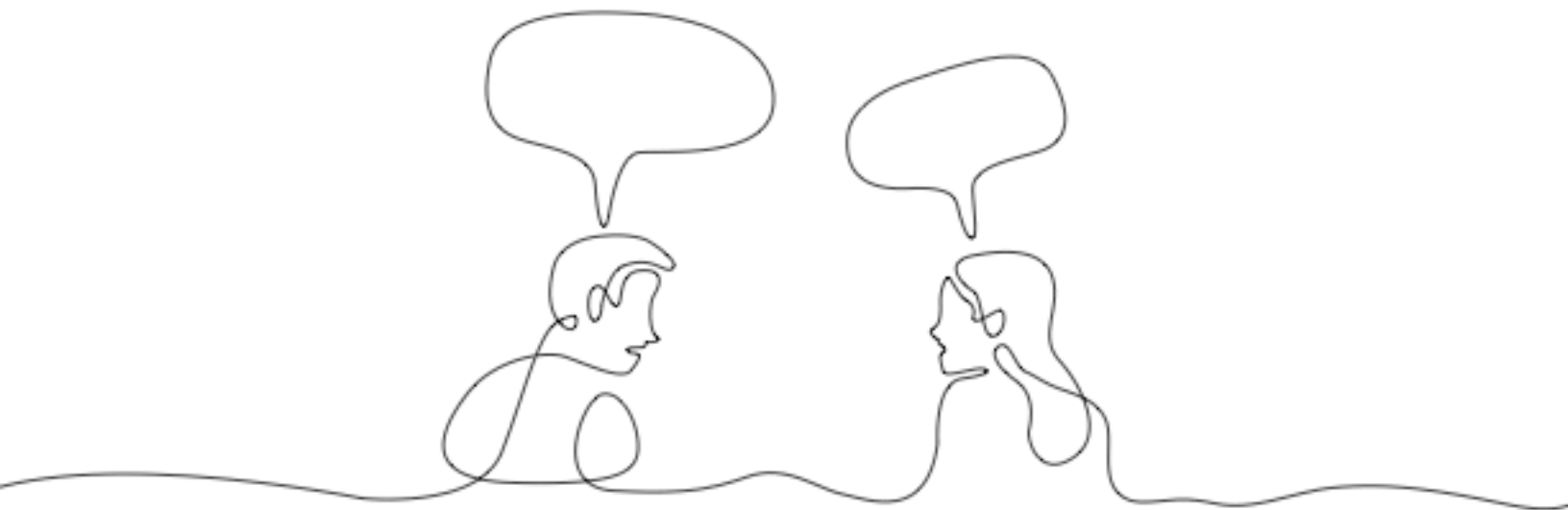
What are the three most important ingredients of a b'nai mitzvah reception (i.e., amazing band/DJ, great food, lavish giveaways, cherished family members to honor at the candle-lighting ceremony, etc.)?

In your opinion, what makes a person a good Jew—attending services and praying, continuing the Jewish traditions, or doing good deeds and mitzvot?

How does your life within the Jewish community change when you become a bar or bat mitzvah and become an adult in the eyes of Jewish tradition?

There are many ways to repair the world. Pick one Jewish leader and explore what that person did to make the world better. What is his or her legacy? What would you like YOUR legacy to be?

Imagine your mom or dad as a child. Did they have a b'nai mitzvah? If so, what did they talk about? What do they remember about that day?



Step Three:

Start planning the big day!

- You will need to recruit leaders for each activity.
- It is also important to offer activities for a variety of ages, interests, and abilities.

The beauty of Mitzvah Day is that there is something for everyone.

Here are some Ideas for Mitzvah Day activities:

- Write letters or visit seniors in your community.
- Create an oral history of your community. Film the interviews.
- Pick up garbage around the community. Clean up a park!
- Plant trees—in Israel or in your community.
- Replant a garden. Or create an indoor herb garden.
- Clean the sanctuary. Clean the classrooms. Is your kitchen kosher? Are there community members that would like to learn what it means to keep a kosher kitchen?
- Visit seniors in the community. Help around the house is always appreciated.
- Organize photos.
- Host a food drive for a local food pantry.
- Host a 5K run or walk for a favorite cause.
- Ask seniors in your community to speak to kids about their childhoods.
- Sign up to tutor younger students.
- Cook kugel! Or latkes! Or challah! Everyone likes that!
- Babysit and donate the money to a local cause.
- Organize a Clothes or Coat Drive for a local shelter.
- Create a B'nai Mitzvah Quilt. (Every student in the class designs their own square!)
- Write letters to your local representatives. Or invite a local representative to speak to your community.
- Donate books to little free libraries or community shelters.
- Make gift baskets welcoming new members to your synagogue.
- Discuss anti-racism and anti-Semitism.
- Create an opportunity to talk about gender, so that community members can ask questions and discuss new terminology and ideas in a judgement free environment.
- Create care packages for college students.
- Organize school supplies for students.
- Make bagged lunches for needy members of your community.
- Host an interfaith gathering or themed dinners in homes.
- Learn about safety at home.
- Learn a new song to sing at services.
- Host a blood drive.
- Help seniors get to synagogue. Or get to the doctor or market.
- Make masks!
- Design name tags to wear in the synagogue and at events.

When you have your schedule ready, make it easy for families and small groups to participate. Make sure you have socially distanced options as well as some activities that can be done at home. Create a sign-up sheet online and at the synagogue or community center. You can also assign specific tasks to different classes or families.

are you ready?

Step Four: Make a Mitzvah!

Stick out your neck for your community! Engage with others and make new friends as you work to strengthen your community. Through mitzvot, we all can build a better world through social action, creativity, and kindness.

Don't forget to celebrate when you are done! And take pictures! Add site where people can post?

When YOU make a mitzvah, you center someone else. You make their day better. On Mitzvah Day, we work together to make a better world!

Available Now!

What does it mean to become an adult in your faith? Join thirteen diverse characters as they experience anxiety, doubt, and self-discovery while preparing for their b'nai mitzvah. And whether celebrating with a lavish party or in reception room A with an accordion player, the Jewish rite of passage remains the same. Filled with humor, hope, and history, there's something in this anthology for every reader, regardless of their faith.

