

Beth El Temple  
West Hartford, Connecticut

## **Thirteen Mitzvot Program**

Rabbi Shimon taught us:

“The world exists because of three things,  
**TORAH** (The study of Torah and Jewish tradition)  
**AVODAH** (Worship and observance of rituals) and  
**GEMILUT CHASADIM** (Doing deeds of kindness).”

When you become a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah, you will declare in a public way that you are committed to our tradition of *mitzvot*, Jewish responsibilities. By completing the “Thirteen Mitzvot Program”, you will demonstrate that you are now ready to appreciate what it is to be a responsible Jew, a son or daughter of the *mitzvot*.

The following are examples of *mitzvot* in Judaism. They represent various dimensions of Jewish life, from ritual observance and learning to service of one's fellow Jews. Please choose thirteen (13) mitzvot for your own performance. **Those projects that are in bold type are required by all students.** As *mitzvot* listed are only examples, other projects of your own design may also be undertaken with **prior** permission of Rabbi Rosen, Rabbi Garber or Rabbi Rosenbaum.

Please keep all your work for the Thirteen Mitzvot Program together in a notebook/binder designated for this purpose. You will be asked to bring your completed projects to your meeting with Rabbi Rosen approximately six (6) weeks prior to your simcha.

### A. Observance and Study

- 1. What is your Hebrew name? What is its origin and what does it mean? Tell something about the person for whom you are named or how your name was chosen. What special qualities of this person do you hope to emulate? What is the meaning and origin of your family name?**
- 2. Attend Shabbat morning services (or Mincha/Maariv for a Shabbat afternoon Bar/Bat Mitzvah) with your family at least (10) times leading up to your Bar/Bat Mitzvah.**
- 3. Write a d'var Torah explaining the content of your Haftarah, connecting it to the weekly parasha and relating lessons that can be derived for our lives today. If you are having a Mincha/Maariv Bar/Bat Mitzvah, do the same for the Torah portion from which you will read.**
- 4. Lead Havdallah at the conclusion of Shabbat in the Chapel service at Beth El Temple.**
- 5. Lead Ashrei on Shabbat morning in the Sanctuary service at Beth El Temple.**
- 6. Recite the Torah blessings (pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah aliyah) at services on Shabbat afternoon or Monday or Thursday morning during the week prior to your simcha.**
- 7. Learn about the significance and symbolism of the tallit. With the help of your parents, make a tallit, tying the tzitzit on the four corners of this ritual garment.**
- 8. Lead Shir Hakavod on Shabbat morning in the Sanctuary at Beth El Temple.**

9. Research one of the following topics related to Judaism and write a report of at least two pages: Shabbat, kashrut, tefillin, mezuzah.
10. Read a book relating to Judaism and write a two-page (minimum) book report in which you summarize the book's main points, explain how this book relates to Judaism and tell what you learned about Jews or Judaism from the book. Would you recommend this book to others? Why or why not?
11. With your family, visit the Jewish Museum in New York, the Holocaust Museum in Washington or another place (other than a synagogue) of Jewish interest and write a report about what you learned.
12. Create your own Jewish family scrapbook which will include your own family tree. Explain the importance of the family in the Jewish tradition. What is your family's history? Where did your family originate? How did they get to America?
13. If you were planning a trip to Israel, list seven places you would want to visit, describe them and explain why you would want to visit them. Pinpoint the places on a map of Israel. If you are lucky enough to have actually visited Israel, describe in detail your visits to five different sites and discuss the impact your visit to Israel had on your identity as a Jew.
14. Follow and document the story of a Jew/Jews in the news. Why is (s)he in the news? How did you feel about what (s)he did as a person? As a Jew? As an alternative, follow and document coverage of a significant Jewish event in the news. Why is it significant? What impact did it have on the Jewish community?
15. Design and make a Jewish ritual object such as a challah cover for Shabbat and Festivals or a matza cover for Pesach. Explain the significance of the design and the symbols you used.
16. Create mishloach manot for Purim using home-baked hamentashen and distribute them to at least three people outside your family. Discuss the significance of this practice and what it means to you.
17. Build a sukkah at your home and invite another family to join yours for a holiday dinner in the sukkah.
18. Celebrate a traditional Shabbat beginning with candle lighting on Friday night and ending with Havdallah on Saturday evening. Describe the different components of this experience and discuss your reaction to them.
19. Become a pen pal with a Jewish child in another country. Describe your pen pal and how his/her life, Jewishly and generally, is similar to/different from yours.
20. Attend Shabbat services at Reform and Orthodox synagogues. Keep a journal (written after Shabbat, of course!) of your impressions of these experiences and how they are similar/different from being at Beth El.
21. Name the five (5) books of the Torah and tell briefly about the contents of each book. What is the second division of the Bible called? Who are some of the important people whose writings constitute this section? What is the name of the third division of the Bible? What are some of the important ideas from this section?

22. Prepare a notebook describing the holidays of the Jewish calendar year. Explain the importance of each holiday as well as its major customs and observances. Be sure to include special customs practiced by your own family.
23. How is a Torah written? Prepare a poster describing the process so that a person who has never seen a Torah before will understand.

## B. Between People

1. **Work for a worthy cause in the general or Jewish community. Describe your experience and the cause for which you worked.**
2. **Make a family tzedakah box and contribute to it each week. Before your Bar/Bat Mitzvah, donate collected monies to a charity of your choice. Describe the purpose of this charity and why you selected it.**
3. With a parent, work at a local soup kitchen or homeless shelter. Describe your reaction to the experience and discuss why it was important within the framework of Jewish tradition.
4. Research Maimonides' (Rambam) "Eight Levels of Tzedakah." Explain in your own words how Maimonides understands charity in its various forms and give examples of each.
5. Make a list of Jewish agencies and organizations in our community that collect tzedakah. Explain the purpose of each organization and tell how the funds that they collect are used.
6. Adopt a Jewish aged person or shut-in and contact him/her by phone, mail and personal visits on a regular basis. As an alternative, make regular monthly visits to a local nursing home and spend time talking with the residents.
7. With one of your parents, take an elderly synagogue member/neighbor pre-holiday shopping or volunteer to do pre-holiday shopping for a shut-in. Discuss what Jewish tradition says about honoring the aged.
8. Volunteer to help and/or work with a child or adult who is physically or mentally challenged. Keep a diary of your experiences with this person over the course of a year.
9. Tutor another student who needs help either in Hebrew or with public school work for at least five (5) hours.
10. Organize a collection of food, clothing or other items for people in need. Learn about the organization to whom you donate these items and how they distribute these goods.
11. Symbolically share your Bar/Bat Mitzvah ("twin") with a young person in a country (such as Russia, Ethiopia) where Jews are not permitted to freely practice their religion. What is this individual's life like? How did "twinning" with this person make you feel?
12. Comfort someone who has suffered the death of a loved one by visiting during the mourning (Shiva) period.