

# Tzedakah and Bar/Bat Mitzvah Planning

**Mazel Tov on the upcoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah in your family!** We hope that everything surrounding the Bar/Bat Mitzvah will be the stuff of lifelong memories.

This booklet has been prepared for you as a family. Becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a process in which you will all be sharing. We encourage you to read over this material together, and to use it creatively to make the entire experience deeper and richer in meaning and power.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah literally means “one who is responsible for doing *Mitzvot* (primary Jewish actions).” Preparing for the celebration can consume huge amounts of money, time, food and materials. Our goal is to give you some tools to reemphasize Jewish principles of *Tzedakah* (righteous giving) and *Tikkun Olam* (world repair) as you go through this process. By doing so, you will find that your celebration becomes deeper and even more special.

## Planning a Family Mitzvah Project in Connection with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Many families take the opportunity for a Family Mitzvah Project to make the whole process of Bar/Bat Mitzvah more meaningful. There are many opportunities for families to do good works together at shelters, soup kitchens, nursing homes and hospitals. Many ideas are mentioned in this booklet—but this is only a starting point! Be creative! Work with your strengths and interests! Talk with other families/people about opportunities! Go for it!

**Read through your Torah portion.** Is there a Mitzvah Project which is perfectly in tune with the theme of your day? For instance, perhaps your *parashah* is about Creation. This might get you thinking about human beings and our relationships with other living creatures and the environment. Maybe you and your family will want to raise a puppy for **Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation**, training it to become a companion for a person with disabilities. Or maybe you’ll start a letter-writing campaign on local issues of environmental justice?

Is your *parashah* about Noah? Collect umbrellas!

Are you reading about Abraham, who was famous for sheltering wanderers in the desert? Volunteer at a homeless shelter and then write about the experience for the local newspaper.

Is your Torah portion *Tazria/Metzora* (the dreaded chapters in Leviticus about leprosy)? Collect medical supplies for **Charlie’s Closet**.

Is your Haftarah about Samson? Maybe you’ll be the one to spend six months growing your hair long, and then cut it and donate it to **Locks of Love**, who will turn it into a wig for a cancer patient surviving chemotherapy.

You get the idea. Free associate—think out of the box. There are lots of ideas for Mitzvah Projects just waiting to be discovered.

## Invitations

More and more people are inviting their guests to share in the Mitzvah of Tzedakah with them as they prepare for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Many add special inserts to their invitations, as a way of letting their guests know that Jewish values will be an inherent part of this particular celebration.

Or, you might order less expensive, less fancy invitations for your celebration.

Somewhere on the invitation you might explain: “The money saved from this invitation will be used for tzedakah.”

## Other Preparations for the Big Day

Your *kippot*: Are you buying special *kippot* (yarmulkes) for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah? You can order them from **Myriam’s Dream**, or **Life Line for the Old** in Israel. Both of these programs employ elders—people who might otherwise be suffering from isolation, boredom or loneliness. They find ways to help people live lives of restored dignity, often via workshops where they develop new skills and earn salaries. Both programs will make custom-made *kippot* especially for your Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

If you need assistance with making this happen, contact Jo-Ann Fleischman in the TBT Gift Shop.

## Tzedakah and Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah Reception

### Mitzvah Projects at Your Party

Plant a tree for each table of guests at your party. Be sure to put some sort of certificate or acknowledgement on the table (or on place cards) to let your guests know that you have done this Mitzvah in their honor. To plant a tree in Israel in a forest sponsored by the Reform Movement, contact TBT’s Religious School Office.

Many Bar/Bat Mitzvah families are choosing to have “alternative centerpieces” at their celebrations. Baskets of fruit or canned food can serve as centerpieces which donated after the event to a soup kitchen, shelter or food bank, avoid unnecessary waste and expense while providing food to people who need it. Centerpieces of books can be donated to **Read to Grow**, hospital pediatric centers or family shelters.

**Don’t let anything go to waste!** It is a mitzvah to not let perfectly good, useful things go to waste. That Mitzvah is called **Bal Tashchit**—“do not waste”. All of those leftover meals, flowers, centerpieces, balloons, etc. can be used to make a big difference in people’s lives.

Always ask your caterer, “**Do you donate leftover food?**” It is important to do this—if enough people bombard their caterers with this question, the caterers will get the idea that it is *unacceptable to throw away perfectly good food when other people in America are hungry!* If your caterer answers “yes” and explains how, then this part of the Mitzvah is over. Please note that some hotels give leftover food to their staff and employees. This

answer is acceptable. The point here is to make sure that good food is not being put in the trash.

**And by the way...** Don't ever let a caterer, hotel, or restaurant tell you that they cannot donate the food because of "liability" issues. **It simply is not true.** In 1996, President Clinton signed into law the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Law, which explicitly states that people or groups

***"shall not be subject to civil or criminal liability arising from the nature, age, packaging, or condition of apparently wholesome food or an apparently fit grocery product that the person or gleaner donates in good faith to a nonprofit organization for ultimate distribution to need individuals."***

If the caterer does not donate as a rule, figure out a way to get the leftovers to a local shelter or soup kitchen. Call **The Community Dining Room** or **Columbus House**. Arrange to have leftover flower arrangements and centerpieces brought to local nursing homes or assisted living facilities. Or call the **Jewish Home for the Aged/Tower One**. Make plans to have leftover balloons and party favors donated to the pediatric centers at **Yale New Haven Hospital** or **St. Raphael's Hospital** or local family shelters.

## **Giving Tzedakah at Bar/Bat Mitzvah Time**

When it comes to giving Tzedakah, Jewish tradition is quite explicit. Our rabbis extensively discuss the way in which we are supposed to give. We are told to give Tzedakah in a manner which always protects the dignity and self-respect of the person receiving it and never in a way which humiliates the receiver. Recognizing that there are infinite needs in the world, and yet insisting that it is NOT a Mitzvah to impoverish yourself by giving tzedakah, our tradition offers guidelines about how to give.

At the time of Bar/Bat Mitzvah, issues of Tzedakah are especially relevant. It is a time of celebrating Jewish adulthood, and it is a time of celebrating family and community. It is a time of spending money, and it is a time of receiving money as gifts. And so Bar/Bat Mitzvah students and their families are challenged to wrestle with the mandate to give Tzedakah: to determine appropriate amounts to give away, and to find appropriate people and places to receive their Tzedakah money. Together, parents and children can sit down and consider where they feel Tzedakah money should be given—to determine need, consider their own areas of interest and figure out where they can have a **real impact on the world**. For the family to ask these questions together can be a powerful and meaningful experience.

The rabbis understood that every family's situation is unique; that's why the Mitzvah of Tzedakah is a *range* of a person's income. **Bar/Bat Mitzvah students are strongly urged to give a portion of the cash gifts they receive to Tzedakah.** This is in keeping with Jewish tradition, the pressing needs of our communities, and the meaning of Bar/Bat Mitzvah itself. The final section of this booklet lists many organizations to which you may wish to consider giving.

So many teenagers, when asked "What happened to all your Bar/Bat Mitzvah money?" answer: **"Oh, it went into the college account."** That's important—but it is a missed

opportunity, too. Bar/Bat Mitzvah time can and should be a time when students can really learn about the impact and value of money by taking some of it to do some good.

When it comes time to make the donations, we encourage you to enclose a note explaining that the donation is being made by the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student. Through future literature addressed to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah student it will be possible for him/her to keep up-to-date and remain involved in an on-going act of Tzedakah.

A word about **Mazon—A Jewish Response to Hunger**. This highly recommended Tzedakah project has become a genuine phenomenon in the Jewish world. Mazon supports anti-hunger projects on large and small scales, in local neighborhoods and around the world. Under the slogan “**3% For Mazon**,” they encourage people to donate 3% of the cost of an event where food is served to Mazon for their hunger-relief programs—whether the event is a committee meeting with 10 people attending, a wedding or Bar/Bat Mitzvah with 200 guests, or a convention with thousands of people. We heartily endorse the notion of “3% for Mazon.” You can contact them at: **Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger**, 12401 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 303, Los Angeles, Ca. 90025-1015, and on the web at: [www.mazon.com](http://www.mazon.com).

## **Tzedakah Organizations To Consider For Bar/Bat Mitzvah Giving**

**Important:** You always have the right to ask questions when you give Tzedakah. How efficiently will this group use your money? How much overhead (money spent printing up brochures, etc.) is acceptable to you? Ask for the group’s budget or annual report—does it seem to you that the money is being used wisely and effectively?

In recommending the following programs, we have taken into account the organizations’ histories, the needs being addressed, the people who are being served, and the groups’ efficiency and low rates of overhead. We know that there are many worthy targets for Tzedakah money out there and that this is a very incomplete list. Please help us by letting us know of your experiences with these or other groups:

### **Addressing a Spectrum of Needs**

Laurence B. and Elaine J. Sommer Memorial Fund for Social Justice (TBT)  
Jewish Fund for Justice  
TBT Caring Community  
Kavod  
IRIS (Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services)  
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

### **Assisting and Empowering Women**

Women and Family Life Center  
The MAIA Foundation  
Living Dreams Foundation

**Care and Dignity of Elders**

Tower One/Tower East  
Charlie's Closet  
Jewish Home for the Aged  
Myriam's Dream  
Local nursing homes/assisted living facilities  
(The Hearth, Madison House, The Gables, Evergreen Woods, etc.)

**Ending Homelessness**

Madison Cares/Habitat for Humanity  
Columbus House

**Fighting Hunger**

Community Dining Room  
Mazon  
Crop Walk  
Madison Community Services  
Guilford Food Bank  
Heifer International  
Share Our Strength

**Peace and Human Rights**

New Israel Fund  
ARZA (Israel)  
Peace Walk  
Adopt a U.S. Service person

**People with Disabilities**

Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation  
High Hopes Therapeutic Riding, Inc.

**Protecting the Environment**

Charity: Water  
Clear Water Initiative

**Providing for Children**

Read to Grow  
Save the Children  
Yale New Haven Hospital-pediatrics  
Hospital of St. Raphael-pediatrics  
Children's Defense Fund  
Locks of Love

**Providing Medical Care**

Doctor's Without Borders  
Yad Sarah

**Responding to World Poverty**  
American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee  
American Jewish World Service

## **Descriptions of Tzedakah Suggestions**

**Adopt a U.S. Service Person:** Participate in one of the many opportunities to offer your support and express your gratitude to deployed troops, including the Reform Movement's "Adopt a US Serviceperson" hands on project. Visit [www.rac.org/pubs/packets/sos](http://www.rac.org/pubs/packets/sos) to get started or to learn about other ways to say thanks to the men and women who serve our country.

**American Jewish Joint Distribution Service:** A leading force in aiding people internationally when other agencies cannot. They are all over the world, leading relief efforts after a natural or manmade disaster. [www.jdc.org](http://www.jdc.org)

**American Jewish World Service:** Provides economic and community development programs in health and agriculture that encourage people to be self-sufficient. [www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org)

**ARZA:** the voice of Reform Judaism in Israel. It is our main way of pressing for civil liberties, social justice, peace and freedom for all people living in the State of Israel. [www.arza.org](http://www.arza.org)

**Charity:Water:** dedicated to bringing clean drinking water to impoverished areas of the world. [www.charityis.org](http://www.charityis.org)

**Charlie's Closet:** supplying medical equipment to Guilford area residents. [www.gimct.org](http://www.gimct.org)

**Children's Defense Fund:** advocates politically for the children of America, paying particular attention to the need of poor, minority, and disabled children. CDF also monitors the development of federal and state policies which affect kids. [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)

**Clear Water Initiative:** dedicated to bringing clean water to disaster areas. Started by Army Captain Benjamin Sklaver, a member of the Jewish community in Hamden, Ct. who was killed in Afghanistan in December 2009. [www.clearwaterinitiative.org](http://www.clearwaterinitiative.org)

**Columbus House:** dedicated to providing shelter for the homeless in New Haven, Ct. [www.columbushouse.org](http://www.columbushouse.org)

**Community Dining Room:** Serving the hungry of the Connecticut Shoreline since 1985. [www.communitydiningroom.org](http://www.communitydiningroom.org)

**Crop Walk:** Crop Hunger Walks are ecumenical, interfaith community events. Supports self-help development, meets emergency needs, and helps address the root causes of poverty and powerlessness. [www.cropwalkonline.org](http://www.cropwalkonline.org)

**Doctors Without Borders:** an organization of medical volunteers who respond to the victims of war, natural disasters and epidemics. [www.DoctorsWithoutBorders.org](http://www.DoctorsWithoutBorders.org)

**Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation:** training service animals for the disabled. [www.fidelco.org](http://www.fidelco.org)

**Guilford Food Bank:** helping to feed hungry families in Guilford. They are located at 45 Stone House Lane in Guilford and can be reached at 203-453-8166.

**Heifer International:** helping to end world hunger and poverty through self-reliance and sustainability. [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org)

**High Hopes Therapeutic Riding, Inc.:** serving people with physical, emotional and developmental disabilities through equine assisted activities. Located in Old Lyme, Ct. [www.highhopestr.org](http://www.highhopestr.org)

**Hospital of St. Raphael, Pediatrics:** [www.srhs.org](http://www.srhs.org)

**IRIS(Integrated Refugee Immigrant Services):** helping refugees and other displaced people establish new lives, regain hope, and contribute to the vitality of Connecticut's communities. [www.irisct.org](http://www.irisct.org)

**Jewish Fund for Justice:** established to affirm the historic connection of the Jewish people to work for social and economic justice. Assists grassroots organizations working directly with low-income people to fight poverty in their own communities. [www.jewishjustice.org](http://www.jewishjustice.org)

**Jewish Home for the Aged:** enhancing the quality of life for older persons in the New Haven area. [www.jhanh.org](http://www.jhanh.org)

**Kavod:** a tzedakah collective that gives to grassroots, low-overhead groups in America and Israel which promote the principles of human dignity and well-being. [www.kavod.com](http://www.kavod.com)

**Laurence B. and Elaine J. Sommer Memorial Fund for Social Justice:** This fund at Temple Beth Tikvah was established in memory of Laurence and Elaine Sommer who throughout their lifetimes cared for the hungry, homeless and disadvantaged. Through the auspices of this ongoing tzedakah fund, donations are dispersed to agencies which continue good works. [www.templebethtikvahct.org](http://www.templebethtikvahct.org)

**Living Dreams Foundation:** dedicated to the cause of artisans in developing countries whose skills and effort most often get forgotten. Focuses primarily on women, trying to empower them economically and socially, ultimately alleviating them out of poverty and teaching them the skills to become leaders in their own communities.

[www.livingdreamsfoundation.org](http://www.livingdreamsfoundation.org)

**Local nursing homes/assisted living facilities:** The Hearth, Madison House, The Gables, Evergreen Woods, etc.

**Locks of Love:** mission is to return a sense of self, confidence and normalcy to children suffering from hair loss by utilizing donated ponytails to provide the highest quality hair prosthetics to financially disadvantaged children. [www.locksoflove.org](http://www.locksoflove.org)

**Madison Cares/Habitat for Humanity:** agency dedicated to the elimination of poverty housing through community participation that includes financial support, volunteer labor and leadership for local, national and global Habitat for Humanity builds. Temple Beth Tikvah is a founding member of this local organization. [www.madisoncares.org](http://www.madisoncares.org)

**Madison Community Services:** food pantry in Madison, Ct. Located at 26 Meeting House Lane. 203-245-3031.

**The MAIA Foundation:** advocating women's health and health literacy in Africa. [www.themaiafoundation.org](http://www.themaiafoundation.org)

**Myriam's Dream:** establishes and funds projects that have two goals: to rehabilitate elderly and disabled people through work and socialization, and to bridge the gap between generations. [www.myriamsdream.org](http://www.myriamsdream.org)

**New Israel Fund:** supports and promotes groups which are strengthening democracy and advancing social justice in Israel. [www.nif.org](http://www.nif.org)

**Peace Walk:** walking for peace and justice throughout New England. In the fall, route goes through shoreline areas in Ct. [www.peacewalk-newengland.com](http://www.peacewalk-newengland.com)

**Read To Grow:** dedicated to early literacy development. Located in Branford, Ct. [www.readtogrow.org](http://www.readtogrow.org)

**Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism:** the hub of Jewish social justice in our nation's capital. Educates and mobilizes the American Jewish community in legislative and social concerns, advocating on issues from economic justice to civil rights to religious liberty to Israel. [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org)

**Save the Children:** creating lasting change in the lives of children in need in the US and around the world. [www.savethechildren.org](http://www.savethechildren.org)



**Share Our Strength:** committed to ending childhood hunger in America.  
[www.strength.org](http://www.strength.org)

**TBT Caring Community:** provides support, assistance and acts of loving kindness to members of the Temple Beth Tikvah community. [www.lotsahelpinghands.com/c/617927/](http://www.lotsahelpinghands.com/c/617927/)

**Tower One/Tower East:** grounded in Jewish values and traditions, The Towers is a non-denominational, multi-cultural home to residents 62 years of age and older.  
[www.towerone.org](http://www.towerone.org)

**Women and Family Life Center:** serves women and their families who have either been dealt a devastating blow or merely want to improve the quality of their lives. It is a place for individuals on the Ct. shoreline to access support, education, information and referrals. [www.womenandfamilylifecenter.org](http://www.womenandfamilylifecenter.org)

**Yad Sarah:** doing everything possible in Israel to prevent people from being institutionalized in hospitals, old age homes, etc. Also train immigrants in new trades and provide senior citizens with services. [www.yadsarah.org](http://www.yadsarah.org)

**Yale New Haven Hospital/pediatrics:** [www.ynhh.org](http://www.ynhh.org)