

MITZVAH

The word mitzvah is often mistakenly translated as “good deed.” From the Hebrew root “to command,” a mitzvah is something that is commanded or required of the Jewish people by God. Mitzvah is the term used for the various ethical and spiritual laws (according to Jewish tradition, there are 613 of them) found in the Torah. The word is sometimes understood as “a responsibility.” Therefore, a bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah is a “responsible person,” a person who has reached the age to be obligated under the law.

Mitzvot are often divided into categories:

- Positive Mitzvot: Mitzvot written in the Torah as “You shall...” such as “You shall honor your father and mother.” (Exodus 20:12)
- Negative Mitzvot: Mitzvot written in the Torah as “You shall not...” such as “You shall not murder.” (Exodus 20:13)
- Moral Mitzvot: Mitzvot that govern relationships between people such as “Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits.” (Exodus 23:6)
- Spiritual Mitzvot: Mitzvot that help develop and sustain the relationship between people and God such as “You shall be holy, for I, Adonai, your God, am holy.” (Leviticus 19:2)
- Time-bound Mitzvot: Mitzvot that time causes such as “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” (Exodus 20:8)

What other examples of mitzvot can you think of for each category?

What does it mean to become a son/daughter of the commandments?

Name at least one mitzvah in each category that you try to perform regularly:

ASK YOUR PARENTS:

Who in your family and extended family has had a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

Why? Who has not? Why? Does your family have any particular

traditions surrounding Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

Discuss as a family: Why do you want to have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah? What

do you hope to gain from the preparation? What role do you want

Judaism to play in your life?

A BEFORE WORD

Torah is a word we use a lot, and it is a word with many meanings. Torah can be a process – a way of studying, learning, and growing. That is, Torah can be something a Jew does. Torah means law. We use it to mean the codes, rules, and values that guide the way we live. We use it to mean the principles that shape the way we act. That is, Torah can be the way a Jew lives. Torah can mean all the literature the Jewish people consider holy. Torah can mean the whole Bible, the commentaries, the Talmud. It could mean the huge body of material a Jew learns. **So we do Torah by learning Torah in order to live Torah.** It can get confusing. Torah also means the Five Books of Moses. The SEFER TORAH is the scroll we keep inside the ark.

A great Chasidic teacher would teach, “Don’t say words of Torah, BE Torah.”

Torah has two meanings. **Torah can be a symbol.** We can dance with the Torah, stand up for it, and kiss it with our tallit or prayer book as it is carried by. We can talk about the Torah as being a light or as being the length of our days. Torah can be a symbol for our Judaism.

Torah can be a book. The Torah is a body of literature filled with history, stories, poems, laws, and other sacred information. The Torah is a collection of names, places, events, and codes. Written in Hebrew, the Torah is a book we struggle to fully understand.

Sometimes, it is hard for us to find all the beauty of the symbol when we wrestle with the book.

PRESENTING THE TORAH

The Torah is:

5 books

187 chapters

54 Torah portions

5,846 verses

It tells a story which begins with God creating the universe and ends with the death of Moses. In between, people discover God, and God makes a covenant with Israel. B'nai Yisrael (the Children of Israel) enter and leave Egypt, and the Law is given. In between, we have lots of laws and stories.

Important characters:

Adam and Eve

Cain and Abel

Noah

Abraham and Sarah

Eliezer, Hagar, Ishmael, Lot, Lot's wife

Isaac and Rebecca

Laban, Esau and Jacob, Abimelech

Jacob and Leah

Rueben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dinah

Zilpah (handmaiden), Gad, Asher,

Jacob and Rachel

Joseph and Benjamin

Bilhah (handmaiden), Dan Naphtali

Joseph

Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, Pharaoh

Manasseh, Ephraim (Joseph's sons)

New Pharaoh, Pharaoh's Daughter

Shifrah, Puah (midwives)

Yocheved & Amram, Miriam, Aaron, Moses

Moses

Yitro (father in law – aka Jethro, Reuel, Hobab) – had 7 daughters,

Zipporah (Moses' wife), Children: Gershom, Eliezer

Aaron, High Priest

Elisheva (wife), Children: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, Ithamar

Architects for tabernacle

Bezalel (tribe of Judah), Aholiab (tribe of Dan),

Korach

Balak

King, Balaam – wizard

12 spies

Joshua and Caleb

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YOUR PARASHA PROJECT

The goal of the Parasha Project is to introduce the student to the Torah portion you will read at your Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebration.

Parasha/Torah Portion (Torah Book, chapters and verses):

Name of Portion:

Torah Book: _____

Chapters: Verses: ____: _____ - ____: _____

Where does your Parsha fall in the story of the Jewish people? Before or after Abraham? Before or after Moses took the Israelites out of slavery from Egypt?

Now read your Torah portion.

Who: Who are the characters mentioned in your Torah portion?

What: What happens in the story? Was there conflict between the characters?

Where: Where does the story take place? Does the Torah portion mention a city or land?

Why: If there was a struggle or issue with some of the characters, why did it take place?

Where does it fit in the story of the Jewish People? Which book is it in?

What happened before this Parsha?

Open up the Hebrew Bible and try to find your Torah portion.

Name of Torah Book in Hebrew:

Name of Torah Portion/Parsha in Hebrew:

Hebrew equivalent of Chapters: Verses:

_____ : _____ - _____ : _____ פרק

Write the first sentence of your portion in Hebrew:

Write an overall Summary of the Torah Portion in three sentences:

Did you relate to any of the characters?

Which part of the portion did you connect to?

Which part of the portion do you want to share with the group?

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Write a proposal for you

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Make a list of what you need. Will you need posterboard? A shoe box?

Clay? *Each class will dedicate time to these individual projects, but students who need more time to complete the project may have to work on these projects at home.*

Please make sure to include the following during your presentation:

- Where we can find the Torah portion (book, chapter, verse)
- A three sentence summary of your Torah portion
- What you found interesting about your Parsha
- The focus of your Parsha Project