

Mitzvot work in becoming B'nai Mitzvah

Ben Azzai would say, “Run to do the least of the commandments as you would to do the most important. Run away from transgression, for a commandment pulls along a commandment and a transgression pulls along a transgression. The reward of a commandment is a commandment and the reward of a transgression is a transgression.” (Pirkei Avot 4.2)

What is a *Mitzvah*?

- A *mitzvah* is a commandment. There are 613 specific *mitzvot* in the Torah (plural of *mitzvah*), traditionally acknowledged to have been given by God or decreed by our Sages.
- Doing *Mitzvot* connect us to God, bringing God’s presence into our lives.
- Doing *Mitzvot* is part of our history. Through our actions, we become connected to our people who stood at Sinai to witness God’s eternal covenant with every generation.
- Doing *Mitzvot* also connects us to our tradition, which at more than 5,000 years old, has contributed to some of our civilization’s greatest values.

Why am I starting to do *mitzvot* as I become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah?

- While we now call you a Jewish adult, it is actually up to you to become one. It is your time to search, study and take on Jewish responsibilities for yourself.
- While many *mitzvot* are ‘good deeds’, being helpful and important activities in our society, it is a Jewish responsibility to take them on and do them in a Jewish consciousness that elevates their purpose to something holy, toward making the world complete and whole.
- The Jewish principle of *Tikun Olam*, of repairing the world, guides us to live out our Jewish values. You can change the world, one deed at a time.

Various ethical and moral bases of *mitzvot*, to help me think about where I want to begin:

- *Tsa’ar Ba’alei Chayim* – Being Kind to Animals [Compassion for the pain of living creatures]
‘A person should feed his or her animal before eating.’ [Talmud, Berachot 40a]
- *Bikur Cholim* – Visiting the Sick.
‘To attend to the sick is to attend to God.’ [Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel]
- *Hachnasat Orchim* – Hospitality
‘You shall treat the stranger who dwells with you as the native among you, and you shall love that one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.’ [Leviticus 19:34]

- *Tzedakah* – Righteous Giving
‘Justice, justice shall you pursue.’ [Deuteronomy 16:20]
- *Kibud Av va’Em* – Honoring one’s parents
‘Honor your father and your mother.’ [Exodus 20:12]
- *Talmud Torah* – Torah Learning
‘Study is greater than practice, for it leads to practice.’ [Talmud, Kiddushin 40b]
- *Chesed Shel Emet* – Honoring the Deceased and Comforting the Mourner
‘Weeping may linger at night, but joy comes with a new day.’ [Psalms 30:6]
- *Hiddur P’nei Zakein* – Giving Honor to the Elderly
‘The prosperity of a country is in accordance with the treatment of its aged.’ [Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav]
- *Sh’mirat Shabbat* – Observing the Shabbat
‘Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.’ [Exodus 20:8]
- *Sh’mirat haTeva* – Protecting our Natural World
‘When you wage war against a city, do not destroy its trees.’ [Deuteronomy 20:19]
- *Mazon* - Feeding the Hungry
‘Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the stranger. I am Adonai your God.’ [Leviticus 19:10]
- *Gemilut Chasadim* – Deeds of Great Compassion
‘Shimon [the son of Rabban Gamliel] says: It is not what one says, but rather what one does, that makes all the difference in the world.’ [Pirkei Avot]
- *Zikaron* – Remembrance
‘Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Eternal your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.’ [Deuteronomy 5:15]

***B'nai Mitzvah* Social Action Projects and Older Youth Volunteer Ideas**

We encourage youth to volunteer with our NVHC community, the Reston community and our “partners” including Cornerstones, Forest Edge Elementary School, and Clearview Elementary School.

Projects are more meaningful if they are more than a one-time activity and involve multiple steps including planning, raising funds (if needed) or collecting items, and participating in the activity several times.

Cornerstones <https://www.cornerstonesva.org/>

Contact at Cornerstones: Susan Alger, Director of Volunteer and Community Engagement
susan.alger@cornerstonesva.org

Off-site Youth Activities (see [Cornerstones hand out](#) for more detail on doing these activities)

- Do a Neighborhood Gently Used Towel Drive - collect from your neighbors, wash and deliver
- Prepare Bedtime Snacks for Children at the Embury Rucker Shelter (see [bedtime snack guidelines](#))
- Prepare Bagged Meals for Shelter Residents (see [bagged meal guidelines](#))
- Cook or Bake for Shelter Residents
- Conduct a Drive in front of a local store (toiletries, cleaning goods, housewarming needs etc.)
- Date and sort bins of toiletries (pick up from the shelter, sort, return to the shelter)

Other activities for Cornerstones: Visit their [volunteer webpage](#) and if interested email susan.alger@cornerstonesva.org Highlighted activities for youth:

- Farmers Market Gleaners: Collect items from vendors at the Lake Anne Village Farmers Market and drop off at the Cornerstones Emergency Pantry (Saturdays, May through November)
- Coat Closet Volunteers: Sort and display donated coats at the Reston Coat Closet (help needed on Tuesdays, Thursdays, & Saturdays from November through March)
- Special Event Donation Drive Coordinator: Collect items needs for Back to School, Thanksgiving, Adopt a Family (December holidays).
- Celebration Hosts: Plan a special event, purchase materials (e.g., for doing crafts for children) and lead an event.
- Homework Help: Help with homework after school at one of Cornerstones neighborhood programs at Cedar Ridge Community Center, Westglade Community Center, and Herndon Neighborhood Resource Center (only high school student volunteers and must make a regular commitment to help).
- Childcare: Help care for younger students during certain Cornerstones programs.
- Thanksgiving Food Drive Distribution (Saturday before Thanksgiving): Hand out boxes of donated food to families.
- Older teens can also do childcare for various events, and after-school homework help for kids in our neighborhood programs at Cedar Ridge, Westglade, and Herndon Neighborhood Resource Center. They are looking for homework help volunteers for Westglade community for Tuesday through Thursday. One day a week is fine.

Weekend Snack Bags for Forest Edge Elementary School and Clearview Elementary School

Contact at NVHC: Alison Behar alison.behar@gmail.com

NVHC provides weekend snack bags for students at the local elementary schools. Donate and help pack the weekend snack bags. Pack dates for 2018-2019 School Year: (Sundays at noon): 9/23, 10/28, 11/11, 12/16, 1/20, 2/24, 3/24, 4/28, 5/19. (Tamid packs monthly on Tuesdays.)

Women Giving Back <https://womengivingback.org/>

Contact at NVHC: Deede Snowwhite, Sisterhood Social Action Chair SisterhoodSocialAction@nvhcreston.org

Sisterhood collects clothing for Women Giving Back and also volunteers at their location in Sterling from time to time. Get involved with them, or organize your own collections and volunteering (most volunteering is on Saturday mornings but we may be able to set up our own time if we have a group contact Ellen Ranard, NVHC Social Action Chair SocialAction@nvhcreston.org).

Project Linus <https://www.projectlinus.org/>

Contact at NVHC: Deede Snowwhite, Sisterhood Social Action Chair SisterhoodSocialAction@nvhcreston.org

Sisterhood and the religious school students have participated in blanket making (non-sew fleece blankets) for Project Linus. Organize your own blanket-making party and donate the blankets to Project Linus. Blankets are donated to the Fairfax coordinator and given to children in local hospitals and shelters.

Warm Up America <http://www.warmupamerica.org/warmup.html>

Contact at NVHC: Jackie Gladstone jagstoner@aol.com

The NVHC Knitting group makes squares that are used for blankets. Knit squares and donate to their effort or organize your own knitting or crocheting party and make squares as a group. Warm Up America also collects the following knit and crochet items: hats for preemies, adult hats, scarves, baby clothing, and afghans. These items are distributed all over the country.

NVHC Pre-School Volunteers – Summer Program

Contact at NVHC: Cindi Drake, preschool director, cindi@nvhcreston.org

NVHC pre-school is year-round. Volunteer to help with the children during NVHC's summer camp program.

VOICE – Get out the Vote <http://www.voice-iaf.org/>

Contact at NVHC: Lisa Folb lisafolb@yahoo.com

NVHC is an active member of VOICE. Participate with your parent or other adult in a non-partisan Get Out The Vote (GOTV) – door to door in Fairfax County before election day.

Plastic Free Challenge <https://350fairfax.org/plastic-free-challenge/>

Contact at NVHC: Ellen Ranard, Social Action Chair, SocialAction@nvhcreston.org

The Social Action Committee is promoting the Plastic Free Challenge in October. Learn about plastic use and pollution, participate in the challenge, encourage others to participate. Combine this with other activities to encourage limited use of plastics.

NVHC Change, Social Action Committee

Contact at NVHC: Ellen Ranard, Social Action Chair, SocialAction@nvhcreston.org

We need help on some of our activities. Or have a new idea? Let us know and maybe the Committee can help support you with more volunteers or resources. Examples of activities where we need help:

- High Holy Day Food Drive (help with stapling bags, handing out bags, collecting food)
- Embry Rucker Shelter Meals – you must be 18 to serve but younger students can help with a parent when we cook and bake (two or three times a year) or cook or bake for the Hypothermia Shelter Meals (six times during the winter)
- Handing out Reusable Shopping Bags to encourage plastic free challenge
- Greeting worshipers from ADAMS who come to NVHC to pray at noon on Fridays (come on a day off from school)

Hospital Volunteers (for older students only)

Reston Hospital Center: Must be at least 16 years old to volunteer. Information at: <https://restonhospital.com/about/caring-for-our-community/volunteers.dot>

Inova Fairfax Hospital: Must be at least 15 years old to volunteer. Information at: <https://www.inova.org/get-involved/volunteer/inova-fairfax-hospital/teen-volunteer-opportunities/index.jsp>

Inova Loudoun Hospital: Must be at least 16 years old to volunteer. Information at: <https://www.inova.org/get-involved/volunteer/inova-loudoun-hospital/index.jsp>

Fairfax County Volunteer Opportunities

Check out these websites for more ideas –

<http://volunteerfairfax.org/> and <https://volunteer.fairfaxcounty.gov/custom/1380/index.php>

Lucky Dog Animal Rescue

Contact: volunteering@luckydoganimalrescue.org

Volunteer opportunities are available for students with an adult, including helping at an adoption event:

<https://www.luckydoganimalrescue.org/volunteer/youth-program>

The above list of ideas will get you started but please think more broadly and creatively:

- Do you and your friends have special skills or talent? Plan a talent show for senior citizens or magic tricks for the youth at the shelter. Buddy with a younger student to help with homework or reading. Plan a special event to do crafts with children. Contact Cornerstones at volunteer@cornerstonesva.org (or another organization of your choice) to see what they need at their facilities – community centers, day care facilities, and shelters.

Questions: Contact Ellen Ranard, Social Action Chair, SocialAction@nvhcreston.org

If you have a great activity for youth that you have done, let me know so I can share it with others.

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