

Beth Emet ^{בית אמת}

THE FREE SYNAGOGUE

Kabbalat Mitzvah:

Gemilut Chasadim Project Planning Workbook

Becoming a Kabbalat Mitzvah is a great honor in the Jewish community – one where Jewish teens take their first steps into Jewish adulthood. But what does it mean to be a Jewish adult anyways? This is a complicated question, and (like so many aspects of Judaism) there is not one answer. With that said, there are some core aspects of Jewish life which we try to embody through the Kabbalat Mitzvah process. By leading a service, you are already engaging two of these: Torah and Avodah (prayer). Your project will be an expression of Gemilut Chasadim (acts of loving-kindness). This workbook is intended to help you through this process. You are not required to complete every section, however it can be a helpful guide for teens who are having trouble getting started or need help putting good idea into action. In particular, steps 1 and 2 in this booklet are vital for anyone beginning a Gemilut Chasadim project.

You are welcome to meet with the Director of Youth Programs for help. It is, however, very important that before you contact him/her you have spent time reviewing and completing this workbook. In particular, it is important that you complete steps 1 and 2, and have at least begun step 3.

What is a Gemilut Chasadim Project at Beth Emet Anyways?

A Gemilut Chasadim Project is any action that makes our world a better place. It is an expression of your interest and your values, and is a demonstration of your budding leadership skills. In it, you will take responsibility for the world around you and demonstrate that you can make a difference. There is no ‘correct’ type of Gemilut Chasadim Project – any project that creates meaningful change and that you are passionate about fulfills the requirement. With that said, you are encouraged to spend time exploring projects beyond raising money or collecting items. While those can both be very meaningful actions – and very important for the organizations – there are lots of ways to create change in our world and it is important that you give consideration to many of them.

Steps in the Process

There is no right way to do a Gemilut Chasadim Project, however the steps below are common ones that many teens go through. Each section in this workbook addresses the various common steps. Your personal process may not have all these steps, or may have more – that is OK. This is just a guide!

1. Ask yourself: What do I value?
2. Choose a cause
3. Research ways to make change
4. Develop a project
5. Do your project!
6. Share what you did

What Do I Value?

Your Gemilut Chasadim Project should be an expression of who you are and what you value. Part of being a Jewish adult means that you develop your personal value system. Judaism has many values – we call these Jewish values. We can find them expressed in Torah and other Jewish texts. If you were in sixth grade Judaica at Beth Emet, you can think back to the Jewish Lens project. Remember how you thought of Jewish values, read texts that expressed those values, and then found them expressed in everyday places? This should be the basis of your Gemilut Chasadim Project – knowing what you believe in is a critical step to changing the world.

List (at least) five Jewish values that are important to you. Next to each one, write your personal definition of what it means. For help, you can ask a parent, older sibling, cousin, babysitter, or another adult you know, how they would define this value. *If you need help thinking of some Jewish values, you can visit <http://babaganewz.com/values>.*

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Choose a Cause

Once you know what your values are, and are able to talk about them, it is time to think about what causes are important to you. Look back at the values you listed. Does any cause 'jump out' at you as you read through them? The most meaningful Gemilut Chasadim Projects happen when a teen has a personal connection to the cause they are advocating for. Sometimes this comes from their own life, such as a teen who was adopted and thus is interested in a Gemilut Chasadim Project about adoption. Sometimes, it comes from someone who is close to them, such as a family member who is a veteran and thus the Gemilut Chasadim Project is about veterans. The activity below has helped many teens narrow down their many interests to select a single cause.

1. Think of your own life. Is there something that is a part of who you are that you might want your Gemilut Chasadim Project to be about? *If yes, skip to step four.*
2. Think of at least five adults in your life (only two can be people who live in your house). List them and their relationship to you below. Talk with each of these adults about what is a cause that is important to them and why. Try to think creatively about who these adults could be: a grandparent, an aunt/uncle, a cousin, a camp counselor, a teacher, a coach, a babysitter, etc. *During your conversations, if one of the causes they talk about really interests you, skip to step four.*

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

3. By now, you have thought about your personal life, and talked with five adults. If you have not yet talked with five adults, go back to step 2. If you have already talked with five adults, and still do not have a cause, list three talents that you have. Sometimes, people notice that one of their interests draws them to a particular cause. For example, someone who is an athlete may decide to have their cause be access to afterschool athletic activities for everyone. Or someone who is an artist may have their cause be funding for art classes in middle schools.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

4. List a cause that you are passionate about and would like to focus on for your Gemilut Chasadim Project:

Research Ways to Make Change

Now that you have a cause, you need to figure out what to do about it! For some causes, it is obvious, but for others it may involve some creativity. Research is an important step in this process. The steps below are suggestions for how to research and find a way to affect the cause that you are concerned about. Remember, the goal is to make change on the cause that you are passionate about.

1. **Ask Around:** If your cause is something that is connected to a person you are close with, ask them! For example, if your cause is fighting cancer because you know someone who has it, ask them what they think you could do. You can also ask someone who works on the issue you care about. For example, if your cause is better schools, you could ask a teacher what they think you could do.
2. **Find Out What Others Are Doing:** Through a little internet research, you might stumble across a good idea. A good starting point is the National Youth Leadership Council's *Project Examples* page for inspiration. <http://www.nylc.org/resources/projects/literacy>. Also, keep an eye out in the local paper for articles about people doing important work. For example, you might read about teens who knit blankets for people in the hospital. Or a person who delivers home cooked meals to veterans. Or someone who donated their old bike to a person who needed some wheels but could not afford any.
3. **Find Out What Legislation There Is:** Sometimes, there are laws that are related to your cause. For example, if your cause is ending discrimination, you could advocate for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) which is trying to stop discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in the workplace.
4. **Are There Organizations Working on This Cause?:** You can also try researching organizations that work on your cause. Finding an organization that is based in Chicago, or your city, would be best. For example, if you are concerned about homelessness, perhaps there is a shelter nearby to your house. Or if you are concerned about access to food, maybe there is an organization that is trying to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to people who cannot afford any. Once you find an organization, ask them how you can help. It is great if you want to go and play with the puppies at an animal shelter, but maybe what they really need is for people to help scoop litter boxes. Remember, you are trying to help them, not the other way around. In the next section there is more information about specific projects.
5. **Learn About What Other Kabbalat Mitzvah Teens Have Done:** If you are still struggling with ideas, you can visit the JUF *B'nai Mitzvah Stories* website. The site includes many stories of Gemilut Chasadim Projects that Chicago-area teens have completed. http://www.juf.org/tweens/bb_mitzvah_stories.aspx

Write what you learn here:

Develop a Project

This is the point that many teens struggle the most. So now what? The most important thing to remember is that you want to make meaningful change. There is no recipe to making change. Below are some types of change making that people choose to do.

Direct Action: *Some people go out and affect their cause directly. For example, someone whose cause is literacy could help tutor children to read. Or someone could organize a large group to build a house with Habitat for Humanity. These types of projects are direct ways that you can build a better world.*

Advocacy: *Some people create change by making people more aware of an issue, and thus affecting the cause itself. For example, someone who is concerned about gun violence can organize a petition or a letter writing campaign in support of a proposed law. Or someone who is concerned about cutting art programs in schools could organize a digital gallery of student artwork and send it to all the school board members with letters asking them not to cut funding.*

Fundraising/Collections: *While there are many ways to help your cause, sometimes the most meaningful one is fundraising or collecting items. Make sure that you are not just choosing this option because you think it is 'easiest.' Try and have your project do more than just collect donations. For example, if you are raising money to support an organization that buys bikes for communities abroad that need affordable transportation, consider organizing a fundraising bike ride with some friends. Or if you are collecting jackets for a homeless shelter, consider passing out a piece of paper about local soup kitchens to volunteer at to everyone who donates.*

Write three project ideas that provide a meaningful impact for your cause:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Next, you need to decide what project to do. While all of your projects will make a meaningful impact in this world, you cannot do all three. Spend some time thinking about, and discussing with a parent, the following:

1. *What would the impact of your project be on the cause you are concerned about?*
2. *What are the obstacles to completing your project? What plans do you have to overcome the obstacles?*
3. *Do any of your special skills and talents enhance any of the projects more than the others?*
4. *Which project feels the most meaningful to you?*

Once you have thought through the questions above and discussed with a parent, write what your project will be:

Do Your Project!

This is what you've been waiting for! This page has some ideas of things you should think about when actually creating your plan for the project. Because everyone's project is different, some of these items may not be relevant to you. The Director of Youth Programs is a great resource in case you need help.

List three goals for your project. What do you hope to accomplish?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List supplies or resources you will need:

Location of your project: _____

Date(s) and Time(s): _____

People whom you will need to ask for help from:

How will you invite them/ask them to help?

Schedule:

Share Your Project

After you complete your project, share it with the Beth Emet community through a video or PowerPoint presentation! Using some of the prompts below, develop an interesting way to tell us about your cause and what you did. You can continue your responses on a separate page. Before sharing with the community, it is important that you are able to explain what you did in full. Try to write at least four sentences in response to each question.

Describe your cause:

What are three (or more!) Jewish values that relate to your cause? (Define each one)

1.

2.

3.

Why is it important?

What did you do?

Interesting reactions, responses, or feedback you received...

Teens at Beth Emet can share their project with the community through a video or PowerPoint presentation. What is important is that a person who sees whatever you create is able to understand your cause (some facts and figures are not a bad thing!), understand why it is important, and know what you did for your project. Submit your presentation to the Clergy Office, or to the Director of Youth Programs. Contact their Director of Youth Programs with any questions.