

MAZON: A Jewish Response To Hunger Bar/Bat Mitzvah Project Guide





Becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah is an incredible moment that marks your transition not only into the adult Jewish community, but also as a conscientious citizen of the world. Part of that process is understanding the Jewish responsibility to help those who find themselves in a time of need. Choosing to do a meaningful Mitzvah Project with MAZON by calling on your skills, intuition, and passions is a rewarding way to do just that. Take this opportunity to join your Jewish community fighting hunger and have fun doing it!



on starting your journey!

What is

MAZON?

Founded in 1985, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger is a national non-profit dedicated to ending hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds in the United States and Israel. Our work involves educating the Jewish community about the reality of hunger, advocating for policy changes that will improve our nation's safety net, providing financial grants to organizations that serve the needs of hungry people in their communities, and identifying and elevating emerging issues that might otherwise go unaddressed.

MAZON practices two of the most important Jewish ideals. We engage in *tzedakah* by advocating for sufficient resources to help those who are hungry today, and *tikkun olam* by working to prevent hunger in the future.



MAZON means “food” or “sustenance” in Hebrew. Together we can make a difference in the lives of hungry people.



Choosing to engage in a MAZON bar/bat mitzvah project means *being an advocate*.

Advocates stand up for others who are experiencing **injustice.**

But don't worry - advocacy doesn't have to be overwhelming or confusing. And we're here to help you every step of the way! MAZON's staff are available to help you one-on-one.

Justice, Justice you shall pursue. - Deuteronomy 16:20

LEARN

1

It's important to understand the reality about hunger. We have very clear resources that can help break down the info. Turn yourself into an anti-hunger pro by visiting mazon.org.



SET GOALS

2

What do you want to achieve? How many people do you want to reach? Do you want to do a one-time event or an ongoing program? Coming up with clear answers to questions like these will provide you with definitive direction for where your project will go.

PICK A PROJECT

3

We've got lots of ideas for **ADVOCACY** and **TZEDAKAH** projects on the next page. Remember, you'll have the greatest impact if you do *one of each*.

Harness what you
love to do
and turn that into an
opportunity to
create change.

Reach out to your school's newspaper and ask if you can submit an article about hunger and what students can do to address the issue. You can share similar ideas in your speech from the bimah.

Here are some ideas to get those creative juices flowing

ADVOCACY project ideas

Spread awareness.
Demand change.
Educate your community.
Join forces with group efforts.

Film a video about the prevalence of hunger - or watch MAZON's This Is Hunger Digital Experience and share it with your family and friends in person or on your social media platforms.

Get out into the community to educate people about hunger, whether at your local farmer's market or your temple's annual Purim carnival. Check out MAZON's "Hunger is Stressful" campaign for more info.

Before or on the day of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah, have your friends and family write messages on paper plates explaining why we should fight hunger. You can send these plates to your local, state, or federal political leaders as a plea to take action. You can also meet with these policymakers in person - we can help facilitate!

Host a MAZON
Hunger Seder
for Passover

Write a short story about hunger. Your characters can portray the problems people who experience hunger face. Share the story and lead a conversation with your religious school class.

TZEDAKAH project ideas

Encourage your guests to donate to MAZON in lieu of presents. Include information about MAZON in your invitation or on the tables at your party!

Start an awareness campaign! Choose a specific topic about hunger (e.g. nutritional obstacles hungry people face) and raise money from your family and friends to support MAZON's advocacy work. We have everything you need to manage your campaign online!

Fundraise for a cause.
Volunteer your time.

Many families donate 3% of the cost of their celebration to MAZON. Talk to your parents about being a part of this special legacy!

Organize a "Walk to End Hunger" or other "Hunger Awareness Day" with your religious school class, school club, or youth group to raise money for MAZON. You can teach other students about hunger at the walk or an all-school assembly. Ask your friends and family to support you by participating. MAZON has materials to help.

Volunteer your time or organize a food drive for a local pantry. Incorporate education about MAZON's advocacy work into your invitation or lead a discussion or activity with those that join you.

Don't forget to use: social media, your temple youth groups and religious schools, school clubs, MAZON materials, and anything else you have at your fingertips to get your message heard. Visit mazon.org for more ideas!

Let us help you get started!

Send us your thoughts.

We're eager to hear from you!

Whether you already have an idea in mind or need help coming up with something, email us at outreach@mazon.org with the following information so we can get in touch with you:

YOUR NAME

DATE OF YOUR BAR/BAT MITZVAH

EMAIL

ADDRESS

PHONE NUMBER

NAME OF YOUR SYNAGOGUE (and city)

MAZON has many materials that you can include at your celebration to help you raise awareness about your commitment to ending hunger - take a look, then let us know what you need!

MAZON Centerpiece Cards

You can put these on display at your oneg, luncheon, or party to remind your guests of your commitment to those who are struggling with hunger.



MAZON Placecards

Placecards can be used for any part of your celebration: when your guests check in for your event, at tables, or even in your thank you cards!

MAZON Tzedakah Boxes

Include these as part of your fundraising! Ask your religious school teacher or rabbi to distribute these around your synagogue for people to see and contribute to.



We also have activities you can run with your classmates and friends; advocacy postcards, petitions and flyers you can share, and so much more!

Stay Connected to MAZON

**Even after your big day is over,
there's still so much you can do!**

Share MAZON information with your friends. If you're working on social justice projects in school or youth group, share what you've learned from your mitzvah project with your friends and classmates.

Sign up for MAZON's advocacy alerts. Register at mazon.org so we can let you know when we've got an active advocacy campaign. Your voice does make a difference!

Honor the anniversary of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah by making an annual donation to MAZON.

Follow MAZON on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to stay up-to-date on what we're doing and how you can get involved.

"You are not obligated to finish the work, but neither are you allowed to desist from it." - Pirkei Avot 2:21

Together
we can transform
how it is into
how it should be

mazon.org

MAZON | A Jewish Response
To Hunger

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"Our teachers have said: If all the sufferings were assembled on one side and poverty on the other, poverty would outweigh them all."

- Shemot Rabbah 31

Who is hungry?

49 million* people
in America are
food insecure

4.8 million
seniors



When we say people are "food insecure" we mean they are unable to consistently afford to buy food.



There are more food insecure people in our country than the entire population of Canada (33.7 million)



16 million
children

*Visit mazon.org or contact outreach@mazon.org for the most up-to-date data. Data changes all the time - stay informed! Data above is pre-pandemic.

How do food insecure people get food to eat?

They rely on help, primarily from two sources:



Private Charity

Soup Kitchens provide prepare and serve meals to hungry people.

Food Pantries distribute bags of groceries made of donations from individuals, local stores, food banks, and companies.

AND



Government Programs

School Meals provide meals to eligible students including breakfast, lunch, and supper for a reduced price or for free.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which used to be called “food stamps,” is an *allowance* given to hungry people who qualify. This can only be used for food items at stores that accept it.

i
46 million*
Americans receive
support from
SNAP

If there is a needy person among you...do not harden your heart and shut your hand... rather you must open your heart and lend whatever is sufficient to meet the need.

- Deuteronomy 15:7-8

Not everyone struggling with hunger lives on the streets. Most of the time, hunger is invisible. Here are a few stories to read (and share):

Dylan is a 14 year old raised by a single mom who just lost her job. They only sometimes have enough money for even the bare necessities. Because of this, Dylan had to give up several things he loved to do, like being on the basketball team. He simply can't afford to purchase a uniform. His mom isn't able to buy him clothing or proper school materials and Dylan frequently goes to bed hungry. He struggles to focus in his classes because he isn't getting the proper nutrition he needs. In addition to all of this, the stress of not knowing when he will have his next meal takes a large toll on his emotional health.



At only 10 years old, John wishes he could have a job to support his family. His mother works inconsistently for very low pay and his father is unable to work due to a physical injury. John recalls how difficult it was to concentrate at school before he started receiving free meals at school. Not having enough nutritious food affected his school work, moods, and relationship with friends. His free school lunches are often his only source of food during the day. Despite his struggles, John maintains high hopes that his mother will find a job, giving him the opportunity to help others who also suffer from food insecurity.



Debunking some common myths about hunger

MYTH

Hunger exists because there is not enough food.

REALITY

We produce more food worldwide than what we actually eat. There is enough wheat, rice, and other grains produced globally to provide every human being with 3,500 calories a day – that's 75% more calories per person than are recommended in the USDA's Nutritional Guidelines. Hunger is an issue because many people can't afford the high price of food.

REALITY

Simply giving people food for the week does not solve the bigger issue: the *reason why* people go hungry in the first place. Food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens were created to solve temporary or emergency situations, not deeper rooted problems. Charities are limited in what they provide, how much they give, and how often they offer services. Many are volunteer and often run out of basements or closets at their local houses of worship. They rely heavily on getting food donated from their communities. They simply could never have the capacity to feed the significant number of people who need help.

MYTH

It's better for local charities to feed people, not the government.

MYTH

Government programs enable lazy people to live well on society's dime.

REALITY

Receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly "food stamps") hardly enables anyone to live well. The average benefit is roughly \$1.80 per person per meal. And in most cases, the money runs out before the month ends – typically after only three weeks – forcing families to rely on charity to eat. Government programs like SNAP are designed to ensure that people receive the sustenance they need so they can contribute back to society and get off these programs. How productive could we expect anyone to be if they haven't eaten for extended periods of time?

MYTH

People on SNAP just need to get a job.

REALITY

Many people who receive government assistance to buy food are working, and others are in the process of looking for jobs. In fact, 40% of households receiving SNAP benefits have at least one working person. Low wage employees might be working many hours a week, but still find it difficult to cover all their expenses.

Think being hungry is just about food and eating? Think again. Even if you're getting help, the struggle to get enough food every day impacts nearly every aspect of everyday life. Consider this:

You might have to sacrifice the things you love.

If something isn't an absolute necessity, you'll likely have to give it up for food. Playing sports, going to the movies with friends, visiting family out of town, and buying new stuff (i.e. clothes, books, games, and technology) are just some of the many things that hungry people probably can't afford to do.



You might not reach your full potential.

We all need nutritious food to thrive. But if you're on a tight budget, heavily processed food is much cheaper and lasts far longer than fresh produce and meats. Consistently consuming nutritiously poor food has many significant negative consequences on someone's mental, physical, and emotional well-being.



Psychological Consequences

Easily Distracted
Reduced Productivity
Difficulty Concentrating



Physical Consequences

Fatigue
Medical Issues
Lessened Endurance



Emotional Consequences

Fear
Stress
Shame/Embarrassment

Thoughts on including information about your project in your d'var torah

Reflect on what you did and learned:

- 1 What did you do for your project?
- 2 What did you learn from doing your project?
- 3 How can you connect the Jewish values you learned in your torah and/or haftorah portion to what you've learned about anti-hunger work with MAZON?

Quick stats* you could include in your d'var torah:

Tens of millions of Americans are food insecure.

The average SNAP benefit is less than \$1.80 per meal per person.

Charity only provides about 5% of total food assistance that supports hungry people.

Jewish values to include:

Tzedakah/Tzedek (Justice)

Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World)

Chesed (Kindness/Compassion)

Feel free to use any of the text excerpts see throughout the guide!