Jewish World Watch works to end genocide and mass atrocities worldwide by educating and mobilizing individuals, advocating for policy changes, and funding projects to support and build resilience in conflict-affected communities.
INTRODUCTION

This Guide is for you, a bar or bat mitzvah student who is thinking about (or being pressured to do) a special mitzvah project that combines both advocacy and tzedakah in connection with your bar or bat mitzvah ceremony and celebration.

Advocating means talking about and trying to convince someone about something important to you. Tzedakah is the practice of giving charity or doing good works. A mitzvah project combines both.

You are busy with schoolwork, sports or other after school activities and studying for your bar or bat mitzvah. Why should you consider doing a mitzvah project when you already have so much to do? It’s already a big responsibility to lead the congregation in prayer, chant from the Torah and deliver a meaningful d’var Torah. Maybe you are not sure you know how to be an advocate or pick a project.

This Guide explains why a tzedakah or mitzvah project will make your bar or bat mitzvah more memorable and meaningful and how Jewish World Watch can help you make it fun, interesting and enjoyable.
Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it. – The Talmud

WHY DO A MITZVAH PROJECT?

With all the time, planning and resources that are focused on making the day memorable, it is easy to lose sight of one of the most important mitzvot: tzedakah or tikkun olam (repairing the world).

*If you see what needs to be repaired and how to repair it, then you have found a piece of the world that G-d has left for you to complete.* – Menachem Mendel Schneerson

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught us to “pray with our feet.”

While that could be taken literally as a challenge to join the Walk to End Genocide, it also means that living Jewishly means *doing something*, not just using our words but also our actions.
Creating and executing a mitzvah project allows you to express your Jewish values in a way that is personal to you. It also makes this important life cycle event something even bigger to celebrate and will empower you to make a real difference in the lives of others.

One key thing is that the mitzvah project should be something the student really has thought about, that it comes from somewhere inside of them, and that they learn something about how to interact with communities that are in need.
– Rabbi Jill Jacobs

PICKING YOUR PROJECT: WHAT SHOULD MY PROJECT BE ABOUT?

Your particular project starts with you. What do you think is wrong with the world? What problem would you hope to solve? Thinking about what keeps you up at night and talking about it with your parents, friends or rabbi will bring clarity and help you choose an issue that is right for you.

Next, think about what you are good at and what you like to do. Most people start working on a mitzvah project during the year leading up to their Bar/Bat mitzvah service. Think about what could be interesting enough that you would want to do it for a whole year.

Once you have come up with a particular concern and have identified an area in which you can make an impact, think about how much time you have, what resources you have, what obstacles you might face, and who can assist or partner with you. With these things in mind, you can set your goals and figure out what is practical for you to accomplish.
The next step is to find a link or parallel between the issues that concern, intrigue or move you and the education, advocacy and relief work that JWW addresses. This is where a phone call or meeting with JWW staff may help. Our staff is here to help you review your project ideas or brainstorm with you to come up with a project idea that fits you.

**JEWISH WORLD WATCH MITZVAH PROJECT HINTS**

**Create a fundraiser around something you already do** – Do you play a sport, exercise on a regular basis, babysit, or love to read?

You can ask your friends and relatives to donate to JWW every time you score, reach a new weight training goal, complete a book or get a good grade on a test. Not only will you be raising money, but this will also give you many opportunities to engage your friends and family and educate them about JWW. Integrating social justice into everyday activities makes those activities even more meaningful.
**Pair your JWW concern with a local issue** – Keeping girls in school, hunger, health, the environment, all of these are issues that affect our local communities as well as places like Sudan and Congo.

You could volunteer at a shelter, organize donations at a food pantry or homeless facility, or volunteer at a hospital.

You could hold a drive for food, school or art supplies, sports equipment or clothes. As you take these actions, talk about the parallels to JWW projects on the ground in Africa. Passionate about education? Combine tutoring at a local school with JWW’s Little Ripples, BVES or LAV projects.

**Make your own Genocide Awareness Day** – Be a JWW anti-genocide advocate. Give a speech at your school and get your friends to sign a petition. Pick a particular JWW theme or action and ask everyone you know with a social media account to post, tweet or update their status with information or a link to an action. We can point you in the right direction.
MITZVAH PROJECTS, YOUR SERVICE AND YOUR CELEBRATION

Your Mitzvah Project can be highlighted in many ways as you prepare for your big day.

**Tell people you know about what you are doing:**

**Invitations** – You may choose to raise money to support Jewish World Watch projects and advocacy initiatives. If you do, including information about the initiatives and what you want your guests to do with your invitation is a really good way to bring attention to your project. People are most likely to fill out a postcard or write a check when they are returning their RSVP card.

We usually have a petition or advocacy issue that you could send with the invitation as a postcard that just needs to be completed by your guests. If you ask us about our current campaigns as you are planning your invitations, we can provide you with materials to include.

**Make a Bar/Bat Mitzvah website** – There are templates available that make it easy to make your own Bar/Bat Mitzvah website. It’s a great way to provide your guests information – times, location, maps, hotel suggestions, etc. You can include a mitzvah project page to explain why you chose JWW, give details about your specific project and link to JWW pages that pertain to your project.
If you are not making your own website, consider directing your guests to the JWW.org site. We will post your picture, a description of your mitzvah project and a donation link on our Bar/Bat Mitzvah page.

Talk about your mitzvah project as part of your Bar/Bat Mitzvah speech:

**Your D’var Torah** – The drash (lesson) that you give is your opportunity to share what about your Torah portion feels really important to you. Think about how your Parsha relates to JWW’s mission and particularly the issue or project that you chose – genocide, gender-based violence, hunger, lack of access to education.

Discuss including information about JWW and your Mitzvah project in your speech with your rabbi or educator, your parents and friends and don’t forget, you can call us for help as well.

You stand alone while we, your parents, are seated in the congregation.

You stand on your own two feet to lead the congregation, to sing, to pray, to study.

They and we listen to you carefully, They and we hear your words, your commentary. My son, my daughter, your voice is heard,

Your wisdom addresses all of us. – Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, z”l
Take your project into your party:

Tzedakah boxes – Consider placing JWW tzedakah boxes on the tables or at the gift table. People may be moved to make monetary donations to JWW after hearing your d’var Torah. Make it easy for them to give.

Or, have your party guests decorate their own “Change for Change” boxes to take home and fill. We can supply the boxes and give you some decorating ideas.

Decorate a Donation Box – If you are pairing a JWW on-the-ground project with the collection of items for a local organization, you should provide a box at your synagogue or party for your guests to deposit their donations.

Make that box extra special by decorating it with pictures of Sudan, Congo or Chad and provide brief descriptions of how the global and local projects connect.
SOME TERRIFIC TZEDAKAH PROJECTS BY JWW ACTIVISTS:

Shachar Astor – Adding More Mitzvah: Shachar shied away from the traditional Bar Mitzvah party video montage. Instead of showing a video of his life, he made a short film about Jewish World Watch to raise awareness about the genocide in Darfur. He had guests sign petitions, and he donated money toward refugee relief.

Elizabeth Kushner – Recruiting a Walk Team: Elizabeth set up a table at her synagogue’s Purim carnival and made signs to post at her bat mitzvah party to recruit people to join her team for the Walk to End Genocide. Through her efforts, Elizabeth signed up 20 walkers and raised thousands of dollars to support JWW programs.

Hannah Brooks – Keeping Girls in School: After learning that many Congolese girls drop out of school when they reach puberty, Hannah collected over $2000 to purchase reusable sanitary kits for 400 girls. She also set up a donation box at her synagogue and collected over two hundred new and gently used bras that were taken to Congo for those same girls.
**Josh Shapiro – How to Create a Fun-Fundraiser:** Josh worked hard to organize a fundraiser that included a fun activity that he knew his friends would love to do – laser tag! He posted flyers around his school and neighborhood. He spoke to classes to persuade them to help, explaining why he chose to support JWW’s refugee relief project. All of his friends had so much fun playing laser tag and, with help from JWW staff, he raised over $500 to support Darfuri refugees.

**YOU DON’T HAVE TO DO ALL OF THIS ALONE**

**Join Forces** – Talk to your fellow b’nai mitzvah students. Explore whether they have an interest in supporting JWW and doing a joint project. People need to hear a message multiple times for it to take hold.

Think about how powerful it would be for members of your synagogue to hear about JWW’s mission several times at different services.

**Use a Mitzvah Mentor** – It is often easier to complete a task when you work with someone who has already been through it. JWW can pair you with a “Mitzvah Mentor”, trained students who have had their B’nai Mitzvah and who can be a guide, an extra pair of hands, or a source of good ideas.

Don’t need a mentor but just want some advice? No problem. We would love to spend a little time with you in person, if possible, or on the phone, through Skype or even by email to talk about picking a project and seeing it through to its amazing conclusion.

**Let us help add another layer of meaning to this special time in your life!**

JWW staff can help you find the link between your Torah and Haftorah portions and JWW’s advocacy and relief efforts and provide support for a variety of Bar/Bat Mitzvah tzedakah projects.

Call us at 818.5601.1836 or email us at info@jww.org