

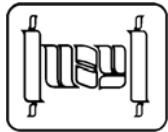
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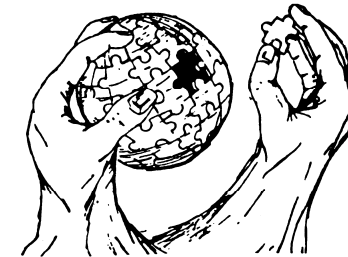
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# **116 Practical Mitzvah Suggestions**

by

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# **116 Practical Mitzvah Suggestions**

*(In No Particular Order of Importance)*

1. Pick some immediately-solvable Tzedakah situation and solve it: shoes, holiday meal, table and chairs for recently-arrived immigrant family, space heater, large print prayer book for synagogues. Get to know the feeling that you have done something easy that makes a difference. Flex your Mitzvah muscles.

2. Collect stuffed animals, teddy bears and Beanie Babies (and other similar items) for distribution to kids in hospitals (in America, Canada and in Israel). Don't be surprised to learn that elderly people love them too!

3. Learn some magic, clowning, and balloon-animal making and use these skills in local institutions and for agencies such as Big Brother and Big Sister programs. It is a great way to do the Mitzvah of Bikur Cholim—Visiting the Sick—in pediatric wards of hospitals. (Sweet Pea and Buttercup (=Mike and Sue Turk), are willing to offer help in this area: 19 Mohawk Rd., Short Hills, NJ 07078, 201-376-2885).

4. Establish a Flower Committee to take leftover flowers from synagogue and other Jewish communal events to shelters, hospitals, or residence for the elderly.

5. Write cards for soldiers to be put in packages for Barbara Silverman's A Package From Home project. Mail them to her, or have them delivered by Mitzvah messenger [A Package from Home, Barbara Silverman, Keren Kayemet St. 12, Jerusalem,

112. Inquire about getting involved in your local Chevra Kaddisha-Burial Society. Many cities need people to sit by the bodies during the night before the funeral (Shemirat HaMet.) The movie, "A Plain Pine Box" is an excellent introduction to this area of Mitzvah work. (Movie — Adath Jeshurun Congregation, 10500 Hillside Ave., Minnetonka, MN 55305, 612-545-2424.)

113. When you donate to a Mitzvah hero or Mitzvah Project, sometimes you will want to give to them to use the money where they think it can make the most difference, but you should ask whenever possible for a "wish list". These are specific items, equipment, activities, or programs they might need funded, and you may be able to solve it totally by your donation.

114. On any trip to Israel, always take a larger suitcase than you originally planned to take - fill the extra space with Mitzvah items, e.g., school supplies, socks, baby items, etc. for the Rabbanit Bracha Kapach (12 Lod St., Jerusalem, 02-624-9296).

115. Using the computer and computer whiz kid, keep track of which groups and individuals are going to Israel and ask them to deliver some of the Mitzvah items that have been collected. Ask them to buy Israeli products and bring them back to share with friends.

116. Collect a variety of new, useful, practical clothes (socks, comfortable slacks, skirts, shirts and blouses) and have them delivered by Mitzvah-Messenger to people in Jerusalem who will put them at the disposal of individuals who otherwise could not afford to purchase them. One of the great, unique Mitzvahs. (In Jerusalem, The Rabbanit Bracha Kapach, 12 Lod St., 02-624-9296.)

106. If you are a grandparent, invite your grandchildren out for an afternoon when you can tell them Tzedakah stories from your own life, and that of your parents and grandparents, to give them a good sense of the continuity of this Mitzvah through the generations.

107. Give blood.

108. With your Rabbi, research the issue of donating corneas and/or other body organs.

109. Write an Ethical Will and put it in your safe deposit box. The document should contain your feelings about what values you consider important as a Jew: caring, Tzedakah, kindness, decency, etc. (Consult: *Ethical Wills*, Riemer and Stampfer, Schocken Books, 1983.)

110. Consult your Rabbi during the week, asking who is in the hospital, and offer to make rounds. Establish a Bikur Cholim-Visiting the Sick Committee. Similarly, consult the Rabbi concerning making a Minyan for people sitting Shiva.

111. Establish a synagogue or community Hachnassat Orchim-Welcoming Committee whose committee members visit people new to the community, welcome them, and introduce them to the nature and structure of the community. Congregation Beth Sholom of San Francisco, at the end of services, asks new people in the congregation to stand up and introduce themselves so that members can more easily welcome them. Other congregations have two different color cups—usually one blue and the other white—at the Oneg Shabbat. The Rabbi announces that guests and strangers should please take the blue cups, so the members can come up afterwards and welcome them.

6. Put a book sale rack for Jewish books in your synagogue or JCC lobby. Overcharge for the books and give the difference to Tzedakah.

7. Open a separate checking account for Tzedakah and deposit a portion of your income as soon it arrives.

8. Contribute to your local UJA-Federation campaign.

9. Take a tour of your local Tzedakah agencies, Federation-sponsored and other, private-organizations. (Some communities, like San Francisco, take contributors on a day-long bus tour.) Ask questions, learn about the workings of the agency, and get involved.

10. Seek out the local Mitzvah heroes. Meet them, talk to them, invite them to speak to community groups (particularly the religious schools). Apprentice yourself to one of them.

11. Install a food barrel in your local synagogue or other Jewish communal building. Collect food and distribute to individuals in need, either through local agencies or individual contacts. Have children and adults decorate the food barrel together.

12. Set up a Mitzvah crib to gather all kinds of items for infants and young children: stuffed animals, toys, diapers, books, blankets, strollers, other cribs, etc., and get them to agencies that will distribute them to people who need them.

13. Seek out unused Yiddish books in your library, in your friends' libraries, and community libraries and send them to the

National Yiddish Book Center. (48 Woodbridge Street, South Hadley, MA 01075, 413-535-1303, Fax: 413-535-1007.) They have people around the United States and Canada ("Zamlers") who will help with the shipping. (By consulting local Sefardi Jews, you might want to help set up a similar project for books in Ladino.)

14. Make a home-made Tzedakah box (Pushka) for your home. When it is full, have the entire family decide where the money should go.

15. Have your synagogue give a Tzedakah box to every bar and bat mitzvah kid. Ideal synagogue gift for weddings, Chanukat Habayit (moving into a new home), conversion, and other occasions. Get residents of the local residence for the elderly to make the Tzedakah boxes. (Contact Irvin Goldstein, The Temple, 5101 Brownsboro Rd., Louisville, KY 40241, 502-423-1818.)

16. Have the synagogue provide a Tzedakah box for every family unit. A good time to distribute them is when people come to pick up their High Holiday tickets.

17. At organizational programs and meetings, have each member give \$1.00 to a specific member. That person will become the Shaliach/Sheleichah—Messenger to distribute the money. At the next meeting, he or she reports on the allocation, unless there is a need for secrecy about the recipient.

18. Call your Rabbi and ask about his or her private Tzedakah discretionary fund. Indicate that you are willing to be "on call" if emergencies arise and extra assistance is needed. Rabbis know of an incredibly wide range of Tzedakah situations where secrecy is an absolute must. This is a great way to be an anonymous miracle worker.

19. Pick on night of Chanukah when you will want relief

counselors to do *pro bono* work for (a) Jewish communal agencies, and (b) individuals these agencies might want to refer to them.

99. Conduct seminars for attorneys, accountants, and investment counselors to study the ins and outs of encouraging people to give more. (How far may one go when suggesting contributions - arm-twisting, mild suggesting, strong urging, etc.?)

100. Using your local computer whiz, establish a Furniture-Utensil-Vehicle Committee which will keep track of people who no longer need certain items, and who, on the other end, might need them. The committee can serve as the intermediary for the transfer at no cost, cost, minimal cost, or symbolic cost.

101. Hold a Mitzvah Day program, combining study about the Mitzvah and specific Mitzvahs that can be done within the time frame. Eight hours is a good start.

102. Gather friends for an evening of Tzedakah storytelling. Share the stories and review together the insights gained from them. They should be stories from your own life, or from your own life, or from what you have heard or read.

103. Build up a private Tzedakah library: books, videos, slide shows, tape-interviews with Mitzvah heroes, and newsletters from various Tzedakah groups.

104. Hold an infant car seat drive. Gather car seats no one is using and get them to agencies that will deliver them to people who need them.

105. Set up a seminar for high school seniors, informing them for what kinds of Tzedakah projects are available on college campuses. (Contact: B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations, 1640 Rhode Island Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036, 202-857-6560.)

93. If you are a merchant or a professional, sell some of your merchandise or give some of your services at a discount, asking the "discountee" to give the difference to Tzedakah. Set a reasonable limit on how much you can handle, pick which friends you think will respond, and encourage them to support your favorite projects.

94. Canvass audiologists, hospital hearing centers, old age residences, and other likely sources, and collect hearing aids that are no longer being used. Have a Tzedakah Messenger deliver them to Yad Sara in Israel - they will repair them and lend them for free to people who need them. Other supplies (glucometers, crutches, etc.) are very much needed. (Contact: Yad Sara, ATTN: Uri Lupoliansky, 43 HaNevi'im St., Jerusalem, 02-244-242.)

95. Form a sub-group of your SATO Committee to specialize in human-animal interaction Mitzvahs – there are many. Have a local veterinarian talk to your group to spark the discussion and begin to launch projects.

96. Encourage your dentist and dental technicians to donate dental equipment for the free pediatric dental clinic at Dental Volunteers for Israel. Or, encourage your dentist to volunteer to work there for a week or two during the year. (Dental Volunteers for Israel, ATTN: Zev Birger, 29 Mekor Haim St., Jerusalem, phone: 02-643-6628, birgert@netvision.net.il.)

97. Encourage your plumber, electrician, carpenter, handy-people to offer their services for free to agencies that will link them up with individuals who need the repairs done, but cannot afford to pay. If you, yourself, are such a handy-person, volunteer your own services.

98. Encourage attorneys, accountants, and investment

from the burden and craziness of giving gifts, and donate the money you would have used for a gift to Tzedakah. Buy extra gifts and give them to those who would not otherwise have Chanukah gifts. (Contact Sharon Halper, 914-723-7727.)

20. Ask the finder of the Afikoman on Passover if he or she would be willing to have the cost of the gift given to Tzedakah instead. Contribute to that individual's favorite Tzedakah.

21. Contribute the money you would have used for food on Yom Kippur or other fast days to MAZON or other organizations helping to feed the hungry. (Mazon-A Jewish Response to Hunger: 12401 Wilshire Blvd., #303, Los Angeles, CA 90025, 310-442-0020, Irving Cramer, Director.)

22. Tie in all kinds of personal celebrations with Tzedakah— birthdays, promotions, graduations, anniversaries, etc.—by asking relatives and friends to contribute to Tzedakah in your honor. Specify which are your favorite Tzedakah projects.

23. At various celebrations, instead of floral centerpieces, have a card noting that the cost of the flowers was contributed to Tzedakah. Or:

- (a) Have a centerpiece made of books, to be contributed to a local synagogue or Jewish communal library.
- (b) Have trees planted in honor of the guests, with their certificates on the tables.
- (c) Have cans of food, to be donated after the celebration to a local agency that will channel the food to hungry people.
- (d) All of the above.

24. Encourage the synagogue to sell a Torah, prayer books,

or other items they may have more than enough of , and use the money from the sale for Tzedakah. (Jewish Law supports this practice. "We may sell a synagogue, and , similarly all holy objects—even a Sefer Torah—in order to provide for Torah students or to marry off orphans with the money from the sales." [Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 152:6.]) There is always a need for Jewish education scholarships, and we may easily extend the meaning of "orphans" to include some community members who may feel disadvantaged, lonely, alienated, or in some way feel distanced from the community. Some Mitzvah people I know would include latchkey kids, our Elders, single-parent families, singles, widows and widowers, people with disabilities—any one of a number of people—in this group. (Contact Naomi Eisenberger, 973-763-9396.)

25. Adopt "The Tzedakah Habit" of buying an extra item of food whenever you go grocery shopping—for distribution to hungry people.

26. Label one shelf of your food pantry "Tzedakah Food" so you, family, and friends will remember which items have been set aside for Tzedakah.

27. Encourage your local bakeries and grocery stores to channel day-old and leftover foods for local pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters for the homeless.

28. Put a Tzedakah Box by your washing machine to gather all of the loose change you find in the pockets of your clothes.

29. At organizational meetings and programs, have people bring in a can of food for the organization's food barrel.

30. Get a copy of your state's or province's Good Samaritan Law on food donations, and find ways to take leftover

Zoo, for example, has such programs.)

86. Start an inter-generational choir, choral group, or band.

87. Locate the Jewish elders in non-Jewish old age residences and provide for them.

88. Approach the mayor of your community and ask to set up a bookbindery. The books would be bound by the elderly, the books themselves - the schoolbooks of the school children.

89. Have your synagogue gift shop market the Kippot made by Guatemalan women. Contact Mayaworks, Kathleen Morkert, 773-506-4905, [mayaworks-chi@attbi.com](mailto:mayaworks-chi@attbi.com), [www.mayaworks.org](http://www.mayaworks.org).

90. Hold a "kid video" drive in your synagogue or local Jewish agency. Donate them to a pediatrics ward at the local hospital...on the condition that they allow the child to take the video home with them if they want to. This means you will have to continue to supply the hospital with more and more videos. (Contact Meryl Innerfield or her mother, Tobi, at [merand@aol.com](mailto:merand@aol.com), 516-783-0337.)

91. Encourage your cantor, choir, singers, or just plain people with good voices to sing at hospitals, institutions, and other places where this will be appreciated. (Contact: Cantorial School, Jewish Theological Seminary, 3080 Broadway, NY, NY 10027, 212-678-8000.)

92. Encourage your barber or hairdresser to cut and style the hair of individuals in local old age residences and institutions free of charge. Also a good project in local shelters. (If you cut hair yourself, volunteer to do it.)

come in and talk to the pre-bar/bat mitzvah groups about giving some of their money away to Tzedakah and or other Mitzvah projects they might tie in with the celebration.

79. Build a Habitat for Humanity house.

80. Start a Bet Tzedek - a Jewish *pro bono* (free) legal service for people in need. (Contact: Bet Tzedek, 145 S. Fairfax Avenue, Suite 200, Los Angeles, CA 90036, 323-939-0506, [www.bettzedek.org](http://www.bettzedek.org).)

81. Encourage the bar/bat mitzvah families to invite members of the elderly community to the event, from the old age residence or independent housing.

82. Establish a special "twinning" program with Jewish special education children and adults for the bar and bat mitzvah program. Match up a bar and bat mitzvah kid with one of the special people to share the day.

83. Encourage bar and bat mitzvah celebrations for individuals in Jewish special education programs in the community.

84. Make sure your local old age home has pets. Remember: resident animals are always better than a visiting pet program. Also, make sure your local independent housing for Elders allows pets. (Contact: Linda Hines, Delta Society, 289 Perimeter Rd. East, Renton, WA 98055, 1-800-869-6898, and Dr. William Thomas, Eden Alternative, RR 1, Box 31B4, Sherburne, NY 13460, 607-674-5232.)

85. Ask if your zoo will bring pets to old age residences for programs. Set up an inter-generational program with the religious school, always an enjoyable and entertaining event. (The Utica

food from Jewish communal affairs to appropriate recipients. Encourage local Jewish caterers to get involved. (Call City Harvest, 212-349-4004 for details.)

31. Have your synagogue ask each member to bring a non-perishable food item for the food barrel before Kol Nidre begins.

32. Before Passover, collect the Chametz you are removing from your house, and, using the synagogue as a drop-off point, distribute it to a local food pantry.

33. Have your synagogue and caterers the MAZON project where 3% of the cost of an affair is donated to MAZON. The contributions are used by MAZON to support hunger programs around the world. (See #21 for MAZON address.)

34. Do your own individualized holiday food project: buy provisions for a family for Rosh Hashana, Purim, Chanukah, etc. Channel the provisions through an agency who will locate a family who would need the food. (You won't need to know the recipients, and they won't know you. There's always a middle-person.)

35. Get involved in the local "Meals on Wheels" program.

36. Establish a food pantry in your synagogue.

37. Visit the shelters, food banks, and soup kitchens in your town and locate Jewish street people. Organize a program in the Jewish community to provide services for them. (Contact: The Ark, 6450 California Avenue, Chicago, IL 60645, 312-973-1000.)

38. Establish a shelter for homeless people in your synagogue. (Contact: Temple Israel, 1180 University Dr., NE, Atlanta, GA 30306, 404-873-3147 or Temple Israel, 1014

39. People involved in organizational Tzedakah work— Hadassah, ORT, Sisterhoods, Federations, synagogue, youth groups— tell your family and friends *exactly* what Mitzvah work you are doing and why you are doing it. (I am shocked by how many children of involved parents - and parents of involved children - have no idea why the parent or child is always going to meetings, making phone calls, doing mailings. The higher aspects of the Tzedakah work often get lost in the organizational shuffle.)

40. Parents - inform your driving-age children that they are expected to use the car a certain percentage of the time for Mitzvah work.

41. Organize a synagogue Tzedakah committee to cover very direct Mitzvah work. (Contact: Marlboro, NJ, Jewish Center Tzedakah Committee, POB 98, School Road West, Marlboro, NJ 07746, 732-536-3358.)

42. Computerize your organization's mailing list to include the members' occupations and special interests. Inquire as to what limit merchants and professionals are willing to donate goods and services for specific Mitzvah projects. (Do *not* exceed their expressed limits. Respect the bounds they set.)

43. Make your synagogue and Jewish communal buildings accessible to people with disabilities....including the synagogue Bima.

44. Purchase large print and braille editions of the prayer book, Chumash, Machzor, Megillot.

45. Establish a large print and braille section of your synagogue and agency library. Ask visually impaired individuals

Program for the benefit of latchkey children or any other children who might need such a program.

73. Adopt a recently-arrived immigrant family. This is a major project in many communities for Jews arriving from Eastern Europe.

74. Encourage your Jewish Community Center to make all facilities of the building - gym, pool, day care, message service - available to individuals presently seeking jobs through Jewish Vocational Service, Jewish Family Service, or other agencies. During the tense, often-depressing interim period between jobs, this can be a most welcome contribution to the well-being of the unemployed person. (Contact: Harry Nadler, c/o Jewish Federation, 615 N. Alabama St., #412, Indianapolis, IN 46204, 317-637-2473.)

75. Start a Jewish hospice program in your community. (National Institute for Jewish Hospice, 6363 Wilshire Blvd., #126, Los Angeles, CA 90048, 213-653-0795.)

76. Start a program for Jewish alcoholics, chemically dependent individuals, and gamblers in your community. (Contact: JACS - Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others Foundation, Inc., 10 E. 73rd St., NY, NY 10021, 212-879-8415.)

77. Help revive or stabilize a synagogue whose membership has moved away. (e.g., The Eldridge Street Synagogue on the Lower East Side of New York, through the efforts of Project Ezra; The Tremont Street Synagogue, Cambridge, MA, through the efforts of college and graduate students and leftover 60's people in Boston.)

78. Ask the principal of the religious school if you could



66. Encourage your local newspaper, or synagogue or agency bulletin to publish a regular "Be An Angel" column. Specific projects in need of specific goods and services and contributions are described,...encouraging the readers to take part. (Contact: Denver's *Rocky Mountain News*, 303-892-5381.)

67. Conduct a clothing drive for local individuals in need.

68. When cleaning out the closet and selecting clothes to give away, recite some formula such as "I am now about to perform the Mitzvah of Halbashat Arumim-ohnurg ,ackv-providing clothes for those in need of them." If you have children, make sure they are aware that this is a specific and important Mitzvah stretching back many centuries in Jewish tradition and not just a "something or other" we do now and again. Also, it is important, on occasion, to give away clothes that we would still use.

69. Organize drivers to insure that non-drivers, elderly, infirm, partially-able, or all-alone members of the community can take part in community events.

70. Seek out your local Jewish interest-free loan society. If there is one, find ways to make their work better known in the community. If there isn't, set one up. (Contact: Mark Meltzer, Jewish Free Loan Association, 6505 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90048, 213-655-6922.)

71. Get a computer whiz kid to computerize a series of projects - volunteers, times, places, and other details....a good way to integrate the youth into Mitzvah work, and a fine way to use a computer.

72. Set up a local Jewish Big Brother and/or Big Sister

which books they might want. Publicize this service in the synagogue or agency bulletin and local newspapers. (For large print and braille books of Jewish interest, contact: The Jewish Braille Institute of America, 110 E. 30th St., NY, NY 10016, 212-889-2525 and Jewish Book Council, 15 E. 26th St., NY, NY 10010, 212-532-4949.)

46. Print some copies of your synagogue or agency bulletin and announcements in large print.

47. Organize a Large Print Photocopy Committee to: (1) inquire which books individuals with visual impairments would want to read (2) find someone with a photocopy machine that enlarges, (3) write the publisher to ask for permission to reproduce the book in larger print by photocopying it, (4) photocopy the book, (5) deliver to individuals, agencies and/or libraries.

48. Encourage Jewish book publishers to publish some, more, or all of their books in large print. Specific publishers include: Jason, Aronson, Jewish Publication Society, Jonathan David, United Synagogue, UAHC, and Reconstructionist Presses.

49. Have your synagogue or library subscribe to the Large Print Edition of the New York Times.

50. Install a special sound system (infrared, audio loop, etc.) in your synagogue and agency meeting rooms for people with hearing impairments. (Contact Dr. Mark Ross, 9 Thomas Drive, Storrs, CT 06268, 860-429-6688.)

51. Encourage synagogues and local agencies to purchase TTY's (=typewriters and modems connected to phone lines) which will allow the community's deaf members to use the phone system to allow them to be tied into communal events. Price

range: \$275 and up.

52. Have synagogue services and communal events sign language interpreted for the hearing impaired members of the community. Inquire which members already know sign language...it is often a pleasant surprise to know that such resource people are often already available.

53. Set up courses to teach American Sign Language (ASL), or sign up for an already-established course. Be sure to learn the contemporary Jewish terms in ASL. (Contact: Rabbi Dan Grossman, Adath Israel Congregation, 1958 Lawrenceville Rd., Lawrenceville, NJ 08648, 609-896-4977.)

54. Purchase prayer books, Chumashim, Machzorim, etc. with Russian, Spanish, Ladino, Farsi, Yiddish, or other translations for synagogue members who will appreciate services more with these translations handy.

55. Establish a group home or group homes for Jewish retarded adults in your community.

56. If there are already group homes in the community, make certain the residents are part of synagogue, JCC, and community programs. Help facilitate the transportation.

57. When you hear of protests against group homes in a neighborhood, organize committees of people to show your support. Particularly encourage the religious school students to take part in the process.

58. Contact local general group homes and institutions to locate Jewish residents. Provide services for them (holiday celebrations, get-togethers, visits), and extend invitations to communal events.

59. Have the local special needs individuals participate in Super Sunday, the UJA-Federation's annual major phone-a-thon. Two or three of my friends from different cities indicate that this has been extraordinarily successful in their communities. Similarly, they should be invited to other fund-raising events where their people-power may be needed. Make sure to have TTY's available (see #51) so members of the hearing impaired community may be reached.

60. Encourage synagogues and agencies to mention on stationery, bulletins, newsletter, and publicity what accessibility there is for their buildings and programs. (Holiday Inns and churches do it.)

61. Go to your local dry cleaners. Offer to distribute unclaimed items to individuals in need.

62. Encourage all national synagogue organizations, National UJA, Council of Jewish Federations, JWB, and other national organizations to publish their directories with notations indicating which buildings have what kind of access for people with disabilities.

63. Keep giving your money away to Tzedakah.

64. Downgrade a testimonial dinner to a dessert reception. Contribute the difference in cost to Tzedakah.

65. Establish a Tzedakah-Newspaper-and-Magazine-Clipping Committee to scan the papers and magazines for Tzedakah articles to be shared with your group. Review at least one article before each meeting or event. Compile a scrapbook and share it with religious school children and members of the youth group.