

“Mitzvah” Centerpieces

What is the purpose of this booklet?

Some people grapple with how to decorate a table with something longer lasting than flowers or other typical centerpieces. “Mitzvah” Centerpieces provide people with such an option. They are often constructed of products, equipment or goods that organizations need to serve their particular population. **The Social Action Committee developed this resource to provide information on what “Mitzvah” Centerpieces are, why people choose them, and how one can begin and execute the process.**

Why decorate your table with these?

Some people feel their money can go further by decorating tables with “Mitzvah” Centerpieces. Specifically, these centerpieces demonstrate your awareness and commitment to social justice issues. They help you achieve a dual purpose: decorating your tables AND helping others. They can be more fulfilling and often cost less than other floral or elaborate centerpieces.

Do I have to decorate all my tables with centerpieces?

No! You may choose to decorate each table with a centerpiece, especially if you are donating products. However, another option is to create a representative basket, display it in one location at your affair, and create a small note card for each table that explains the organization you are donating to. This option works well if the donated items are not conducive to including in a centerpiece, or if you are making a monetary donation.

What if the organization we select needs money more than items?

Certainly, you can use the money you would have spent on elaborate centerpieces and donate it to an organization instead. In this case, consider creating a small note card for each table that explains the organization you are donating to.

When are these centerpieces used?

They may be used to decorate tables for Kiddush, an evening event, or any other affair!

How do I get started?

1. Decide what interests your child and/or family. It can be anything from a passion for animals to a concern about homeless families.
2. Select an organization that can receive and benefit from donations. Again, the options for organizations are endless, from the ASPCA to the Greater Boston Food Bank to nonprofit organizations in Israel. Consider checking out the plethora of organizations on the web. Two helpful websites are www.jchoice.org and www.bostoncares.org. Please feel free to consult with the Social Action Committee too (contacts on page 3).

3. Contact the organization and find out what would benefit the population they serve (e.g., tube socks, canned vegetables, blankets for puppies, books for inner city schools).
4. Decide if you want to construct the centerpieces yourself or if you want help. If you would like assistance, two types of resources are Rachel Weinstock (a TA member) at rachelweinstock@verizon.net and Mitzvah Tables at mitzvahtables@comcast.net.
 - a. Rachel Weinstock is not a professional centerpiece maker, but enjoys the consultation and design process. She will send interested families a document with ideas and sources for supplies. She then consults with you and your Bat/Bar mitzvah child for an hour to develop an idea and create a supply list. Then she'll spend another hour to help make a prototype at no charge. If more time is needed, if you want Rachel to work with you on the centerpieces, or if you want her to make them herself, she will discuss an hourly or project rate.
 - b. Another type of a resource is to contract with a professional Mitzvah Centerpiece planner such as Mitzvah Tables. They make custom centerpieces for the charity of your choice, deliver to your event, pick up afterward, and deliver to the charity. They work with you to identify a charity if you don't already have one in mind and with the charity to find out what is the most appropriate donation for them.
5. Plan for how the centerpiece contents will be delivered after your event. Often children want to help with this delivery. Other options include asking the organization if they can pick up the donations, or, if you had assistance with constructing the centerpieces, ask the organizer for assistance with delivery.

What are some examples of "Mitzvah" Centerpieces?

Areas of Interest or Concern	Example of centerpiece & organization
Literacy	Books; can be donated to an inner city school like Philbrook (TA already has connection and history with this underprivileged school)
Animals	Blankets; can be donated to ASPCA, local animal shelters
Education	School supplies, books; can be donated to an inner city school, library
Israel	Sponsor a class for a Bar/Bat Mitzvah; help Ethiopian Jews; for other ideas, contact our Keshet Committee
Food ¹	Canned goods; Family Table (TA already has connection and history of service), Greater Boston Food Bank, donation to MAZON
Nature	Trees for JNF; donation to Sierra Club or Audubon Society
Holocaust	"Twinning" your Bar/Bat Mitzvah with a child who was killed; www.remember-us.org
Homeless	Toiletries, Socks, Clothing; Circle of Hope, Local area shelters
Sports	Baseball equipment; can be donated to an inner city school lacking adequate sports items

¹ For any food basket centerpieces displayed at the synagogue, items must be kosher.

What if we decide to use flowers anyway—is there somewhere we can donate them afterwards?

It's true, there isn't anything as beautiful as fresh flowers or plants. If you choose these, there are several facilities that can enjoy them after your event. You may wish to identify which population you would like to support and then select a facility accordingly. For example, if you want the flowers to benefit children and youth, you might contact the Walker School. If you wish to deliver plants to an elderly residence, Briarwood, Wingate, and Avery Manor are all located in Needham. Other destinations include the Ronald McDonald House in Brookline; local area shelters in Newton (e.g., Second Step and Genesis House); and various hospitals throughout the Greater Boston area.

Can I talk to someone about this?

Yes! Please feel free to contact TA's Social Action Committee Chairs, Judy Lee at judymlee@msn.com or David Harris at dbjanda@gmail.com

Pictures of various Mitzvah Centerpieces

Examples of Rachel's Centerpieces



Bundles of Books for a JCL School – these are inexpensive, super fast and easy! Bundles can be dressed up with fancier ribbons and/or balloons.



Left: Food Bundles for a Pantry topped with a glitter-covered foam core snowboarder silhouette
Right: Musical instruments (donated to a JCL school) attached to an acrylic column. Columns held a school playbill from shows my daughter was in, which was mounted on foam core. Names of plays were table names.

Examples of Mitzvah Tables' Centerpieces



Food Donation



Pet Donation



Sporting Goods Donation

Examples of Temple Aliyah Members' Centerpieces



Books



Food Donation

Total cost per basket ~\$10 (includes \$2 per basket and shrink wrap from Christmas Tree Shops).
All Kosher items bought on sale. Family added a ribbon around top.



Horse Supplies' Pails
Horse-related supplies donated in pail to organization that provides horse riding opportunities to economically disadvantaged children

Examples of Temple Aliyah Members' Note Cards on Tables



We are pleased to share
our good fortune with

MAZON[®]

A JEWISH RESPONSE TO HUNGER

*If you offer your compassion to the hungry
And satisfy the famished creature
Then shall your light shine in darkness
And your gloom shall be like noonday*

-Isaiah 58:10



Ben's Mitzvah project is the Kids Café, a division of The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB). The food items in these baskets will be donated to the GBFB after Ben's Bar Mitzvah.

The Kids Cafe program provides 1,700 meals a day to at-risk children in Boys & Girls Clubs throughout Eastern Massachusetts. Kids Cafe chefs create menus using products from The Food Bank's inventory and a "wish list" of desired items. The Food Bank delivers this food to each Club once a week. Thousands of children a day depend on the safe, comfortable, clean setting the Kids Cafes deliver.

For the past year, Ben has been volunteering once a month at the Kids Café in the West End Boys and Girls Club located in Allston-Brighton. He prepares food and serves dinner to the hundreds of kids who attend after school programs.

For more information: www.gbfb.org/programs/KidsCafe.cfm