

HIAS Mitzvah Project Toolkit



A Self-Led Guide for Parents and Students

You're on the path to reach a profoundly meaningful milestone. Congrats! Many synagogues require a "mitzvah project" as part of the bar/bat/beit/b'nai mitzvah process. For students who care deeply about helping people who have been forced from their homes and are seeking a safer life, HIAS has created this toolkit providing parents and students with everything you need for a HIAS certified mitzvah project. Before you begin, you may want to check with clergy or staff who oversee the mitzvah project program to make sure that it meets the requirements of the community's mitzvah project. Parents/Guardians must provide consent below for the submission of this form.

For Parents/Guardians to Confirm:

☐ I consent for my child to fill out this form. They have permission to share this information with HIAS in pursuit of a certificate from HIAS affirming they have completed the work for a HIAS mitzvah project.

HIAS' permission to share about student's mitzvah project including excerpts of what has been submitted on its website or on social media can be (choose one below).

- ☐ With attribution (using first name and first letter of last name and city, state)
- ☐ Anonymously (using content from the submission with no identifying information)
- ☐ I prefer that no information is made public (default option unless otherwise checked)

Parent Signature and Date (by typing my name above, I confirm the information and choices indicated)

We recommend that you save two versions of this guide: one *CLEAN* version for reference and one for submission with the name of the student in the document title. That will include the student's answers in the relevant sections.

Components of a HIAS Mitzvah Project

The six components for the HIAS Mitzvah project listed below require a total of 12-20 hours over the course of many months. Parents- we recommend that you or a trusted adult joins with your child in the study elements of the project to help bridge generations of knowledge and history. Select **one** option for each category (provided on pages 2-3) to best meet the interests of your student and to account for what may be available in your community.

1. **JEWISH TRADITION:** Study what Jewish tradition has to say about people in need of refuge. (1 hour)
2. **MIGRATION STORIES:** Learn about immigration stories from people in your life. (1-2 hours)
3. **RECENT HISTORY AND CURRENT EVENTS:** Learn about the issue of forced migration today and how the Jewish community is responding (1 hour)
4. **VOLUNTEER PROJECT:** Create a volunteer project, supply drive or fundraiser to support people who have been forcibly displaced. (5-8 hours)
5. **SHARING WHAT YOU LEARNED:** Share about what you learned as part of your b mitzvah ceremony
6. **COMPLETION FORM FOR HIAS:** Fill out the options you chose for each section from this guide and submit upon completion to sarah.bassin@hias.org.

Jewish Tradition

STUDY WHAT JEWISH TRADITION HAS TO SAY ABOUT PEOPLE FORCED TO FLEE FROM THEIR HOMES AND SEEK REFUGE SOMEWHERE NEW (1 HOUR)

The mitzvah of “welcoming the stranger” is the most prevalent commandment in the Torah. It is also a value that Jews have embraced throughout the centuries. Choose one of the following options and answer the questions connected with that option.

OPTIONS:

- Your Torah portion may include a reference to “welcoming the stranger.” Ask your clergy person or tutor to study this section of your parashah together (if there is one). You can use this “parashah decoder” on page 4 to find out if your torah portion has a reference to the experience of the stranger.
- Read the text study on page 6 and discuss with a parent, teacher or friend and answer the questions.

Migration Stories

LEARN ABOUT IMMIGRATION, DISPLACEMENT AND FORCED MIGRATION STORIES AND HISTORY WITHIN YOUR FAMILY, FRIEND, OR COMMUNITY NETWORK. (1-2 HOURS)

The experience of fleeing your home in search of safety is very much part of Jewish history but is not unique to Jews. You may have family members, neighbors or friends from a variety of religions, nationalities, identities and backgrounds who fled danger themselves or who had a close family member who did. Choose one of the following:

OPTIONS:

- Ask a parent or clergy person if there is someone in your network who is open to speaking about the experience of displacement or forced migration with you. You can interview them about their story using the script on page 7. If you are unable to identify someone to interview, you can adapt the interview questions to apply to a story sourced online at a website such as [Many Roads to Here](#).
- Research your own family story (or the family story of a friend or community member open to helping you). See page 9

Recent History and Current Events

LEARN ABOUT THE ISSUES FACING PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN FORCIBLY DISPLACED TODAY AND HOW THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IS RESPONDING. (1 HOUR)

OPTIONS:

- Read the experiences of these refugees from around the world on pages 10-12 and answer the questions about what you learned.
- Learn about the history of HIAS by watching [this video](#) and studying the timeline on page 13. Answer the questions at the bottom of the page.

Volunteer Project

LEAD A VOLUNTEER PROJECT, SUPPLY DRIVE OR FUNDRAISER TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN FORCIBLY DISPLACED FROM THEIR HOMES. (5-8 HOURS)

Doing something to help others is a core part of the mitzvah project. Sometimes, it can be difficult to work directly with refugees and asylum seekers as many agencies have age restrictions and other protective requirements for directly working with the populations they serve. Below, you will find multiple ways to help people who have been forcibly displaced that will count as a volunteer project. Please describe the project you chose on p. 14.

OPTIONS:

- Ask your clergy person if the congregation has a committee that helps refugees. If so, they may have ideas about how you could volunteer 5-8 hours of time to support them.
- People who care about you will care about what you care about. Consider donating a portion of the cash gifts you receive for your ceremony. You can also launch your own personal fundraiser for HIAS using [Start a Fundraiser | HIAS](#) and ask friends and family joining you for your big day to donate.
- Reach out to a local organization serving refugees and asylum seekers to see what help they need that may also be feasible for you and your family. There may be a pre-existing community event to volunteer at or a supplies drive/wish list you can help gather items for. We strongly recommend asking and coordinating with an agency BEFORE you start a collection to make sure your items will be of use. Check [here](#) to see if HIAS has an affiliate in your city. If not- you can google “refugee agency or immigration organization in (your city)” and reach out to them.
- Be an advocate for forcibly displaced people in one of the following ways:
 - You could do a campaign for friends and family to sign on to [a HIAS letter](#) about current legislation or issues.
 - You could write a letter or [arrange a meeting](#) with the local office of your U.S. Representative or Senator asking them to support refugees and asylum seekers and sharing why this matters to you.

Sharing What You Learned

WITH EVERYTHING YOU HAVE LEARNED FROM YOUR STUDIES, RESEARCH, INTERVIEWS AND PROJECT, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO SHARE YOUR JOURNEY WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

OPTIONS:

- If you are doing a drive or fundraiser that you want family and friends to donate to, you can include that announcement in the invitation to your ceremony.
- Include a paragraph in your *d’var torah* about your HIAS mitzvah project. If you’re doing a drive or a fundraiser – make sure to tell them how they can help. If the project or fundraiser is done – let them know what you achieved!
- Some students find a way to integrate their mitzvah project into school – either through presenting at an afterschool club or as part of a history or social studies class. Ask your teachers if there’s a way for you to share or deepen your mitzvah project through class work.

Completion of Guide Question for HIAS

COMPLETE THE QUESTIONS IN THIS GUIDE FOR THE OPTIONS YOU CHOSE AND INCLUDE ANY RELEVANT ATTACHMENTS.

We recommend filling it out and saving as you go. Upon completion, submit to sarah.bassin@hias.org with parental consent to receive your certificate. (1-2 hours)

Jewish Tradition: Option A (Parashah Decoder)

We are told 36 times in the Torah to love those who are strangers. These charts tell you where in the Torah to look.

The Book of Genesis	Date Portion is Read					Reference to the Stranger
Parashah	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	
Bereshet (1:1-6:8)	10/18	10/10	10/30	10/14	10/6	
Noach (6:9-11:32)	10/25	10/17	11/6	10/32	10/13	
Lech Lecha (12:1-17:27)	11/1	10/24	11/13	10/24	10/20	
Vayera (18:1-22:24)	11/8	10/31	11/20	11/4	10/27	18:1-5
Chayei Sarah (23:1-25:18)	11/15	11/7	11/27	11/11	11/3	24:12-14
Toldot (25:19-28:9)	11/22	11/14	12/4	11/18	11/10	
Vayetzei (28:10-32:3)	11/29	11/21	12/11	11/25	11/17	
Vayishlach (32:4-36:43)	12/6	11/28	12/18	12/2	11/24	
Vayeshev (37:1-40:23)	12/13	12/5	12/25	12/9	12/1	
Miketz (41:1-44:17)	12/20	12/12	1/1	12/16	12/8	
Vayigash (44:18-47:27)	12/27	12/19	1/8	12/23	12/15	
Vayechi (47:28-50:26)	1/11	1/3	1/15	12/30	12/22	

The Book of Exodus	Date Portion is Read					Reference to the Stranger
Shemot (1:1-6:1)	1/18	1/10	1/2	1/22	1/6	
Vaera (6:2-9:35)	1/25	1/17	1/9	1/29	1/13	
Bo (10:1-13:16)	2/1	1/24	1/16	2/5	1/20	
Beshalach (13:17-	2/8	1/31	1/23	2/12	1/27	
Yitro (18:1-20:23)	2/15	2/7	1/30	2/19	2/3	
Mishpatim (21:1-24:18)	2/22	2/14	2/6	2/26	2/20	22:20, 23:9
Terumah (25:1-27:19)	3/1	2/21	2/13	3/4	2/17	
Tetzaveh (27:20-30:10)	3/8	2/28	2/20	3/11	2/24	
Ki Tisa (30:11-34:35)	3/15	3/7	2/27	3/18	3/3	
Vayakhel (35:1-38:20)	3/22	3/14	3/6	3/25	3/10	
Pekudei (38:21-40:28)	3/29	3/21	3/13	4/1	3/20	

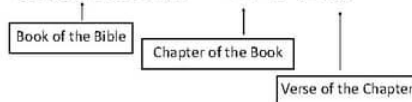
The Book of Leviticus	Date Portion is Read					Reference to the Stranger
Vayikra (1:1-5:26)	4/5	3/21	3/20	4/8	3/17	
Tzav (6:1-8:36)	4/12	3/28	3/27	4/15	3/24	
Shemini (9:1-11:47)	4/26	4/11	4/3	4/22	4/14	
Tazria (12:1-13:59)	5/3	4/18	4/10	4/29	4/21	
Achrei Mot (16:1-18:30)	5/10	4/25	5/1	5/6	4/28	19:9-10, 33-34
Emor (21:1-24:23)	5/17	5/2	5/15	5/13		
Behar (25:1-26:2)	5/24	5/9	5/22	5/20	5/12	

The Book of Numbers	Date Portion is Read					Reference to the Stranger
Bamidbar (1:1-4:20)	5/31	5/16	6/5	5/27	5/19	
Naso (4:21-7:89)	6/7	5/20	6/19	6/3	5/26	
Beha'alotekha (8:1-12:16)	6/14	6/6	6/27	6/10	6/2	9:14
Shelach (13:1-15:41)	6/21	6/13	7/3	6/17	6/9	
Korach (16:1-18:32)	6/28	6/20	7/10	6/24	6/16	
Chukat (19:1-22:1)	7/5	6/27	7/17	7/1	6/23	
Balak (22:2-25:9)	7/12	6/27	7/17	7/8	6/30	
Pinchas (25:10-30:1)	7/19	7/4	7/24	7/15	7/7	
Matot (30:2-32:42)	7/26	7/11	7/31	7/22	7/25	

The Book of Deuteronomy	Date Portion is Read					Reference to the Stranger
Devarim (1:1-3:22)	8/2	7/18	8/7	7/29	7/21	
Vaetchanan (3:23-7:11)	8/9	7/25	8/14	8/5	7/28	
Eikev (7:12-11:25)	8/16	8/1	8/21	8/12	8/4	10:19
Re'eh (11:26-16:17)	8/23	8/8	8/28	8/19	8/11	
Shoftim (16:18-21:9)	8/30	8/15	9/4	8/26	8/18	
Ki Teitzei (21:10-25:19)	9/6	8/22	9/11	9/2	8/25	24:19-22
Ki Tavo (26:1-29:8)	9/13	8/29	9/18	9/9	9/1	26:5-10; 27:18-19
Nitzavim (29:9-30:20)	9/20	9/3	9/25	-	-	
Vayeilech (31:1-31:30)	9/27	9/10	10/2	9/16	9/15	
Ha'azinu (32:1-32:52)	10/4	9/19	10/9	9/23	9/22	
V'Zot HaBerachah (33:1-34:12)	10/11	9/26	10/16	9/30	9/29	

How to Look-Up a Bible Verse

Genesis 1 : 10



What section did I choose to study?

What does it say about welcoming the stranger?

Does this still make sense for today? What feels relevant and what feels ancient?

Jewish Tradition Option B: Text Study on Welcoming the Stranger

Read each text below and discuss with a parent, teacher or clergy person then answer the questions at the bottom.

NUMBERS 15:14-16

And, when, throughout the ages, a stranger who has taken up residence with you, or one who lives among you, would present an offering by fire of pleasing odor to Adonai – as you do, so shall it be done by the rest of the congregation. There shall be one law for you and for the resident stranger; it shall be a law for all time throughout the ages. You and the stranger shall be alike before Adonai; the same ritual and the same rule shall apply to you and to the stranger who resides among you.

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS, “REFUGEE CRISIS: ‘LOVE THE STRANGER BECAUSE YOU WERE ONCE STRANGERS’ CALLS US NOW,” ON WWW.THEGUARDIAN.COM

I used to think that the most important line in the Bible was “Love your neighbor as yourself”. Then I realized that it is easy to love your neighbor because he or she is usually quite like yourself. What is hard is to love the stranger, one whose color, culture or creed is different from yours. That is why the command, “Love the stranger because you were once strangers”, resonates so often throughout the Bible. It is summoning us now.

YALKUT SHIMONI, GENESIS 1:13

God gathered the dust [of the first human] from the four corners of the world - red, black, white and green. Red is the blood, black is the innards, and green for the body. Why from the four corners of the earth? So that if one comes from the east to the west and arrives at the end of his life as he nears departing from the world, it will not be said to him, "This land is not the dust of your body, it's of mine. Go back to where you were created." Rather, every place that a person walks, from there she was created and from there she will return

MISHNAH PESACHIM 10:5

In every generation, a person is obligated to see themselves as though they came forth from Egypt.

What is the core idea behind these texts?

Which text speaks to you the most and why?

Migration Stories Option A: Interview Someone About Their Migration Story

Below are questions to interview someone about their or their family's migration history. Because these stories can sometimes be hard for people to share, be sensitive that they may become emotional or do not want to share about something specific. It is important that you listen to them and only record what you remember after the interview to stay focused on them. You can add or skip questions not relevant to the person you are interviewing. If you cannot find someone to interview, you can source a story from a website like [Many Roads to Here](#).

1. What is your name and do you know the story behind your name (are you named for someone or does it have special meaning in your culture)?
2. What would you like to share about your own story of migration or of your family history of migration?
3. What drove the decision for migration (if it was a decision they made)?
4. What do you think was hardest for you (or for your family to leave behind)?
5. What was the experience like of first coming to a new home? What was good, bad, new, exciting, hard?
6. Did anyone help you or your family come to the U.S. or build a new life? Did anyone try to cause them harm?
7. Did you or your family feel welcomed and valued? Did you experience any discrimination because of your identity or where you came from?
8. How does this history shape who you are today? What do you carry with you from these stories?
9. What have I not asked you that you want to make sure I know?

For the student to answer AFTER the interview is over (not to ask the interviewee):

What was something you learned that was surprising?

What emotions did you feel hearing the story?

Migration Stories Option B: One Family's Migration History

To research your or another family's migration history, ask questions from a person knowledgeable about the family's history to try to build a picture of their story. Questions that may be helpful to ask include:

Who came to the U.S. from our family?

Do we know where they came from and why they left?

What else do we know about them?

How did they get here?

Are there any pictures or documents about their history that we have? Describe them below.

You can record what you learn in the form of:

- a family tree
- artwork or poetry representing what you learned
- a paragraph on the story of one particularly interesting person in the history you learned.

A Note for Families:

HIAS' Archives may be able to help as we have been welcoming Jews to the U.S. for more than a century. In more recent decades, HIAS has helped people from all backgrounds. Visit hias.org/who/records-search-requests/ if you think HIAS may have records of your family and are interested in obtaining them.

Share your picture of your family tree, artwork, poetry, or paragraph here:

Recent History and Current Events Option A: Four Refugee Stories

Today, there are more than 120 million people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes – or about 1% of the global population. That’s the largest displacement crisis in human history. Here are four recent stories. **Read** the experiences of refugees from around the world and answer some questions about what you learned.



Kamal **Escaped Afghanistan.**

I left Afghanistan with my family when I was just a small child. My father was targeted by the Taliban because of his service in the Afghan army, which put our whole family in danger.

We passed through many countries—Turkey, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Iran. Finally, we landed in Russia, but we found little welcome there.

People don't like you if you say you're Muslim. I remember that twice they beat me because ... I don't know why.

It took 17 years, many difficult security screenings, and a long vetting process before my brother and I were finally resettled in the United States. We found refuge in the most unexpected place: San Damiano Friary, a Franciscan retreat center.

Who met us at the airport and found us this place to stay? The Jewish Family Service of the East Bay.

It's really amazing—Muslims, Jews, and Christians all coming together.

Rawan **Escaped Qamishli, Syria.**

Rawan is my 4-year-old son. His father, older brother, and I fled our hometown in Qamishli, Syria over three years ago. Because Rawan does not remember our homeland, I tell him stories about it every night so he will have a connection like the rest of us. My husband fled to Germany last year, leaving the rest of our family behind. Here in Akre, I work on the Castle Art Project, a program through the Rise Foundation that empowers the youth who live here to paint murals on the walls of our new home, which is a former Saddam Hussein prison. This project helps keep our children engaged and gives them hope for a life of dignity and possibility. Somehow, despite the difficulties we face, Rawan is just like any other boy his age. He is incredibly mischievous, loves to be flipped upside down, and takes giant bites out of your food when you are not looking.



Carlos **Escaped Sapuyes, Colombia.**

Here in Ecuador, if you are from Colombia, they assume you are a drug dealer. When the economy is not doing well, we become the scapegoats.

Even though I own my own Chinese food business, it took over 7 years to gain the trust of the community here. Since I fled Colombia in 2009, I have struggled to make my business successful, but now everyone knows I am honest and hardworking.

Still, the landlord who rents space to me overcharges me for the space because I am Colombian.

In Colombia, I worked as a farmer in Túquerres, where it was common to see the guerrilla fighters. One day, there was a massacre on the farm. The paramilitary self-defense group of the farmers killed the workers after accusing them of being part of the guerilla fighting group. My friend and I were saved only because we were hidden by the cattle we were tending, but, because we witnessed the attack, we knew we must flee to stay alive.



Asad **Escaped Aleppo, Syria.**

My life in Syria was a really good life with my family and friends. When the revolution began, my family fled Syria, but I decided to stay. My friends and I wanted to be able to speak what was on our minds without having to be afraid. The Assad regime made that impossible. We organized protests and demonstrations, immediately putting our lives in danger.

Even though I worked as an accountant and had no medical background, I went to volunteer at a hospital. Eventually, the hospital was bombed to the ground. A friend in America asked me if I wanted to come to the U.S. to meet government officials and speak about my experiences in Syria. I said yes, and she arranged for a visa in November 2015. Just a week before I was supposed to fly to the U.S., my car exploded, probably because of my activism.

Thankfully, I was not harmed.

I want people to know that Syrian refugees are not criminals. We are victims of the Assad regime and ISIS, and we have paid the highest price.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER ABOUT THE FOUR REFUGEE STORIES:

- What do these stories have in common?
- How are they different?
- What do you find most interesting or surprising?
- What do you imagine they are feeling?

Recent History and Current Events Option B: History of HIAS

Learn about the history of HIAS by watching [this video](#) and studying the timelines below. Answer the questions at the bottom of the page.

How HIAS Has Helped

1870-1914

Jews organized to create HIAS

HIAS is the world's oldest refugee agency. Though the organization was formally incorporated as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in 1903, that founding moment represented a continuation of several predecessor organizations that had worked through the 1880s and 1890s to assist Jews fleeing pogroms in **Russia** and **Eastern Europe**. By the time Ellis Island became the official immigration inspection and processing station in New York City in 1892, HIAS predecessor organizations had already begun providing meals, transportation, and jobs to members of the fast-growing Russian Jewish population.

1914-1959

The Holocaust and its Aftermath

Because of American restrictions on immigration, few refugees were resettled to the U.S. from that time through WWII, but HIAS was able to work through its European arm HICEM to help 250,000 men, women, and children to escape Nazi persecution, and provided refugee services to those who were saved. After the war, HIAS helped evacuate the Displaced Persons camps in **Europe** and aid in the resettlement of some 150,000 people to 330 communities in the U.S., as well as Canada, Australia, and South America, and, eventually, to Israel following its founding in 1948.

1950s & 60s

The Right to Seek and Enjoy Asylum

After WWII, the 1951 Refugee Convention became the basis for international refugee law, providing the foundation for HIAS' future work to assist refugees no matter where they were. HIAS assisted Jews fleeing such countries as **Hungary, Egypt, Cuba, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Czechoslovakia** and **Poland**.

1970s, 80s, & 90s

Ethiopia, Iran and the Soviet Union

In 1977, HIAS helped evacuate the Jews of **Ethiopia**, which culminated in several dramatic airlifts to Israel. Two years later, internal conflict in **Iran** led to a slow but steady emigration of Jews escaping an increasingly oppressive theocracy, and HIAS facilitated the resettlement of thousands of Persian Jews with close family in the U.S. The Jews of the **former Soviet Union** found their way to freedom with the help of HIAS in two modern waves, with over 400,000 migrating with HIAS assistance through Vienna and Rome to the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere.

2000s and Beyond

HIAS Across the World

We used to help refugees because they were Jewish; now we help refugees because we are Jewish. HIAS still helps Jews fleeing danger in countries – we have simply expanded our century of experience to help people regardless of their background. We support asylum seekers throughout Latin America, refugees from Darfur in Chad and countless other places around the world. We also help refugees and other forcibly displaced people arriving to the United States resettle into their new homes. With the support and volunteering of Jewish communities across the U.S., HIAS helped resettle many Afghans, Ukrainians and others.

- What moments of history do you recognize?
- Was anyone you know impacted by any of these events? Please share if yes.
- Why do you think that HIAS helps not only Jews but all people seeking safety today?

Volunteer Project

Describe what you did for your volunteer project. Include relevant links or content you created for it. Who did you help, what did you accomplish and how did it feel?

Please describe below what you did for your drive, volunteer, advocacy or fundraising project below and what you learned from the experience. Who did you help, what did you accomplish and how did it feel? In your final submission, feel free to attach any relevant links, pictures or content you created for it.

Sharing What you Learned

How did you share this mitzvah project with others? If you wrote about it in your sermon, please include that section of your sermon here.

Please submit the completed answers to at least one option for each of the categories with the signed consent of parents on page 1. Feel free to include any relevant attachments, pictures, content, links. Submissions should be sent to sarah.bassin@hias.org.
