Dear B’nai Mitzvah Families,

Our hope and intention is to provide our students and families with a familiarity with Judaism’s Big Ideas, core vocabulary, and key “skills.” It is “foundational,” a beginning on which to build as one grows and explores the world of “Jewish.” This period of learning and experience is also a doorway, a portal, or a bridge; it is not an end in itself.

Our design and intention addresses each student in three ways: individually, as they reflect personally; collectively, with each other, as they exchange and interact; and with parents and perhaps grandparents who participate in the conversations. In fact, this process is as much a “family and community affair” as it is an individual life-cycle event.

It is my pleasure and delight to accompany you through this passage, to be a resource and guide to you all, to help shape each other and our futures, to help us live meaningfully. To serve the adults your children will become.

This is a Zoom-based “class,” but/and we can also change things up to do different, perhaps more experiential things — depending on appetite and interest — such as a film viewing and discussion, a young adult novel, a walk of the labyrinth, a field trip to a monument or memorial. All to be discussed for consensus.

The class-by-class structure is as follows:

I. “What are we doing here?” — Similes, images, stories, and “beginnings” questionnaire
   A. Intro: Judaism as a “Civilization”
      1. Elements
      2. “Evolving”
      3. Believing, Belonging, Behaving, Becoming
   B. “Coming-of-Age”
      1. Different ‘maturities’ (physical, intellectual, social, moral…?)
      2. “Leaving Childhood” exercise (exploration of “growing up” and “adult”), writing and sharing in class
      3. Identity (personal) and Status (communal)
      4. Self-awareness — of own mind and others around you

II. “Blessings”
   A. Rabbi’s Formula (6 or 10 word incantation)
   B. Reasons and effects of reciting a blessing
   C. How are blessings related to your knee? A swimming pool? A camera?
   D. Occasions? (create list)

III. “Mitzvah”
   A. What? (different understandings, categories…)
   B. Why?
   C. Relationship to values, matching exercise
IV. Part 1: “Tallit”

A. “Wrap” and “enwrap”
B. “Tzitzit”
C. the blessing
D. Jewish choreography (steps, bows, kisses…)

Part 2: Ritual objects, Family heirlooms, Family stories — sharing

V. “Tikkun Olam” and Social Justice (Prophets)

A. Bob Dylan song (“Everything is Broken”) and “Shattering of the Vessels” story
B. “Tzedek” and “Tzedakah”
C. “Aleynu” prayer, “Hands of God” story
D. Prophets and their messages

VI. Shabbat

A. Love story, love songs
B. “rest” vs. “work”
C. Brainstorm do’s and don’ts
D. From “Vishamru” prayer tune — “Shavvat v’yinafash” means… (what?) to you?

VII. “God” talk

A. What do we mean by “spirituality” or “holiness” or “sacred”
B. Metaphors, Images, Descriptions
C. God and “Godliness”
D. Not so much Who or What or even Why, but WHEN, WHERE, HOW?

VIII. Communal worship “services”

A. “Prayer is… (what?)”
B. Overall structure of service; Key prayers, “She’ma” and “Amidah”
C. Torah service and “d’var torah” (speech!)

HW: “Top Ten Values”

IX. Values

A. Connect back to “Coming of age” (beginning to know oneself) and what matters to you)
B. Connect back to Beliefs and Behaviors and Mitzvah
C. Connect your individual list to a “project” in the world