

The Jewish Tool Box Rabbi Alexandra Wright

This year I have been teaching Class Chet – our Bar and Bat Mitzvah class. I wanted to help provide them with what I call their 'Jewish tool box' using a programme (shown to me by Rabbi Monique Mayer) based on this passage in Siddur Lev Chadash.

This list (which is found in Shabbat Morning Service V of our Siddur) is based on a passage in the Mishnah from Pe'ah 1:1, supplemented by a passage from the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 127a.

The 'tool box' is really those things that could be the basis for a Jewish life for these young people who are about to take part in the first significant life cycle event of which they are conscious.

These are actions which bring benefit here and now but whose full value can be measured only in the light of eternity: honouring one's parents; acts of love and kindness; diligent pursuit of knowledge and wisdom; hospitality to strangers; visiting the sick; enabling partners to celebrate their union; consoling the bereaved; praying with sincerity; and making peace where there is strife. And the study of Torah leads to them all.

אֱלוֹ דְבָרִים נְשָׂאָם אוֹכֵל
פְּרוֹתֵיהֶם בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְהִקְרָן
קִיּוּמָת לֹ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְאֵלֹ הֵן:
כְּבוֹד אָב וָאִם, וּגְמִילוּת חֲסָדִים,
וְהַשְׁפָּמַת בֵּית הַמְדָרֶשׁ שְׁחֵרִית
וְעֵרְבִית, וְהַכְנִסַת אוֹרְחִים, וּבְקוֹר
חוֹלִים, וְהַכְנִסַת כְּלָה, וּלְוִיַת
הַמֵּת, וְעִיוֹן תְּפִלָּה, וְהַבָּאָת שְׁלוֹם
בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ, וְתִלְמוּד תּוֹרָה
כְּנֻגַד כָּלָם.

What does this list represent for you? Do you think this list still holds good for us today? Are there ways of interpreting the list that makes sense in a contemporary world? What would you put in your tool box that would enable you to live an active, thoughtful, knowledgeable and committed Jewish life today? And would this be a box that you would wish to pass down to the next generation?