

Eight Experiential Hanukkah Gifts to Teach Kids about Jewish Values

BY: ANNETTE POWERS

They're everywhere these days: ads for toys show up on TV, in shop windows, and throughout your Facebook newsfeed. When you're a parent to kids who have been mentally compiling their Hanukkah wish lists since autumn began, it can be difficult not to get swept up in the consumerism that often accompanies the holiday season.

As a parent of a young child, I want to make sure my child understands that gift-giving is more about the giving than the gift, and that gifts need not be material items. (As New Yorkers in a small apartment, we don't have room for more toys, anyway!) I also want him to learn that Jewish tradition places great value on the family. Whether we're making latkes together or playing a winner-take-all game of dreidel, Hanukkah offers wonderful opportunities to spend time with those we love. In that spirit, here are eight ideas for Hanukkah gifts that won't collect dust on the shelf and will provide meaningful family experiences and memories for years to come:

1 **Go on a trip:** When I was growing up, my parents took our family on a trip every year as a Hanukkah present. I remember these wonderful vacations with my siblings much better than I remember the Barbie dolls I received to add to my collection. Travel doesn't have to be expensive; even a day trip to a local park or a museum can be memorable. If you live in an area with different ethnic communities, a trip to Chinatown or Little Italy, for example, can make a fun "travel" day. Hanukkah is a perfect time, too, for a trip to a local Jewish museum or cultural site.

2 **Plan an event:** Taking your kids to a movie, play, or sporting event of their choice can be a bonding experience and give kids something to look forward to and remember well beyond the holiday's end. Round out the day by having your kids pick their favorite place for lunch or dinner, and end with some delicious *sufganiyot* and a game of dreidel at home.

3 **Buy a family membership:** Memberships to museums, zoos, JCCs, and other local attractions and organizations are a great way for families to learn and play together on a regular basis

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throughout the year.

4 Take a class: Education is the gift that keeps giving. Gifting a child a class in one of his or her favorite hobbies, such as dance, karate, art, or music, is an excellent way to encourage interests beyond school.

5 Subscribe to a magazine: Since the advent of email and text messaging, kids rarely get mail anymore. A gift subscription to a magazine that relates to one of their interests will give them something to look forward to in the mailbox every month. Don't forget, we are the people of the book!

6 Encourage hobbies: If your kid is the arts-and-crafts type, set aside time for a craft night. Try one of these Hanukkah craft ideas! If your child is a budding chef, make latkes together by choosing from one of our favorite latkes recipes. If your kid is an aspiring actor, put together a skit about the Maccabees, and perform it at a family Hanukkah party. Get other ideas from these Shalom Sesame videos.

7 Engage in *tikkun olam* (repair of the world): Spend an afternoon volunteering together at a local shelter, bringing cheer to home-bound seniors, or sorting through last year's toys to donate to those who are less fortunate. These activities not only will teach kids the importance of giving back and helping others, but also will help them learn by example.

8 Give *tzedakah* (charity): It's important—and Jewish!—to teach kids that the best gift is the one you give to others. Make sure to carve out time and money to show them how to give to charity. Decide upon a cause that's dear to your family using this Social Justice Gift Guide for Hanukkah. Discuss with your kids what kinds of charities matter to them and how much to give so that they feel a sense of ownership and pride when giving *tzedakah*.

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