



IN YOUR HOME

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My Jewish Home

JANUARY, 2012 — TEVET-SHEVAT, 5772

Dear Parents,

What makes a Jewish home Jewish? On *Shabbat* and Jewish holidays, the home takes on a Jewish personality, expressing choices of the family living there. Even on ordinary days though, the Jewish home can express many reminders of its identity, with the display of items such as candlesticks, books, *sefer* plates, artwork, Jewish music, Jewish calendars, *tzedakah* boxes, the *mezuzah*, and most importantly, with Jewish language and activities.

A *mezuzah* on the doorpost tells us that a Jewish family lives in that home. Some visitors and its residents like to pause, touch the *mezuzah* and kiss the hand that touched it.

Books are important to Jews. Books in Jewish homes tend to be Jewish; prayer books, Hebrew dictionaries, Jewish history books, cookbooks, coffee-table art and photography books and children's books. At the same time, family members' secular interests, expressed through related book choices, demonstrates the centrality of education to living a Jewish life.

Displaying and using Jewish ritual items expresses the family's ritual habits. Jewish family treasures, received as gifts or purchased on trips, as well as objects created by the children, are often meaningful and connected to Jewish experiences. *Shabbat* candlesticks, a *Chanukiah* (*Chanukah menorah*),

mezuzot and *tzedakah* boxes displayed in obvious places, express Jewish identity and are learning tools for children about family values.



Giving *tzedakah* (charity) is a fundamental *mitzvah*. *Tzedakah* boxes have a special place in the Jewish home. They are often placed next to *Shabbat* candlesticks so family members can empty their pockets of loose change just before *Shabbat* candle-lighting. Making the *tzedakah* box visible demonstrates the importance of sharing with those less fortunate, whether it is on *Shabbat* or on a weekday.

Listening to Jewish music, played in the home and in the car, sets the stage for thinking, feeling and talking about Jewish topics, by adults and children.

What is the "Jewish language" of the family? Setting the "Jewish stage", with ritual objects and items that express the family's values, prepares for family activities such as ongoing discussions, questions and hands-on involvement. Language can have the most meaningful and lasting influence on residents of the Jewish home, leading to tangible expressions of Jewish identity.

HAVING FUN AT HOME

THE MEZUZAH

A *Torah* commandment instructs us to hang a *mezuzah* on our doorpost to remind us of God's oneness and presence and of our duty to fulfill God's commandments. A *mezuzah* is a sacred parchment (*klafl*) coming from a kosher species of animal, and inscribed, by hand, in Hebrew. It contains two portions from the *Torah* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9: beginning with "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One," and ending with "And you shall inscribe these words upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates."). One is affixed to the doorpost of each room in the home, except for the bathroom. Some might be home-made while others might be professionally crafted.

MAKING A MEZUZAH

Materials

oven-bake clay
(OR the next 3 items below)
½ cup flour
¼ cup salt
¼ cup hot water
a few drops of food coloring (optional)
poster paints (optional)
paint brush (optional)
a pencil
a small piece of aluminum foil
floor wax or hair spray
a *klafl* (the scroll containing the Hebrew prayer that is placed inside the *mezuzah* case)

With your child: Using either oven-bake clay, or after combining flour, salt, and water, knead for about 5 minutes. Add food coloring if desired. With a rolling pin, roll the dough



to ¼-inch thickness. Wrap the foil around the pencil (to make it easier to remove the pencil from the dough when finished). Shape the dough around the end of the pencil, flattening and smoothing it to a long, narrow rectangle and closing off the bottom end. Extra dough should be added to extend one-inch beyond both ends of the cylinder.

Place the dough on a flat surface and press down to make it flat enough to lie against the wall when hung as a *mezuzah*. Pull the pencil out through the top opening. Using the pencil point, poke a hole in the top and bottom extensions so the *mezuzah* case can be attached by nails to a door frame.

If you used oven-bake clay, bake the *mezuzah*, following manufacturer's directions. If you used ingredients listed above, air dry or bake the *mezuzah* in a 200-degree oven for about 2 hours.

Paint or decorate it with poster paints and "varnish" it with floor wax or hair spray, (your choice). Purchase a *klafl* at a Jewish bookstore. Roll the *klafl* and slip it into the open center of the *mezuzah*. Your *mezuzah* is ready to be hung.

HANGING A MEZUZAH

It's fun and memorable to conduct a special ceremony as a *mezuzah* is put into place. Before affixing it to a doorpost, say the following blessing:

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu likbo-a mezuzah.



Blessed are You, The Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who sanctifies us with holy commandments and commands us to hang a *mezuzah*.

This blessing is recited only once for hanging all the *mezuzot* in the house, and is usually done when hanging the *mezuzah* on the front door. After reciting the blessing, no words are spoken until all *mezuzot* are hung throughout the house.

Hang the *mezuzah*:

- on the right doorpost as one enters the room.
- two-thirds of the way up the doorpost (shoulder height).
- in a slightly slanted position so that the top points toward the inside of the room.

With your child: After she has chosen or made a *mezuzah*, hang it on the doorpost of her room, in a location that is easy for her to reach.

PLAYING GAMES

Count The Jewish Things

With your child: Walk around your house naming and counting as many Jewish items as you can find (*mezuzot*, *menorahs*, *Shabbat* candlesticks, books with Hebrew writing, a Jewish calendar). How many are there? Count them.

Count The Mezuzot

With your child: Visit a synagogue or a Jewish Community Center and count the number of *mezuzot* you see there.

MORE FUN AT HOME

TZEDAKAH

What Do Children Think About Tzedakah?

They're naturally concerned with fairness and equity in their daily interactions with siblings and peers. ("Why did Sarah get more than me?") Struggles to understand ethical behavior direct their questions on issues of justice. ("Which things are okay to do and which are not?") These offer wonderful discussion opportunities as we talk with them about justice from a Jewish point of view (*tzedakah*)!

The Hebrew word, *tzedakah*, while translated to English as "charity," actually means justice, and refers to the religious obligation to perform philanthropic acts. The Torah teaches us "justice, justice, shall you pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20). Children can be sensitized to injustice, as they observe the world around them. And they can be enabled to correct some of those injustices through their own actions as they realize that by sharing some of their own money they can make a difference.

Discuss injustice with your child and the way it appears in her world. Encourage her to share her ideas and questions. Explore ways that you and she can counter injustice. How much of her money does she think is appropriate to donate to a cause to make a difference? Who will be the recipient? How will you and she contact that person to make the donation?

Using a *tzedakah* box can be fun. Children love to place collected money in the box, listening to the noise it makes as it is shaken. When your child has decorated the box it is even more appealing to him. If you and he have decided upon a recipient, it's very exciting to feel the box getting heavier and heavier. If not, it's still fun, as you keep thinking and discussing possibilities.

The box should be placed in a public place so anyone seeing it can easily add some money to it as desired. Some families put money in the box before lighting *Shabbat* candles. Others do it regularly before bedtime each night. You and your child can

choose a special regular time to add to the box and make it a routine. As giving *tzedakah* becomes ritualized, it becomes instinctive behavior.

Choosing and giving to a recipient can take work. Speak with friends, your child's teacher, your rabbi, or anyone else you think might be able to help you find an appropriate *tzedakah* recipient. Include your child in the decision making process. When the box feels heavy, empty it and help her count the collected money. She can draw a picture or write a note to send along with the donation. Ask for an acknowledgement, so that she feels a sense of accomplishment in having seen this project to its end.



MAKING A TZEDAKAH BOX

Materials

an empty, clean can or box, with the plastic lid (make sure the container does not have sharp edges).

1 sheet of colorful construction paper
Elmers glue
scissors
sparkles
craft knife (to be used ONLY by an adult)

With your child: Cut a slit in the can's lid using a craft knife (or other appropriate implement). Ask him to decorate the construction paper. Wrap the decorated paper around the can, cutting off the area that extends above the can. Glue it onto the can. Let it dry. The *tzedakah* box is ready to use.

SAYING THE SHEMA: A Jewish Bedtime Ritual

At the end of a busy day, your child can be reassured of feeling loved and protected before going to sleep by reciting the *Shema Yisrael* prayer with you. This three-minute routine gives her with a sense of inner peace, connection with Judaism and faith in one God. The first part of the prayer is as follows:

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.
Listen Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

With your child: Discuss "What was the best thing that happened today?" "What made you feel happy today?"

RECOMMENDED SELECTION OF BOOKS

2 and 3 year olds

One Mezuzah: A Jewish Counting Book by C.Kitman & A.Hurwitz, Rossel Books, 1984. Jewish items found in Jewish homes are shown in photos and discussed in this charming counting book.

You Can Do A Mitzvah! By J. Groner, Kar-Ben Copies, Inc., 1999. *Mitzvot* are introduced in this board-book with fun illustrations.

2-5 year olds

The Bedtime Shema: A Goodnight Book by S. Gershman, EKS Publishing Co., 2007. This beautifully illustrated book, with accompanying CD, presents Jewish bedtime prayer rituals and soothes young children's fears of being alone in the dark.



3-7 year olds

A Mezuzah On The Door by A.Meltzer, Kar-Ben Publishing, Inc. 2007. When Noah's family moves to a new house, they discuss ways to complete their home. They agree that placing a *mezuzah* on their doorway will do it. This Sydney Taylor Award Notable Book has exquisite illustrations.

The 11th Commandment: Wisdom From Our Children, S. Korinchak, editor, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996. Children throughout the world discuss their ideas through drawings and words on things of importance in life and on our planet.

Because Nothing Looks Like God by L. Kushner and K. Kushner, Jewish Lights, 2000. Charming illustrations and explanations about where to find God can lead to interesting and important conversations.

Thank You God! A Jewish Child's Book of Prayers by J. Groner & M. Wikler, Kar-Ben Publishing, 1993. Exquisitely illustrated, this book includes simple Hebrew, phonetic transliteration and English

blessings; for food, *Shabbat* and holiday rituals, life and health, comfort and forgiveness.

God's Paintbrush by S.E. Sasso, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1992. Beautiful illustrations and carefully selected words present ideas about God and life's beauty.

Even If I Did Something Awful by B.S. Hazen. A little girl explores her mother's love for her, helping young children understand their own limits and the unending extent of parental love.

Fins and Scales: A Kosher Tale by D.U. Miller, Kar-Ben Copies, Inc, 1991. This fun and rhyming story with charming illustrations, describes what kosher actually means.

5-8 year olds

The Jewish Child's First Book of Why by A.J.Kolatch, Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 1992. This book for children who ask "why" about everything answers common questions like "Why do we play dreidel?", "Why do we plant trees?" "Why do we fast on *Yom Kippur*?" and others.

A Thread of Kindness: A Tzedakah Story by L.P. Shollar, Hachai Publishing, 2000. In this retelling of an old story, a poor farmer and his wife are given a treasure and must decide what to do with it.

Adults

Jewish Parents' Almanac by J.H. Danan, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994. Jewish parents find this information extremely useful as they develop a creative and knowledgeable Jewish home.

How To Run A Traditional Jewish Household by B. Greenberg, 1983, Simon & Schuster, Inc. Filled with practical advice, this comprehensive guide covers every aspect of creating and running a Jewish home, included prayer, dress, holidays, food preparation, marriage, birth, death and parenthood.

