

A Letter from Rabbi Weintraub to Parents of Kane Street Kids

November 26, 2013

23 Kislev 5774

Dear parents,

Children, especially young children, have a natural spirituality. They feel things intensely and are able to “be in the moment.” They have large capacities for joy and wonder. In the words of Rabbi David Wolpe, “Children remind us that it is important not only to understand the world, but to cherish it.”

It is especially inspiring to be around children at the time of Chanukah, one of our most joyous holidays. I spent two lovely mornings this past week with the Kane Street Kids children, sharing teachings and songs of Chanukah, and would like to give you a report.

In the Red Twos with Nari, Keila and Emily I was amazed at how focused these very young children were as we sat around the rug. We practiced the *Chet*, *CHHH* sound, found especially in Hebrew and Arabic, as in – you got it!! – Chanukah. As I set up the Menorah, they identified the different colors of the candles. I put on my large Tallit/prayer shawl and they came near for the Priestly blessing, “May G-d bless you and keep you...” I explained that blessings help people by wishing well for them. Who helps you? “Teachers, babysitters, Mom, Dad” and finally, “Mom, but Dad can help her!”

The Orange (older) Twos were eating snack as I arrived. We said hello and I explored with them the incredible, supersized cardboard Menorah they had built and painted with the teachers. Yashir Ko’ach! Well done. We learned the song “Happy Chanukah...yei, yei, yei, yei” They are under instructions to also greet their cats and dogs with “Happy Chanukah,” so please don’t interrupt any sacred inter-species encounter. I took out my menorah and briefly placed it near the window to teach them about the Mitzvah of “Pirsuma Nisa” – advertising the miracle of Chanukah. We share our light not just with family and friends inside but with everybody outside.

The Purple Three’s began by counting the holidays coming up this week. “Chanukah! Thanksgiving! Shabbat!” I set up Legos as props for a story “The Field of Brotherly Love” about King Solomon. He is instructed by G-d to build the Temple on “The Field of Brotherly Love.” But where is this field? He wanders and wanders, looking for it. Finally he sees a field shared by two brothers, each with a farm, at opposite ends. One brother is alone; the other has a wife and three daughters. The first brother decides to sneak the second brother wheat in the middle of the night because he has those children

to support. The second brother decides to sneak wheat to the first because he is lonely. Of course they return after their missions and see that their own stock of wheat is not diminished. So they go back again, and back again and back again, all night long. Because of the darkness they don't see each other as they cross the field. Sun rises and they finally see each other, realize what has been happening, laugh and embrace. King Solomon who has witnessed all of this now knows that he has found The Field of Brotherly Love, and builds the Temple there. The story involves furiously whipping the Lego block brothers and grain back and forth across the field, and the kids love it

With the Green Threes, we talked about the oil which was good for one night but lasted for eight. This teaches us that you should never give up, never say that I'm too small to do something. I shared the story of the "Apple Tree's Discovery." An apple tree is feeling bad, because it looks up at night at the oak trees which surround it and sees that their branches are so high that the stars appear to touch them. The apple tree is jealous and sad because it wants the stars to touch its branches. So it mopes through winter, spring, and finally summer. One summer day a strong wind shakes its branches and one apple falls to the ground and splits in half. The apple tree sees that indeed there has been a star inside its fruit all the time. (You can show this at home with a knife.)

This story brought up their experiences at night, a huge preoccupation of three year olds. Many said that at night they keep their door open a little and/or have a night life. It is now my sad duty to report that three children indicated that their night lights were broken. Come on, Moms and Dads! Get crackin'!

With Joanna, Priscilla and the Yellow Pre-Ks, I shared the story of Judah Macabee and his band of freedom lovers who saved the Jews. The Macabees were led by a group of brothers so we talked about how you should love everybody but you're especially close with your family. I again shared the story of The Field of Brotherly Love. The Jews of this story lived in Israel. Where do Jews live today, I wondered. "California! Texas! Brooklyn! Mexico! Montreal!" We learned a special Chanukah song in Ladino, "Uno Candelika," a mixture of Spanish and Hebrew spoken by Sephardic Jews in Mediterranean cultures.

The kids in Blue Pre-Ks were proudly dressed in their pilgrim hats when I entered. We got into a discussion about noticing what is special about other people. I asked them what they thought I did when I got up that morning. "Work," "get dressed," "brush your teeth," "eat breakfast," "put on your Kippah." I told them yes, but I also prayed. The Talmud, an important Jewish book, says that one should not say morning prayers until the night is over and day has started. How do know when night is over. I asked them. "When Mom and Dad wake me up!" "When I wake them up!" (What's the split? I took a vote. Three are awakened by Mom and Dad, and eleven wake you up.) The Rabbis in the Talmud first propose other criteria: When you can distinguish your field from your neighbor's, when you can make out different kinds of animals, when you can see the different colors of a flower. But the answer that wins is when you can identify

the person in front of you. The point of waking up, of living each day, is to see and connect with other people!

I set up the Menorah and we talked about the Shamash, the helper candle. Even though it serves the others, it is set up higher. We need to respect people who help us. Who helps you? "G-d!" "HaShem!" "My babysitter!" "Waiters!" "Chefs!" - a very sophisticated group! I then lit candles and we sang "Oh Chanukah."

They are very special group of kids who brighten my days and are growing together in body, mind, and spirit.

Happy Chanukah, Happy Thanksgiving, Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Sam