P A R E N T I N G S O L U T I O N S

Mindfulness and Miracles in the Midst of the Holiday Flurry

by Christine Kestenbaum

Fall is the gateway to the holiday season, which brings numerous wonders of delight and miracles to unfold. It also involves gatherings with family and friends, food, drink, and socializing. For some this brings pure joy; for others, it is bittersweet (missing loved ones, family conflict, and so on).

We begin this time in reflection of thanks and, in the Jewish tradition of mitzvah, by giving to those less fortunate with food, money, clothing donations, and so on. We then proceed by preparing for the Thanksgiving feast, holiday gift-giving, the Festival of Lights, and ringing in the New Year!

It is so easy to gust our way into a whirlwind of activities. With all the bustle—whether self-imposed or by others, guilt, or the media—it is no wonder we can find ourselves tumbling through school activities, cooking a Thanksgiving meal, traveling, helping family and friends in need, and finishing the list of gift-shopping. One can stumble into the New Year half-baked.

With that said, how do we as parents balance our experience while modeling for our children the true essence and value of the celebrations to come, while we are challenged to complete our to-do lists? First, let me affirm that you are doing the BEST job you can already, and that truly is ENOUGH. Second, taking the time to read this article demonstrates that you have dedication to your "parenting" persona and skills. So, please read on…..

I journeyed through my numerous family holiday celebration books for enlightenment and collected some introspections of interest. Chanukah means "dedication." Dedication to the miracles that occurred and to the military victory that led to freedom of religion. The candles bring light to times of darkness to inspire us with hope and faith that any action of mitzvah, even if it appears small, can help repair the world.

I also read that "mitzvah" speaks to our obligations to G-d and others through our political and social justice beliefs, and that by standing up for what you believe in and helping others who may not have the means or words to do so is a part of our role as parents to teach our children, by modeling.

OK, so now not only do you grocery shop, cook, figure out when and who is coming or where your family is going for Thanksgiving and Chanukah, and what the New Year may bring, but must you also take on another role? No—it is within us each day to see the miracles unfold in our children and what has touched them and us on a given day. While you are pushing the shopping cart, driving to school, answering the 20th "why" question of the day, STOP. Listen; look into your child's eyes; ask what your child is thinking, feeling, seeing, smelling. Remember the time of wonder you experienced as a child and view, share, and experience it all alongside your child.

Do this whenever it comes to mind (or when you feel overwhelmed—it is a good refocusing technique). You and your family will enlighten each other and have a more meaningful holiday season. And you will have a true understanding of their views and all the wonderful values you, the teachers, and others have been teaching. This in itself is a miracle and shows how one person at a time can repair the world.

With this in mind, I would like to share my personal reflection during the New Pond Farm 4's field trip. As I crunched on the leaves on the trails, the 4's class skipping along in wonder (not worrying about falling), I pondered how much we

have woven into our lives from the Native Americans. I thought about the time and energy it takes to build one wigwam for a family of one, and how entire extended families would store, sleep, and educate in another. I really appreciated the sounds of nature and the tree branches entwined so methodically to support my body while at rest—I touched the bark, smelled the air of pine and smoke from the fire, and listened to the wind and the song of the trees. We pounded corn and felt acorns with our hands, and we removed hair from deerskin with tools made of wood and bones. We watched water boil from a hot stone from the fire. My daughter's and my appreciation of what we have and what surrounds us is at a much deeper level than before.

That night as I tucked her into a bed of her own, with soft sheets and blankets, we both said thanks. This is what touched my daughter and me that day, and it will become part of our daily lives. Tomorrow will bring on many new miracles of wonder, which will lead to other mitzvah opportunities. Whether it is eating warm oatmeal for the first time this season, or saying thanks on Thanksgiving, or lighting the candles for Chanukah, or the taste of yummy latkes, the smells, the sound of laughter, singing, dancing, family time—new miracles will unfold. This is truly what matters during the most wonderful time of the year, which can also be the busiest. May you and your family have a wonderful holiday season!