

# From the desk of Rabbi Baumann



## GIFT FOR ETERNITY

Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayishlach 5783

Dear Parents,

The confrontation between *Yaakov Avinu* and his estranged brother *Esav* is described in great detail in the beginning of this week's *Parsha*. *Rashi* tells us (*Bereishis* 32:9) that *Yaakov*'s preparation for neutralizing the threat from *Esav* was threefold. *Yaakov* prayed, he prepared for war and he sent gifts, hoping to appease *Esav* without coming on to a physical conflict.

The subject of gifts and gift giving is on many people's minds this time of year. Although the source does not seem to come from Jewish tradition, we nevertheless associate *Chanuka* with giving and receiving gifts, specifically for children, beyond the timeless custom of *Chanuka Gelt*.

“Receiving gifts is a lovely and memorable experience for children.”

Receiving gifts is a lovely and memorable experience for children. It helps cement bonds of love and connection between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren. Children can feel special to be recipients and happy to have something new and enjoyable. Getting presents is a highlight of childhood.

However, there is an important aspect to our children receiving gifts that warrants our attention and concern. When a child receives a gift, that item now becomes part of his possessions and joins his other toys, books and playthings that occupy a great deal of his time, focus and attention. Therefore the choice of a gift is not inconsequential. When the giver of the gift is the parent, they have doubtless considered the pros and cons of their child now having the item to play with. They have hopefully thought through the various consequences of the item being in their home – its size, noise, durability, suitability, etc. Will it cause jealousy, is it age appropriate, is it safe, etc. etc.

The really challenging part comes when the child receives a gift from a well-meaning grandparent or other relative, who probably did not make the same calculation as the parent, rather being more concerned with how much the child will like it, be excited about it and be so appreciative to the giver. They very likely chose the gift because they know or think the child wants it, they've seen it advertised or they have been made to understand that 'everyone' has it.

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Without any hard data, I am nevertheless confident in assuming that many gifts are not to our liking and that many of our families have had electronic devices introduced to their children through well-meaning, but ill-advised gift givers in their extended family. Children receive i-pads, Wii, Nintendo switch, Xbox, smart watches and even smart phones without prior knowledge of their parents. They receive them at ages far younger than the parents would have preferred.

However, once they have been given to the children, they remain, and another set of parents have thrown their hands up in despair. This child now shares his new toy with his friends and way too early, an entire class of parents is besieged by desperate children who simply must get what 'everyone' has.

It doesn't have to be this way. Before *Chanuka* gets any closer, have a conversation with your parents and other relatives who will be giving gifts and explain gently but firmly, that electronics are potentially damaging to young children and you must give your approval before they present them to your child and your family. Children love technological gadgets because they are so attention grabbing. However, the evidence is mounting that too much exposure to a two-dimensional screen is damaging to the healthy intellectual and emotional development of a child in a three-dimensional world. Exposure to the sights, sounds and immorality that these devices introduce to our young, innocent children will stunt their spiritual development. Both outcomes will only become evident many years from now. Just talk to a typical(ly exposed) teenager or his or her parent.

We owe it to our children and ourselves to stand up for their best interests, even if it may cause temporary discomfort to those we love and respect. Be proactive, be forthright – with sensitivity and sincere appreciation, but deliver the message that your children's physical, emotional and spiritual health is more precious than anything in the world, and could be damaged by the innocent looking gift. Give your children a truly priceless gift – that of a parent who is completely devoted to his child's health and future, and will do things that are hard, in order to protect them. Your children will be eternally grateful.

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Best wishes for a wonderful *Shabbos* and an inspirational *Chanukah*,



Rabbi Kalman Baumann  
Principal