



# NATHAN BLOWS OUT THE HANUKKAH CANDLES

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*Jacob loves his brother Nathan, who is autistic. When Hanukkah comes, Jacob worries that Nathan might embarrass him in front of his new friend. What if Nathan blows out the Hanukkah candles?!*

At Hanukkah\*, we celebrate the victory of a small group of people who would not be coerced, despite a powerful king's edict that all people must worship in the King's way. For years, these Maccabees—from the Hebrew word for “hammer”—defended their Jewish lives and traditions. The Maccabees represent a stunning example of perseverance in the name of freedom and the right to be oneself, no matter how unlike the majority.

With your children, showcase the amazing variety in the life, art and traditions of human beings and their cultures by:

- Making fingerprints using non-permanent ink or food coloring. Marvel at the fact that no two human fingerprints have ever been exactly the same.
- Using thumbprints to create *Hanukkah* objects to decorate your home: a *dreidel*, *latke*, or *hanukkiyah* (*Hanukkah* menorah) perhaps using blue and white, traditional colors of Israel.
- Having each family member make a *hanukkiyah*. Collect non-flammable recycling materials for the project. Celebrate each *hanukkiyah* as different but wonderful. Donate several of your creations to an assisted living facility or to homebound Jewish seniors.

## B'TZELEM ELOHIM

Jewish tradition teaches that we are all made in the image of God—in Hebrew, *B'tzelem Elohim*—yet we are all unique. The Talmud explains that:

*A person may strike many coins from one die, and they are all alike. God, however, strikes every person from the die of the first man, but no one resembles another.*

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hasidic Judaism, said: “Every-one has...something precious that is in no one else.”

As Nathan's story shows, “unique and precious” does not always translate to “easy and comfortable.” It's important to help our children learn to deal appropriately with peers whose behaviors are non-typical. Ask your children about encounters they have at school or camp; talk about techniques they can use to interact with respect and kindness. Preparation and discussion will enhance working, learning, and playing together for everyone.

\* The transliterated word *Hanukkah* can be spelled in many different ways—including *Chanukah*, *Channukah*, *Chanuka*, etc. Pj