

A Sandbox *is* Jewishly Relevant

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Playing with nature's outdoor gifts has traditionally been part of child play. Sandboxes, water tables, mud rivers, and leaf stamping are just a few examples of what we adults remember vividly from our childhood memories. Yet thinking about today's children, we see more of a variety of toys and recreational activities alongside our traditional play with nature's offering. Both we as adults, and school settings, are introducing colorful light up push button toys, technology, and academics, sometimes more so than our traditional play.

Yet as a mother, an educator, an advocate for children, and someone who implements curricula in the Jewish San Gabriel Valley, it saddens me to see San Gabriel Valley schools (not necessarily Jewish) replacing sandboxes with concrete flooring. Worse so, are sandboxes being consistently covered, indicating off bound limits for innocent hands. Sure, this is not in every educational setting, but yes, it is common to see tablets amongst children as tender young as two years of age.

I respect the array of educational philosophies out there in the SGPV, and no doubt we adults are educating our children in the best way we see fit. Our children are for the most part growing into strong resilient beings, based upon the Judaic values we provide them, yet providing ample traditional play time using nature's gifts, I feel, will enhance our children's growth, Jewishly.

So why *is* a sandbox Jewishly relevant?

Raising developmentally healthy, righteous, happy children who will carry our traditions with compassion, kindness and moral ethics, is Jewishly relevant. When looking at child development, moreover, we look at several interrelated domains. Some of these include physical, emotional, cognitive, social, language, spiritual, and moral development. When all these domains are cultivated, we know we are on the right track to creating a Jewishly warm and relevant child.

Sandbox play incorporates all these domains. In a nutshell, when a child digs and sifts grains of sand, their muscle tone, or their physical fine and gross motor skills are strengthened. When shovels are passed from one child to another, sharing, caring and moral values are developed. Imaginative ideas can be passed around, and created in the sandboxes, without an app dictating a train of thought. Language is used to create sandcastles, or Lot's wife who turned into a pillar of salt, or cognitive mathematical skills are practiced when enumerating grains of sand promised to Abraham to be the number of Jewish people.

This all is just the tip of the iceberg. Textbooks, research papers and conferences have been dedicated to the sandbox, and other outdoor gifts for children. Likewise, though, so have

conferences advocated for a shift in traditional play, into mass media, and plastic playthings. Finding the balance is key. Not letting go of our traditions is, to some of us, key. Knowing what your child is interested in, is key. Building strong foundations in our children's education, is key.

So, I ask you, dear parents, adults, educators, fellow Jews, and readers, what will you choose for your child? How will you ensure you facilitate a Jewishly warm and relevant path for your child, and will a magnificent grain of sand be incorporated in the raising of your dream child?

