

# Interactive children’s ‘edutainment’

By **NJJN STAFF**

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A page from one of Rabbi Kerry Olitzky’s new interactive books. Photo courtesy Rabbi Kerry Olitzky

**RABBI KERRY OLITZKY** has launched a series of Jewish stories on Ji Tap, an online interactive platform for Jewish content.

Called Jewish Children’s Stories, the focus is on holiday activities such as playing dreidel; values like saying sorry; and theological concepts such as where God lives.

He calls this new set of stories “edutainment,” because the goal is to offer age-appropriate Jewish education while engaging the listener. The text is written on illustrated panels; the user hears the words being read aloud and “turns the page” by clicking on an arrow button.

“What makes such writing challenging is the taking of difficult concepts and translating them into the vocabulary of young children, whose abstract thinking abilities are yet to be fully formed,” said Olitzky.

The platform borrows most of its approach from gaming technology, and provides a robust array of educational opportunities.

Given the growing reliance on video technology in both formal and informal education, these stories also offer an opportunity to discover the extent to which technology can be applied to reading time in the home, even as part of a bedtime ritual familiar to many young children.

Olitzky’s stories are also intended to reach a younger age set —3 to 8 — than most interactive stories on Ji Tap, which are targeted toward children in kindergarten through eighth grade.

He hopes that Jewish Children’s Stories will also be an effective tool to reach families who are not involved in programs of formal education or affiliated with a Jewish educational or religious institution.

“This is particularly important to me,” said Olitzky, former longtime executive director of Big Tent Judaism, where he spent his time primarily working with individuals and families not engaged by or affiliated with an organized Jewish

community. “These stories have the potential to reach beyond the school, into the home and heart of the child.”

Olitzky, a pioneer in Jewish education, is the author of more than 75 books and hundreds of articles in a variety of fields. Among his most recent publications are his first children’s book, “Where’s the Potty on this Ark?” (Kar-Ben 2018), and “Welcome to the Seder: A Passover Haggadah for Everyone” (Behrman House 2018). He holds a doctorate in the history of Jewish education from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and served both as pulpit rabbi and director of religious education at Congregation Beth Israel in West Hartford, Conn., before leading the School of Education at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City. He has been named one of the leading 50 rabbis in the U.S. by Newsweek.

The Ji Tap platform is part of Jewish Interactive, a worldwide educational nonprofit enterprise that uses technology to create Jewish educational material for children.

Olitzky’s stories can be accessed for free at [bit.ly/2Nglzd4](https://bit.ly/2Nglzd4).

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