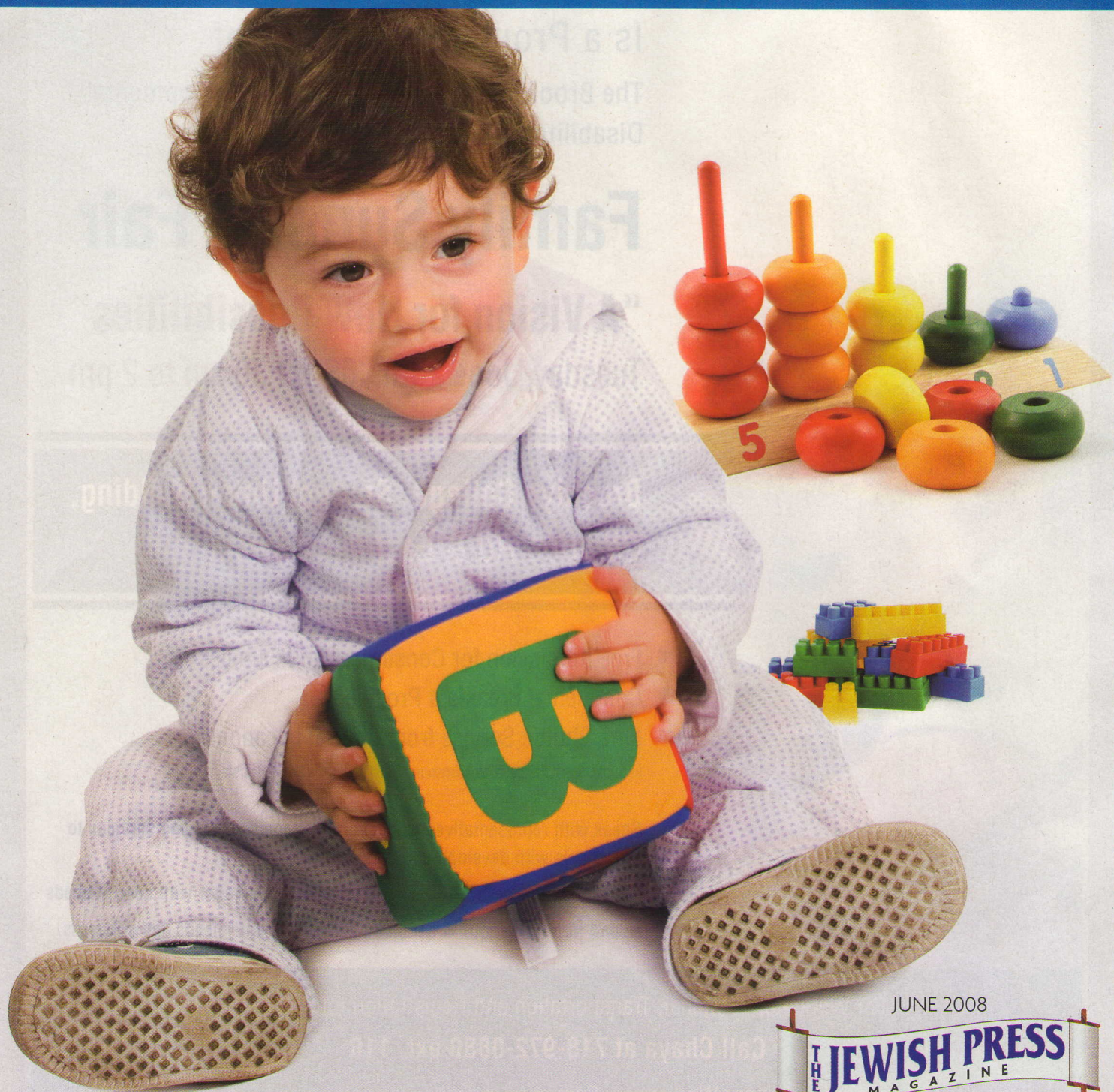


# BUILDING BLOCKS

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## Helping Autistic Children Find The Ninja Within

**JOHN JERALD**

When the Ordovery family of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn learned their son Arren was autistic, they were stunned, shocked and pretty much bowled over. Then they picked themselves up, dusted themselves off, and started on the long, hard road to providing their son with everything he needed to work his way through his disability.

They provided the usual things -- found him a school, set up a home ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) program, got him the supplemental services he so clearly needed -- but there still seemed to be something missing.

"Autism is not just a 'mind' problem," John Ordovery, a Freelance web marketer, said, "it's a 'mind-body' problem." Ordovery thought through the situation and settled on finding his son a martial arts program, something that would work his mind and body together and help knit them into a functional whole. He was surprised to find that no such program existed.

"So I went to Craigslist.com," Ordovery explained, "and posted an ad looking for a martial arts teacher who would be able to work with an autistic child." Enter Lisa Chin, a black-belt in TaeKwonDo who was also a Permanently Certified Special Education Teacher working for the New York Public Schools. Lisa was exactly what the Ordovery's were looking for, and she began working with Arren that very week.

When they started, it was obvious to Lisa that Arren had significant issues when it came to following directions, paying attention and controlling his body. "But," Lisa said, "he, like all the other autistic children I've worked with since, was enthusiastic from the beginning, and worked really hard."

Arren's abilities improved slowly at first, then, as they built on themselves, he progressed faster and faster. Seeing how well Arren responded to her unique approach, Lisa, with the Ordovery's enthusiastic support, decided to open FirefliesNY, a studio where Lisa, along with several volunteers from a local middle

**Martial arts allow children on the autism spectrum to feel at home in their own bodies and control their moods.**

school, offers TaeKwonDo training to kids diagnosed within the autistic spectrum.

### Overcoming initial skepticism

Autistic children are known for sometimes being unable to control their frustration or keep themselves from striking out at others, so there was, at first, some skepticism about a program that taught autistic kids how to hit and kick. Lisa answered by pointing out that martial arts is about controlling the body and calming the mind, allowing children on the autism spectrum to feel at home in their own bodies and control their moods. She then went on to prove it.

Lisa believes that "the study of martial arts can help an autistic child build strong bridges between mind and body, between the child's inside self and the world outside. TaeKwonDo can bring a sense of calmness and peace, both physically and spiritually, that increases focus, reduces stress, reduces anxiety and aggression, prevents or minimizes "meltdowns" and helps the autistic child progress more smoothly along their often rocky path."

Lisa keeps the class size to four or less, depending on her assessment of the particular children. In addition to encouraging physical improvement and mental calmness, the Tai Kwon Do studio is a safe place in which a child with socialization difficulties can practice interacting with peers in the group and the instructors.

Arren Ordovery is certainly an example of the kind of progress TaiKwonDo makes possible for children on the autistic spectrum. "He never kicks anything except his punching bag," his mother, Carol, says laughing, "He's improving so quickly it's a joy to see, and the TaiKwonDo program is a vital part of that."



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