

From The Rabbi



Two years ago, the first night of Chanukah coincided with the celebration of Thanksgiving. This was a great opportunity to merge the celebration of an American holiday together with the celebration of a Jewish holiday. Among the many blessings for which we give thanks on Thanksgiving, is the blessing of the religious freedom of our country that enables us to embrace our Jewish identity and engage in the observance of Jewish traditions. Bringing the celebration of Chanukah, on which we rejoice in the victory of the Maccabees who won the battle for religious freedom, together with the celebration of Thanksgiving was natural. Thanksgivukkah is a new word for which there is an entry in Wikipedia for this unique occurrence of Chanukah and Thanksgiving being observed simultaneously on the same day.

This year, the first night of Chanukah and Christmas Eve coincide. This calendrical phenomena cannot give rise to the joining together of these two holidays into one hybrid holiday that would be called Christmukkah. This is because the only thing that Christmas and Chanukah share is the time of year in which they are celebrated.

Christmas, for Christians, is a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ who is believed to be the son of G-d who G-d sent, out of love for his people, to be the savior of humanity. According to the Christian faith, the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the savior will bring peace and harmony to our world. This is great reason for a great holiday with joyous celebrations and prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

Chanukah for Jews is a celebration of the miraculous victory of the Maccabees who engaged in a war against the Syrian Greeks for religious and political freedom. This was a victory of the few against the many; and the weak against the mighty. Chanukah is a celebration of the ability to stand up for that in which you believe and to have the courage to fight for it. Chanukah is a celebration of the desire and resolve that it took to rededicate the Temple that had been defiled and to rekindle the spirit of Jewish life that had nearly been eliminated. These are great reasons for a great holiday of with joyous celebrations and prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

Holidays are special days that punctuate our year and help us to remember formative events of our past so that they can continue to have an impact on our lives and be an ongoing force in the shaping of our identity. Chanukah and Christmas are two great holidays. However, they are completely different and it is inappropriate to merge the celebrations of these holidays into one hybrid celebration. Jewish ornaments on Christmas trees, hanging Jewish Stockings up for Chanukah or writing Chanukah songs to the tune of Christmas carols are practices that strip two great holidays of their meaning and I believe should be avoided.

I prefer when Chanukah and Christmas are separated by several weeks on the calendar. This enables each holiday to stand on its own. This year with the holidays coinciding with each other, it is our challenge to insure that our celebration of Chanukah stands on its own and enables its message and meaning to shape our lives.

This year, we have planned the following three special events for Chanukah: A Sunday morning of study to explore the major significance of this “minor” holiday, A Shabbat afternoon experience concluding with the lighting of the first candle and a celebration of the 5th night of Chanukah with clients of the Samuel Field Y with developmental disabilities. In the spirit of Chanukah on which we celebrate the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem to the service of God and to the center of Jewish life in Jerusalem, I encourage you to turn to page 8 to learn how you can contribute to the rebuilding and rededication of Moriah, a Masorti synagogue and community center in Haifa that has been devastated by one of the fires that have been raging throughout northern Israel.

May this year’s celebration of Chanukah for you and your family strengthen your Jewish identity and your resolve to stand up for that in which you believe.

“Don’t let the light go out,
it has lasted for so many years!”

Rabbi Gordon Yaffe