

## RABBI'S MESSAGE

### The Evolution of Celebration

There has been a lot of excitement and curiosity about how the first day of Hanukkah coincides with Thanksgiving this year. According to many calculations this is the first time it has occurred since President Lincoln established Thanksgiving as a national holiday, and the next time it is scheduled to happen is over 70,000 years from now. Talk about a once in a lifetime experience!

It is just as curious to explore how these celebrations may relate to each other, especially given that neither of them resembles what might be considered the original intent.

While Thanksgiving became a legal, American holiday in 1863, schoolchildren are taught the folklore that the first Thanksgiving happened in the 1600's as a peaceful celebration between Pilgrims and Indians. The Pilgrims were Europeans who had come to this country seeking religious freedom. The Indians, of course, were native to the America. Two divergent cultures sitting down to share a meal; this is our vision of early America. Some historical accounts of the "first Thanksgiving" in the 1600's relate it as a three-day political gathering to discuss issues of land and property. For over 200 years, Thanksgiving took on many forms. President Lincoln declared Thanksgiving an annual holiday when the country in the midst of a devastating Civil War. Perhaps he was emphasizing the importance of gratitude *despite* the struggles we have, rather than reveling in our abundance. Today, Thanksgiving is about family. More Americans travel on the day before Thanksgiving than any other day of the year. Family, food and football are central to the day for many. The name "Thanksgiving" inspires us, at least between commercials, to recall our thankfulness for having enough food to eat and loved ones with whom to share.

The historical Hanukkah is a military victory featuring the "Maccabees;" a small band of ultra-religious Jews who wanted to insure the future of Judaism despite the fact that many Jewish people were attracted to Greek culture. The joyous eight-day holiday was not a religious observance or "*yontiff*," and originally called "Sukkot in Kislev" in an attempt to make it as important in the community's eyes as our favorite harvest festival. Today, largely because it occurs in the season of major holidays in other religions, Hanukkah has become a more central celebration in many households. The miracle of the oil was not mentioned in the original story, but showed up hundreds of years later in the Talmud. Even so, that is the miracle we celebrate. We light candles in the dark winter and enjoy the light of GD's presence. We recall a story whose details have evolved over time to include – like our American Pilgrim ancestors – thankfulness for religious freedom. We exchange gifts like our neighbors, appreciative that we have loved ones with whom to share.

Time may tweak the details of the stories as well as the purpose of the celebrations. On both Thanksgiving *and* Hanukkah we strive to show family and friends how much we care. We acknowledge GD's role in our lives, and express our gratitude for the Holy One helping us be together with loved ones to share the most precious and intangible gifts of love. And we can be thankful for this teachable moment that brings our American and Jewish traditions together to help us remember the important values of our most sacred celebrations. Happy Holidays!

L'shalom,

*Dan Gordon*

To see previous monthly messages from Rabbi Dan Gordon, visit

<http://temple-beth-torah.org/our-rabbi/rabbis-monthly-message-archives/>

**AND NOW: FOR A NEW WAY TO CELEBRATE...**

Since many families will be away during the officially scheduled Thanksgiving and Hanukkah time, come join Temple Beth Torah in a special celebration for **THE TENTH NIGHT OF HANUKKAH** – Friday, December 6. Special music and food and the kind of celebration only TBT knows how to do! Don't miss our special musical guest, Josh Levine! More info on page \_\_\_ of this newsletter.