

## RABBI'S MESSAGE

### *A Mixed Bag for the Holidays*

There are various times throughout the year that we refer to as “the holidays.” Whether we are talking about Rosh Hashana/Yom Kippur in the fall, Passover in the spring or Thanksgiving/Hanukkah/Christmas/New Year’s in winter, it is quite common to greet people at these times with the question, “So? What are you doing for the holidays?” Before Thanksgiving 2024, it was estimated that over 80 million people in the U.S. were planning to travel somewhere. That is a lot of people who are leaving their homes to go to someone else’s home, probably connecting important relationships with family or friends. Others are staying home, either receiving guests or celebrating with their nuclear families.

Of course, this is a time of joy and togetherness; but for some, it can be a time of tension and stress. There have been many hot issues in the world lately, between the U.S. elections, the war situations in Israel, general economic difficulties, deep seeded family circumstances and a host of things that might make getting together demanding or even traumatic. Some who are gathering might be wishing for solitude.

And what about those who are not traveling, not hosting, and do not have close friends or relatives nearby with whom they can celebrate? For some, the holidays might be a time of loneliness, especially when observing the emphasis on togetherness. The Jewish world is built around the family – a mother, father, children and perhaps grandchildren and grandparents. In today’s world it is important to note that a “traditional” family might be the exception rather than the rule. When individuals and families experience divorce, death, geographical distance, estrangement and illness, it can be hard to feel celebratory. For some, watching the whole world seeming to be rejoicing can feel like a slap in the face, pushing people to feel like excluded outsiders. I also think about those in Israel who have lost a loved one in the current war, or who are awaiting the fate of hostages who are still in captivity for over 14 months.

I don’t say this to put a damper on the holidays, merely to be sensitive to the wide variety of differences with whom we share the world. Those who are able to celebrate should do so with gusto! We never know when our situation might change. And when there is an opportunity to include others who may feel like outsiders, don’t miss this mitzvah! “Hillel said: *Do not separate yourself from the community; and do not trust in yourself until the day of your death. Do not judge your fellow until you are in his place. Do not say something that cannot be understood but will be understood in the end. Say not: When I have time I will study because you may never have the time.*” (Pirke Avot, 2:5)

Hanukkah, specifically, is a holiday that is meant to be shared with others, including people who are not Jewish. We are supposed to proudly display the Hanukkah lights, to share with the world a beautiful light. As the prophet Isaiah said, “*I the LORD have called you into righteousness. I have taken hold of your hand, and kept you, and set you for a covenant of the*

*people, for a light of the nations.”* (Isaiah, 42:6) As Christians are the overwhelming majority in America, this year can be a particularly special Hanukkah, as it begins December 25. We can share the spirit of light, showing and sharing with each other the opportunity to use that light to see another’s point of view. This holiday season, let’s be mindful to seize the chances we have to celebrate with those closest to us, and try to include others who may be in need of closeness.

L’shalom,

***Rabbi Dan Gordon***