



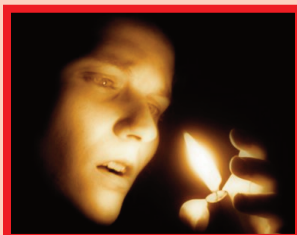
Being

Jewish

CHANUKAH 2009

Relevant Judaism for Modern Life

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in Our Windows

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HAPPY CHANUKAH

From your friends at

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Jewish ideas, resources, and
online content since 1997.

The Brightest Lights

Being Jewish

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By Michael Hanna-Fein
Editor

Chanukah is my favorite time of year. The flickering lights on the menorah, the spinning of dreidels, the wonderful aroma of frying latkes, Chanukah gelt and the presents, all bring back warm feelings from my youth. Chanukah is a holiday that brings out the child in all of us.

We celebrate this most festive event because true miracles occurred around the 25th day of Kislev. The brave Maccabees, under the leadership of Yehuda HaMakabi ("Judah the Hammer"), won the battles against the forces of Antiochus IV, who had destroyed the temple and outlawed Judaism in the land. This victory was indeed a miracle since the army of Antiochus was so much more powerful, and well armed, compared to the almost rag-tag Maccabees. But the one power Antiochus did not foresee was the motivation, heart, and deep belief in their God, that brought the Maccabees this most unexpected victory.

When the battles were over, the Temple was cleansed, and a new altar was constructed, along with the menorah containing the eternal flame; a flame that must never be doused. The flame required oil with which to burn, and as most of us know, another great miracle occurred. It was discovered that there was only enough oil on hand to burn for one day, but showing great faith, the lamp was lit anyway. Against all odds, the lamp burned glowingly and proudly for eight full days and nights before an adequate supply of oil could be found to perpetuate the flame. Hence, we light our Chanukah menorahs, one candle on each night of Chanukah, for eight nights, to commemorate this great miracle.

I grew up in a mostly Jewish and Italian neighbourhood. Every December,



we kids would argue about who had the best holiday. The Christians had the smug condescending attitude, backed-up by millions of dollars of Madison Avenue advertising, that Christmas was, by far, the best. Of course, us Jews stuck-up for Chanukah.

Every evening the sun would go down a little earlier, as our battle raged on the suburban streets. A sinking feeling crept into our little Jewish hearts as one by one the houses lit up with festoons of glittering Christmas lights and lighted crèches in some of the front yards. Door after door, started to display holiday wreaths, and living room windows would be ablaze with dazzling Christmas trees bedecked with twinkling lights, stars, angels and dangling garlands.

We felt like the Maccabees trying to stare down an overwhelming army of Antiochus as every night we added only one additional light to our meagre menorahs.

We brought these concerns to our Hebrew school teacher one afternoon and he listened very carefully to our complaints. After pondering for a moment, he announced:

"Don't worry, we will straighten this out!"

A few days later, a special assembly was held at our Hebrew school. The rabbi and a priest along with about a hundred kids from the local Catholic congregation were all assembled in our grand hall. Both clergymen made brief opening statements where they promised to address all our Chanukah and Christmas concerns. Naturally, we were all very excited because we had home ice advantage, and our wise rabbi would surly vindicate our beliefs, and vanquish our opponents. What a surprise was in store for us.

The Jewish and the Christian kids lined up on separate sides of the room, and started firing our questions at the two rugged clerics. Both took their time in answering us as completely and comprehensively as they could. As the evening wore on, a theme began to emerge from this discussion. In essence, these were the conclusions both learned religious men left with us.

Both Chanukah and Christmas, although celebrating very different events, had striking similarities. Chanukah celebrates the re-dedication of the temple, and Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus, who is the Christian Messiah. Both are punctuated by illumination with the miracle of the oil, and the intensity of the Star of Bethlehem. Both of these holidays are showered with special light.

Even if the Christmas trees and the homes of our Christian friends might seem brighter, and more colorful, than the Jewish homes displaying a Chanukah menorah, it must be remembered that it was the teachings and learning that occurred, both before, and after, the rededication of the temple that eventually enabled Christianity, as well as other religions, to flourish.

The simple eight candles, plus the Shamus used to light them, are a symbol of the great miracle of God, who commands that the light of the temple must be rededicated every year by all Jewish people. These multiple acts of rededication amplify the brightness of the original miracle, and reflects our faith, by shining a special light all over the world.

Let us enjoy all the festivities of Chanukah with our hearts full of light and joy. Look at your gorgeous menorahs burning brightly as they have through millennia, knowing the miracle it represents, and how its light has helped guide the world to their ultimate faith based beliefs. The next time you greet your Christian friends during the holiday season, remember to wish them a merry Christmas, and remind them that this season of lights enables us all to envision ideas for a better future. Then, invite them into your homes for a game of dreidel and some delicious homemade latkes.

Happy Chanukah to all of you,
Michael

Michael is the Editor of GantsehMegillah.com and Being Jewish magazine. He can be reached at beingjewishmagazine@gmail.com.

note to our readers

We want you to love Being Jewish! We hope you will look forward to each issue, no matter your age, from teen to senior, because you find it relevant, user-friendly, enjoyable, and filled with valuable information, and inspiration about the Jewish way of life.

Each article is carefully selected, and edited so that every concept is easily understood, even by those of us who left the synagogue as teenagers, and did not return for 20 years or more.

Our goal for Being Jewish is to help you find meaning, and relevance in the Jewish way of life. In every issue we will try to show you ways to access the three components of Judaism: Ethics, Spirituality, and Peoplehood (ESP).

The articles we publish are designed to help you look at your modern life, and our ancient traditions, and answer one, or all three, of these questions:



E How can I be a more Ethical person?

S How can I have a richer Jewish Spiritual life?

P How can I enhance my sense of belonging to the Jewish People?

Being Jewish (the magazine, and the Jewish way of life) is organized by the ESP circles, though as you can see by the diagram, and also by reading the articles, there is much potential for overlap.

For example, under Ethics, you will find sections like Working, and Being Jewish, Learning, and Being Jewish, Giving, and Being Jewish, and so on. But at the same time, you could easily find a Spiritual, or Peoplehood, dimension in each of these sections. We can also relate the Ethics, and Peoplehood circles more directly by realizing that Jewish values are the building blocks of Jewish peoplehood.

We hope we can show you ways to access each of the ESP circles, and where they overlap, so that in your modern life, you can more fully enjoy the wisdom, and beauty, of Being Jewish!



Chanukah Bushes and Baseball Caps

by Gil Mann



Dear Readers:

Below are two very different questions that readers emailed to me. At first blush, they have nothing to do with each other...but stay tuned...

Shalom Gil

We are Jewish and LOVE our Chanukah bush. It is white and tall and crowned with a star of David. On it you will find blue and silver Chanukah ornaments that are beautiful. The kids truly look forward to this. As a young girl I always felt Chanukah was bland and simple compared to CHRISTMAS. I feel it brings Chanukah to a brighter light, if you will. HAPPY and HEALTHY CHANUKAH!

Warmest Regards,
A Jewish Family

Dear Jewish Family:

Many times I have written in the past of my discomfort with having a Christmas Tree in a Jewish home, but what of a Chanukah Bush?

My immediate reaction is that I would not want one in my house, as a Chanukah Bush to me, feels like a poorly disguised Christmas Tree.

On the other hand, I feel less resolute as I read your letter of how your Chanukah Bush adds light and joy in your celebrating Chanukah. Unlike you however, I never felt Chanukah was bland or simple compared to Christmas. In our eight days of celebrating, I always felt we were luckier than our Christian neighbors.

Still, I can not deny the all pervasive Christmas atmosphere that hits us starting even before Thanksgiving. This can be overwhelming, especially for Jewish children who may feel left out.

Is a Chanukah Bush an answer? There are two conflicting parts of Jewish history that impact my thinking

about this question. First, Chanukah is a holiday that celebrates the Jewish people's victory in their fight to remain a distinct and proud minority. Second, for thousands of years, Judaism has successfully integrated customs and practices from our non-Jewish neighbors. A striking example is the long black coats worn by ultra-Orthodox Jews. Many people do not realize that this garb was a copy of the clothing worn by Polish nobility in the 18th century! (Naturally, like everything in Judaism...some dispute this.)

In sum, a Chanukah Bush is not for me, but I can understand and even appreciate your point of view.

Happy Chanukah!
Gil

Hello Gil:

I have a question for you. I am a call center manager and have recently come across a person who refuses to take off his bunny ears baseball hat because he says he is Jewish and we cannot make him take off his "head covering."

Is a baseball cap considered a proper head covering? Do you know of other Jewish people wearing the same thing?

Thank You,
T

Hi T!

Some observant Jews always cover their heads as a sign of respect for God. The traditional covering is a yarmulke or kippah (similar to the head covering the Pope usually wears.) In public, some of these Jews prefer to cover their heads with something less conspicuous like a hat or a baseball cap.

I don't know what kind of bunny hat that you are referring to, but if his choice of hats is a problem, you

could ask him to wear a cap that is not provocative and he would still be honoring Jewish custom.

Also, I am not sure exactly what a call center manager does or what type of company or organization you work for. If there is some kind of company policy about head covering (like something related to food preparation,) I am sure some kind of agreement could be reached with this fellow that would not compromise his beliefs. If necessary, a local rabbi could likely be of help.

Thanks for writing!
Gil

Dear Readers;

What in the world is the connection between these two letters?

To me, the connection is that these two letters show the challenge of living as a Jewish minority in a culture that is predominantly Christian. How can Jews fit into society yet remain distinct and different?

This is a tension that Jews have felt for thousands of years living in the Diaspora. Often we do not think much of this tension, because as a minority, this is "just the way it is."

I have accompanied a lot of "first timers" to Israel who were Jewish. One of the main reactions is the indescribable feeling of being in the majority. Examples abound endlessly in Israel: Seeing a street sweeper who might be wearing a kippah or on Friday afternoon, hearing secular Jews saying to each other "Shabbat Shalom" as opposed to "have a nice weekend," etc.

So, here we are, at Christmas time: the Jewish season of feeling different. I have written many times over the years about this. You can read more at www.beingjewish.org. Search on the word Christmas.

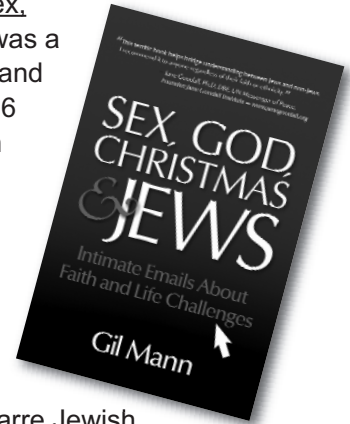
To read my conclusions, in general, of what I think Jews face as we try to fit in yet remain distinct, go to: www.tinyurl.com/y94z53c

As always, I welcome your questions and comments. Please write to me at: gilmann@beingjewish.org

Happy Chanukah!

Gil Mann's latest book: Sex, God, Christmas & Jews, was a finalist in the Jewish Life, and Living category of the 2006 Koret International Jewish Book Awards.

The book features 18 of Gil's popular columns, in which he responds to readers' most perplexing emails, including: I am Very Angry with God!; Bizarre Jewish Sex; Body Piercing, Tattoos and More; I Will Not Circumcise My Son!; and Will Jews Burn in Hell? All names have been removed from the emails, of course!



The book (including shipping) is available at a discount to Being Jewish readers for just \$13. To order the book, call 800-304-9925 or go to www.BeingJewish.org.

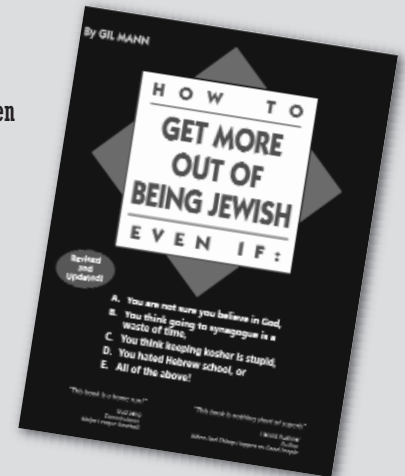


FREE for Internet Users!!!

If you like Being Jewish, formerly published by Gil Mann, then you will love Gil's book:

Now you can download Gil's entire book for free! Just go to www.beingjewish.org/freebook.

If you'd like to order a printed copy (\$10 + \$3 shipping) email leopublish@aol.com or call 800-304-9925.



Gil's Jewish Email columns began on his popular America Online feature called "Judaism Today: Where Do I Fit?" You can read more of his columns at www.beingjewish.org. Gil welcomes any additional questions, or comments, about this topic, or any other Jewish issue. Email him at GilMann@beingjewish.org.

Chanukah Burns Bright

by Mel Yahre

Chag Samayakh. I love this time of year. Chanukah brings back such fond memories for me. I marvel at how the celebration has changed since I was a child.

In my youth we lived in Brooklyn, New York, in a four story walk up. I always enjoyed celebrating Chanukah; lighting the candles, eating latkes, playing dreidel, and singing the Chanukah songs. My parents gave us hazel nuts, which we used instead of money, for betting in the driedel game. It was always fun cracking them open and eating that wonderful round little nut as well.

My aunts and uncles would visit and bring us Chanukah candy *gelt*; kosher chocolates, which came from Baricini or Barton's. I would also get one toy from my parents. I always enjoyed listening to my Dad tell the story of Chanukah. He'd get excited telling how a small remnant of righteous, Torah observant men, with inspiration and love for God, defeated the Syrian Greeks and restored the Temple and Israel to a Torah observant nation. His eyes would light up as he told of the miracle of the oil. Little did I know then that he was handing the tradition down to his sons; my older brother, and me.

When I try to remember those days in greater detail, one incident in particular stands out. My brother Herb once asked for a train as a gift. Our parents, being European immigrants, took him on a subway ride. I remember him crying; they didn't know what he really wanted. They never saw a child's miniature train set. He's 72-years-old now and I think I'll see that he gets the train set this year!

Living in a Jewish neighborhood meant that the majority of the households would have a menorah shining in the window. How exciting to see them all glowing brightly and regally, especially on the last day of Chanukah when all the candles and bulbs were lit. As I looked up I'd see one or two homes twinkling with Christmas lights. I knew they practiced a different religion, but it was never spoken of in our home.

When I turned ten, we moved to Flushing, Queens, New York, and the kids in the neighborhood weren't named Moshe, Yankel, or Vel-



lville, but more like Mike, Joey or Jimmy. These children weren't Jewish, but they were great friends and we all played the same games, and laughed and cried together. Occasionally someone would call me "Jewboy" but it was usually an adult; the kids didn't seem to care, and the remark would be quickly forgotten.

When Chanukah came around again my Dad was still as joyful as he had ever been. He'd tell the same story and he'd place the menorah in the window. When I stood outside our home I noticed there were many more Christmas lights than menorahs. Until then, I thought the whole world was Jewish. What an awakening! This was to change my life forever; I had just joined the real world in America.

Some of the non-Jewish kids were surprised to see a menorah because they began asking me why we were lighting candles, and why we didn't celebrate Christmas. I shared the story of Chanukah with them and how we celebrated for eight days. They started telling me about Christmas and about the presents they'd receive. When I told my parents about all the presents the gentile children get, my Mom said:

"Sweetheart, don't worry, I promise you'll have a present for every night of Chanukah".

Evidently this went on in many Jewish households, as Jewish parents wanted their children to feel just as privileged as their non-Jewish friends. Eight presents seems to have replaced the one simple gift

on the festive holiday.

Years later, married and with children, and living on Long Island, my wife and I passed on the traditions. Celebrations were much different than when I was a child, and the houses around us were lit up like the fourth of July. Our sons learned the story well, and knew what to expect at Chanukah. We had two menorahs in the house, one held wax candles, and the other held light bulbs that we'd place in the window. We played dreidel, and real money replaced the hazel nuts. The gifts would be wrapped in blue and silver paper, and piled high in the living room, and each day the children would choose one gift.

Today Chanukah is more festive because our family has grown. Unlike the celebrations when I was a child, we also celebrate in the synagogue. We have a potluck luncheon with dreidels for the children, and a large table where all the families light the Hanukkias they've brought from home. It's a very powerful moment as we all chant the blessings, and see smiling faces as everything glows. It reminds us too, that we are to be a light for all nations. The rabbi hands out chocolate Chanukah gelt to the children and pronounces many blessings over them.

Much has been added to the way we celebrate the holiday. Menorahs come in different shapes and sizes. We used to make our own cards but today they are purchased at Hallmark, Wal-Mart or online. Retail stores sell Chanukah, as well as Christmas decorations. I hear children talking about Chanukah Harry, or Latke Larry bringing them gifts.

Yes, the holiday celebration is different than when I was a child, but I think I miss the hazel nuts we used when we played dreidel.

Have a Happy Chanukah!!! I wish you all the joy, and the peace of this season.

Mel Yahre lives with his wife and love of his life, Arlene, and their two pups, in Jacksonville, Florida. Mel's love of family and friends is matched only by his generosity towards others. He can be contacted at mel@pass.to

THIS & THAT

What's the difference between Christmas and Chanukah?

Christmas is one day, same day every year, December 25. Chanukah is 8 days and Jews never know when it starts until a non-Jewish friend asks us, forcing us to consult a calendar from the World Jewish Congress, or the kosher butcher, so we don't look like idiots.

Christians get wonderful presents such as jewelry, perfume, and stereos....Jews get practical presents such as underwear, and socks.

Christmas brings enormous electric bills. Candles are used for Chanukah, so we are spared enormous electric bills, and we get to feel good about not contributing to global warming.

Christian women have fun baking Christmas cookies. Jewish women irritate their eyes, and cut their hands, grating potatoes, and onions, for latkas on Chanukah. Another reminder of our suffering through the ages.

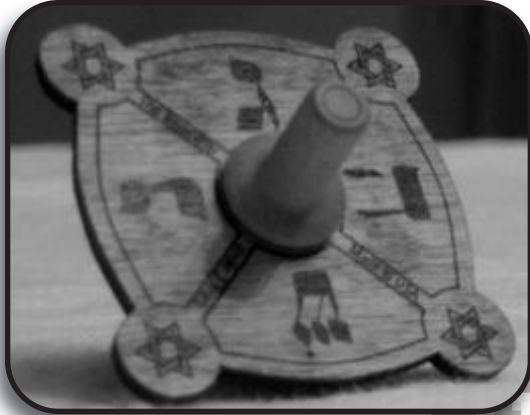
A home preparing for Christmas smells wonderful. The sweet smell of cookies, and cakes baking. Happy people are gathered around in festive moods. A home preparing for Chanukah smells of oil, potatoes, and onions, and is always full of loud people all talking at once.

The players in the Christmas story have easy to pronounce names such as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. The players in the Chanukah story are Antiochus, Judah Maccabee, and Matta whatever. No one can spell it, or pronounce it. On the plus side, we can tell our friends anything, and they believe we are wonderfully versed in our history.

Dreidel Attraction

By Susan Smolenski

"Dreidel, dreidel, dreidel, I made it out of clay" or glass, metal, wood or plastic Having started a tradition years ago for my daughter Laura, I have now learned what a variety of dreidels there are.



When my daughter was a little girl, she first collected Care Bears, then Barbie dolls. Having outgrown those, she then started with spoons, but became bored. I pondered how nice it would be for her to have a collection of some sort (like my own mother had collected salt and pepper shakers which have now been passed down two generations).



HOW TO PLAY

Put a coin in the pot and take turns spinning the dreidel



NUN

The player does nothing

There have been the tiny plastic dreidels that are very easy to spin; heavy pewter dreidels that are for show; wood dreidels that are intricately painted; a special Murano glass dreidel that was bought in Venice, Italy; a somewhat modern art dreidel that was bought in South Carolina. One dreidel came with a little art lesson, explaining the artist and his inspirations.

This tradition continues, even now as Laura is married with a new house of her own, which will soon have these dreidels on display.

This tradition continues, even now as Laura is married with a new house of her own, which will soon have these dreidels on display.

Susan Smolenski has elevated multi-tasking to an art form. She works full time for a media firm in Manhattan, and resides in Queens, New York, with her husband Tony. Susan and Tony are the very proud parents of three adult children. Contact Susan at susan.smolenski@gmail.com



GIMMEL

The player wins everything in the pot

ג

ה

HEY

The player takes half the pot



SHIN

The player puts a coin in the pot

ש

The game is over when one player has won all the coins

NES GADOL HAYA SHAM

A Great Miracle Occured There

A dreidle in Israel has a peh in the place of a shin changing the meaning from "there" to "here"

פשהגן or



3 Africans

By Kenneth Ngwa

In the central market, an old man called to me.

"Cameroon, Cameroon," he shouted over and over.

Puzzled, I wondered how he knew where I was from. His grey eyebrows were raised with excitement. He held out his hand and handed me a newspaper.

Square underneath the Jerusalem Post logo read the headline:

AFRICA NATIONS CUP FINAL
Cameroon Versus Egypt

I continued on my way still unsure of why he called me Cameroon. I passed the Tel Aviv Merkaz Station in the so-called bad part of town. A group of Africans assembled on a grassy knoll. A large metal gate enclosed the area. The smell of curry lingered. Children with dull clothes and bright faces played basketball.

One was oriental, the other was black (the new faces of Israel). A hidden neighborhood lay behind dilapidated buildings. The streets were so close together that cars could not come down the road. Nigeria, Congo, and even the Philippines flags hung above head. Drifters and card sharks set up makeshift gambling tables in between stores. An old woman sat on the bare ground. She was selling four pairs of (what I presumed to be her own) shoes.

In the decay of this minimal road, I had stumbled onto ground- zero of the refugees and illegal immigrants in Tel Aviv. This was their downtown; their meeting area.

The street was blocked off. A mass of bodies stood hovering. Eerily, they were all quiet. I couldn't see what they were focused on but I was determined to get by. Excusing myself, I maneuvered past a mass of black faces. When I neared the center, something finally became visible. An old, rickety television stood on top of a dirt-brown table. The TV itself was plain, but the picture it broadcast had our eyes glued.

The Indomitable Lions Football Club of Cameroon faced off against the Country of Egypt.

Unable to look away, I joined in the trance. I was in the epicenter of the choir.

Their cheers bounced on my shoulders sending pride racing across my soul. The green of its jungles, the yellow of its golden plains, the red of its honored people.

I finally understood what that old man had tried to explain to me hours earlier. On that day, amidst the gentle flicker of a small screen, we were all countrymen.

I had never felt such a swell of pride. I wished I had a banner I could throw in the sky and announce to the world where I was from. The more intense the game became, the livelier the crowd behaved.

I could have gone to a trendy tourist bar. I could have watched the game in comfort at a friend's house. At that moment, there was nowhere else in the city I would rather have been. Their solidarity absorbed me.

A hand brushed my back. Turning around, I saw Amadou's stately mug. The glint from his glasses shone in every direction. Jumping up and down, he was thrilled.

We were watching a game being played thousands of miles away, and you would have thought our lives depended on it. If we spoke, it was about the game. Nothing else mattered.

The next day I arrived at the restaurant to find Patrice standing on the sidewalk. He was accompanied by a Philipino woman. Water leaked from the gutter of the restaurant, partially soaking the path to the entrance. The garbage had not yet been moved, so cats hung about. When I entered the kitchen, I heard one of the cooks shouting.

"Idiot, you should be careful" He said.

I couldn't tell who he was yelling at. Trying not to be discovered, I waited for a good opportunity to peek inside.

When I looked around the corner, It was Amadou. The cook pointed at a small china plate which lay on the floor. Amadou must have broken a plate, I thought. The cook's face turned red. He shook his finger in Amadou's face repeatedly.

"What was running through your head? How stupid you must be to behave so clumsily," the cook hollered.

A knot twisted in my stomach. My nerves shot up; I could feel my blood rushing in anticipation. All the while, Amadou stood frozen.

"When you break plates you steal from me. Clean this up" the cook said, before storming away.

It was just Amadou and me in the room. His eyes were fixed on the floor. He wouldn't look me in the eyes. Feeling pity, I looked away. He needed this job. This was life or death to him. Gradually, I went to work cleaning the mess myself. I didn't do it out of friendship. I did it because I was beginning to understand his predicament.

This was my taste of life as an illegal. I had witnessed something which occurred the world over, time and time again. My education into the treatment of the oppressed was swift. More revelations followed that very work shift. As I was washing a set of ice cream bowls, I dropped one.

The shattered glass spread out into the four corners of the room. The same cook from earlier had heard the commotion and came over.

"What is this?" He asked.

"I am sorry, but I dropped a bowl" I said.
"You have to be more careful," the cook responded. He returned to whatever he was doing, leaving me with the mess.

Restaurant policy was that all kitchen staff were

granted one meal. The standard meal for dishwashing staff was a grilled chicken sandwich and chips. Every dishwasher ate this, every one of them but me. Inexplicably, I was allowed to eat anything I chose off the menu as long as it was reasonably priced.

After seeing Patrice eat the same meal three times in a row, I learned of the favoritism I was shown. I was filled with so much guilt I began to eat my meals alone. I was an American oddity, while they were African refugees. Patrice, Amadou, and I were born into similar circumstances, yet I had something neither of them possessed. I had an American accent.

My ignorance of local customs and the language was looked on as being acceptable. In the same breath, Patrice and Amadou's were viewed as deplorably ignorant. Unable to function within a niche, they carried a heavier burden than I would ever know. In that building, I had worked with great men; men who were not motivated by an idealistic quest, but by necessity. They carried on despite bitter hardships.

Later that week, I came in to work but everyone was missing. The restaurant manager called me into her office.

"Ken, I am sorry but we have to let you go" She said. When I heard the news, I smiled.

Months later, I bumped into a fry cook who mentioned that Amadou was no longer in Israel. He had been deported. He did not know the specifics, but had heard of it secondhand. Patrice's fate, however, was a mystery. It remains a mystery to me still to this day.

This is an excerpt from Kenneth Ngwa's book **Brothers Don't Travel - Tales Of Israel**

The book gives a contemporary view of Israel from an African-American perspective, and it is a story recounted in an absorbing and very sensitive manner. From shadowy refugees, to hash smoking tourist, Ngwa paints a quirky clash of cultures in a country we already know as a dynamic society in a tumultuous region. This is one man's journey through a familiar land which we have never seen quite this way.

Movies, Won Ton Soup and December 25th



By Molly Golubcow



Inevitably, December twenty-fifth will come around. On that day, year after year, all good Jews ask themselves, "So, what should we do today?" The answer may vary slightly, but let's be honest here, there's not much to pick from on December twenty-fifth. The stores are closed, so shopping is out of the question. Can't go to work because that's closed, and not much has been accomplished since Thanksgiving anyway. Watch TV? Well, it would be an option if it weren't for the fact that *White Christmas* is showing on every channel except for the ones that are re-broadcasting *It's a Wonderful Life*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *Rudolph*. Now don't get me wrong, I enjoyed these movies; classics actually. *Rudolph* is my personal favorite! But, after forty plus years, I can probably recite the lines in the films by heart. So, let's review our options - no TV, no shopping, and no work.

What's a Jew to do? Well, in my family December twenty-fifth is our annual movie and Chinese food day. Usually, my nephew Jeremy and I go to an early movie; the earlier the better. Our rationale is that gentiles are either sleeping or still unwrapping hundreds of thousands of gifts that the fat man in the red suit so generously left for them. As a child I always wondered how he knew NOT to drop off gifts at my house. Was there a mark on the door similar to the one on Passover where the angel of death passed over our first born boys and took the Egyptian tots instead? Is this some sort of pay back? You took our kids so now you get no toys! Oh, what a child's mind can conjure up.

Anyway, I digress. So, Jeremy and I have been going to an early movie for the past twelve years. I think it

started out as a Chanukah gift to him and his sister, Jordan. Jeremy would usually take weeks to carefully select the movie because this was an important annual event that could not be taken lightly. The kids are now young adults, but still the process is as deliberate and as research intensive as it was when Jeremy was eight-years-old. There are reviews to read and previews to consider. We've gone from *Hook* and *Men in Tights* to *The Green Mile* and a *Beautiful Mind*. We've seen so many great films (and some mediocre ones), but we always had the December twenty-fifth experience. We have sometimes been the only people in the theater (when we go to a theater located in a primarily gentile neighborhood) and sometimes crowded in line with hundreds of other lost Jews who had the same idea (go figure).

After the movie, whether a drama or a comedy, the day is always followed up by a trip to Hunan Manor in Silver Spring. Our favorite waitress, Winnie, welcomes us with a big smile and a bowl of fantastic steamed vegetable dumplings. She knows us, and knows our culinary needs. Although many of our Christian friends and neighbors are eating turkey and ham and figgie pudding-like meals, Jeremy and I share non-traif and very non-December twenty-fifth dishes such as vegetarian General Tao's Chicken and Hunan Bean Curd. Ironically, the restaurant's decorations are Christmas-like, but the Chinese food and all of the Jewish clientele serve to make this a very pluralistic experience. After we read our fortune cookies, we head home with our bellies full and hearts warmed with yet another successful December twenty-fifth outing.

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Menorah Report

For the entire eight days of Chanukah it is forbidden to fast or to eulogize.

It is permitted to work; however it is customary for women not to work for at least the first half hour of the candles' burning, and some have the custom not to work for the entire time of burning. The types of activities that are forbidden are things like sewing and laundry etc. (Cooking is permitted.)

If the menorah was lit in accordance with the requirements of Jewish law and it was extinguished, one is not obligated to relight it, but one may relight it without reciting a blessing.

It is customary to sing during the meals; songs that thank and praise Hashem. To sing and speak about Torah makes the meal into a seudat mitzvah, a meal of religious significance.

It is customary to eat milk foods because Yehudit, daughter of Yochanan the High Priest, was taken to be defiled by the Greek ruler Holofernes. She fed him cheese (to make him thirsty) and wine (to quench his thirst); and after getting him drunk, she killed him. This was one of the events that sparked the Macabean uprising. Food fried in oil is also eaten to commemorate the miracle of the menorah. Latkes and donuts are the most common foods.

It is obligatory to light candles, and one should even borrow money to fulfill this mitzvah. If a poor person needs money for Chanukah candles the community is obligated to provide for him.

Wax candles are acceptable, providing they have a single wick.

All wicks are acceptable, but it is best to use cotton. The same wicks may be used over and over again.

It is correct to have a menorah of glass or metal if one is lighting with oil, since other substances such as clay become disgusting after one use. If one can afford it, it is correct to buy a beautiful menorah.

Ideally, the menorah should be placed outside the house to the left of the entrance. Since anti-Semitism was so common throughout Jewish history it became

customary among many communities to place the menorah inside the house, near the entrance or on the table. In many families it is the custom to place the menorah in a window facing the public, especially where many people share one entrance (e.g., apartment building).

In Israel it is customary to light outside in a special box that prevents the flames from blowing out.

In most Yeshivot and Seminaries, it is customary for students to place their menorahs in the dining room at windows facing the street or public thoroughfare. (Lighting in the dormitories is usually a fire hazard and should therefore be avoided)

The menorah should have all the candle or wicks on the same level, none higher or lower than the others.

It is customary to have an additional candle (the shamash) with which to light the other candles. The shamash should be placed in a way that shows that it is not one of the Chanukah candles.

It is prohibited to light the shamash from the Chanukah candles.

Left over wicks and oils should be destroyed after Chanukah (except for unused oil left in a bottle) since they may not be used for anything else. One should not store the used wicks and oil for the next year, since there is a probability that it will be used for profane purposes by accident.

There are different customs as to the lighting of the menorah. Some light at sunset. Some light about ten minutes after sunset and some light 1/2 hour after. Some specifically light after the evening service is recited (Maariv). Ideally a person should follow the custom of his father, or the custom of the local community.

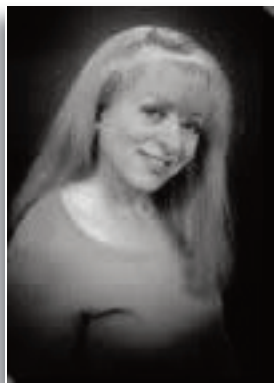
It is obligatory to put in enough oil, or a long enough candle to burn for at least 1/2 hour after nightfall (i.e. the appearance of three medium size stars).

It is best to light in the presence of many people in order to publicize the miracle.



A Fork-Tender Brisket

By Eddy Robey



There are some foods that symbolize the peace and well being associated with the Sabbath and holidays. A festive menu nearly always means Kreplach Soup, Gefilte Fish, and Brisket. These are the tastes of comfort and love. The meat should fall apart with your fork, and there should be plenty

of rich Gravy for the Potatoes.

This is a glad meal, one that will have your guests asking if they can wait just a little bit before dessert.

A good Brisket is not difficult to prepare, but is time consuming, because the Meat must be trimmed of all visible Fat, then browned thoroughly before roasting. Do not stint on the time for these tasks. The best Brisket is made the day before it is to be served, and chilled in the refrigerator. This allows the flavors to blend, and the Fat to be lifted off in a cake before the Gravy is thickened.

Once the Fat has been removed, the Meat can be frozen in its juices until it is needed. Those of you who are planning to entertain should remember that the Kreplach and Gefilte Fish can also be made and frozen ahead of time. If you do these tasks a week or two before your party, you will be able to serve a lovely dinner without being exhausted or feeling that you must resort to ready made foods because the time is short.

Put the Oil in a Dutch Oven and heat over a medium flame. When the Oil is hot, add the brisket.

Brown thoroughly on both sides. This takes 20-30 minutes.

Do not raise the heat in order to speed the process, or the Meat will toughen.

When the Meat is browned, remove the pan from the heat.

Brisket

Preparation Time: 35 minutes

(Meat)

Cooking Time: 180 minutes

1 Brisket (about 5 pounds) trimmed of all visible fat

1 tablespoon Vegetable Oil

1 bottle of good Dry Red Wine

1 pound Pearl Onions

1 pound Mushrooms, sliced

1 packet Dehydrated Onion Soup Mix

2 tablespoons Worcestershire Sauce

4 Bay Leaves

2 teaspoons Marjoram

2 teaspoons Thyme

Cornstarch as needed

Water as needed

Sprinkle the Onion Soup Mix, Marjoram, and Thyme evenly over the top. Then add the Pearl Onions and Mushrooms.

Tuck the Bay Leaves in at the corners.

Add the Worcestershire Sauce and Wine. Please remember that your food is only as good as the Wine you use.

Place in a 325 degree oven for 3 hours, checking occasionally to make sure there is enough liquid.

If it starts to be dry, add some Water. This may also be kept in the oven overnight at 250 degrees, if you add 2 cups of Water. Be sure the pot is as airtight as you can make it.

Remove from the oven and, if possible, chill in the refrigerator until the Fat congeals on top and can be removed in a cake.

Slice the Meat while it is cold, for a neat presentation.

Arrange the Onions and Mushrooms around it on the platter.

Delicious Fudge Brownies

Most of us lead very busy lives.

We do our errands, wash the floors, and generally try to be good people. Usually, we don't think much about rewards. We just buckle down, and try to get the jobs done.

Unfortunately, our culture makes it easy to ignore simple pleasures. There are so many advertisements that put fancy cars and perfumes in front of us. When we think of wanting niceties, they are too often luxury items, far beyond our daily reach.

Because we can't go out and get them, we do without any goodies at all. However, no matter how stoic we seem, there are times when all of us need to be spoiled, just a little bit, by something special.



This Brownie recipe will do that. If you are on a diet and want to limit your intake of sweets, have one luscious piece and share the bounty with your neighbors. Can't you do the same thing by getting one at the bakery?

Fudge Brownies

Preparation Time: 10 minutes

(Pareve)

Cooking Time: About 25 minutes

2 cups Brown Sugar

1 1/4 cups Self-Rising Flour

1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons Cocoa Powder

A pinch of Baking Soda

1 tablespoon instant Coffee Powder

1 cup melted Margarine, lukewarm

3 eggs

1 tablespoon Vanilla extract

No.

There are few things quite so yummy as a rich and fudgy brownie, fresh from the oven. For total hedonism, try topping one with French Vanilla Ice Cream. If someone that you love could use a bit of pampering, invite them over to share the feast. I promise you, that if you spent a million dollars, you could not buy anything more sumptuous than these.

In a large bowl, thoroughly mix the dry ingredients.

In another bowl, whisk together the wet ingredients.

Beat the wet ingredients into the dry ones, until smooth.

Bake at 325 degrees, in a greased and floured 9-inch square baking pan for 25 minutes. Do not overbake; they should be a little soft.

A hint for gift-givers:

Mix the dry ingredients, place in a jar, and seal. Write the rest of the recipe on a self-stick label, and put it on the jar. Tie a ribbon around the top and give someone a smile.

ALTEH GEFERLEKH JEWISH JOKE

A baleboosteh storms into the post office and waves a stack of envelopes at the clerk.

"I need stamps for my Chanukah cards!" she says.

"What denominations?" he asks.

"12 Orthodox, 10 Conservative and 25 Reform."



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