

Dear Friends,

As you all know, tonight is the first night of Chanukah. As we celebrate the miracles of Chanukah, it is important to think about the ways in which the story of the Maccabees is relevant today. The Maccabees fought for the right to express their Judaism and relationship to God in the ways that they found most appropriate. The looming force of the Greek Assyrians did not stop them from carving out a place for Jewish religion and tradition, even as many of their Jewish brothers and sisters were attracted to the Hellenistic lifestyle that engulfed them. Our challenge is no different. Living a rich Jewish life in a culture that is not Jewish presents endless challenges. We can meet these challenges head on and use them to augment our Jewishness, or we can allow them to diminish the importance and role of Judaism in our everyday lives. Remembering that this is a choice is crucial.

This time of year always brings the commercialization of religion into the forefront of our lives: people fight over gifts for their children; people fight for their religious symbols to be represented in the immediate culture; people fight with each other because hey, the holidays are supposed to be fun and we often feel like we can't live up to that bar...so we fight. We have to dig deep into our reserves in order to expend the energy necessary to recapture the essence of the holiday, which is not gift wrapped and tied in a bow. It is however, a gift that we can give our children.

Chanukah is not about demanding that a channukiah or menorah be displayed next to the Christmas tree. It is not a time to advertise our Jewishness to the outside world. We place our Chanukah candles on our windows to remind one another about the miracle of our people's survival and evolutionary relationship with God, not the rest of the world. The menorah need not market to the larger culture that our religion matters too; it needs to remind **us** that Judaism matters. When you see a lone Christmas tree in the airport, your efforts are better spent engaging in personal expressions of Jewishness within your

family and Jewish community than to fight for a channukiah to be displayed next to the tree. If we want the culture in which we live to take our religion seriously, then we have to do so ourselves. Otherwise, the act of forcing a channukiah to accompany the Christmas tree is an empty gesture, reminding folks that we matter, but not on the merit of our commitment to God and humanity, but on the merit of our symbols.

I wish the Pelham Jewish Center family a Chanukah full of light and inspiration. I hope to celebrate with all of you on Sunday at 11:00am at our Chanukah party. By the way, the Talmud teaches that one who eats applesauce with his/ her latkes instead of sour cream will not have a place in the World to Come. So do yourself a favor, eat them the right way this year, with globs of fattening sour cream (and none of that low-fat stuff either!).

Chag Urim Sameach!

Rabbi David A. Schuck

FOR A REMINDER OF HOW TO PUT THE CANDLES INTO THE CHANNUKIAH AND THE BLESSINGS IN HEBREW, ENGLISH, AND TRANSLITERATION, PLEASE [CLICK HERE](#)