

Dear haverim,

The season of Christmas music has nearly run its course. The beautiful lights that identify every non-Jewish household for our children will be removed in a few short days. The long lines at the mall will shorten. Traffic patterns will return to normal patterns.

As we light the seventh candle this evening our non-Jewish neighbors realize there are only two shopping days left to complete their assignments. Every retailer recognizes the importance of these last few days. As Jews, this challenging period of time has beset some of us with overwhelming challenges.

We often refer to this time as the December Dilemma. Wherever we go we are reminded we are different. Our children become uncomfortable. Parents are unsure of themselves. We feel saturated with a non-Jewish view of the world that permeates every aspect of our lives.

I like to remind ourselves that this December Dilemma should serve as our yearly spiritual wake-up call. If our children find the beauty of Christmas music too appealing, and the allure of Christmas lights too alluring perhaps that is because they do not feel the joy and wonder of Shabbat and holidays throughout the year in their own home. If our children don't experience the beauty of our Jewish tradition then, of course they will feel excluded when they observe their friends and peers enjoying other religious traditions.

In many ways this is the hidden message associated with the story of Hanukkah. We like to focus our attention on the victory of the Maccabees over the Greeks- the victory of the few over the many, the victory that led to the re-sanctification of the Temple in Jerusalem.

In fact, the parallel struggle within the Jewish community at the time of the Maccabees was one for Jewish identity. The assimilated Jewish Priesthood became too comfortable adopting Greek patterns of culture. The Maccabees were the anti-assimilationists. They favored a more aggressive stance on retaining Jewish identity- not willing to forgo many expressions of a tradition that had endured so many trials and tribulations throughout history.

As we stand before our hannukiah this evening, let us pledge to ourselves, to our children, to our past and to our future that we will stand proud as Jews. If our children find themselves threatened then let us commit to showering them with the joy and love of our Jewish tradition. If we, as adults feel insecure then let us explore, for ourselves the treasures of our Jewish tradition that have inspired every generation of Jewish people throughout history. May the December Dilemma inspire us to respond to the challenges we encounter, helping us forge a stronger Jewish identity for ourselves and for our children.

Hag Urim Sameah,

Rabbi Stefan J. Weinberg