



...And so, what do many Jews do on Christmas? From what I hear they go to a Chinese restaurant. That, for some Jews, has almost become a religious tradition. So much so that one of the teachers in our school, Brandon Walker, made a musical video entitled, "Chinese Food on Christmas" which has been watched by a million people on You Tube. So how did this minhag of going to a Chinese restaurant on Christmas come about? The answer is simple. **Jews don't observe Christmas ... and the Chinese people don't observe Christmas!** We both operate on a different calendar. While this January 1<sup>st</sup> will usher in the year 2008 in the Christian calendar, it is in February that the Chinese people will be celebrating their New Year – the year 4706. And we Jews are celebrating the year 5768. Which means that the Jewish people had to go more than 1000 years without Chinese food! How did we survive? The miracle of Jewish survival!

I am not going to tell you what you should do on Christmas, and I'm certainly not going to tell you to go to a Chinese restaurant (unless, of course, it's kosher!). But I can tell you what Jewish tradition says you *can't* do on Christmas ... or more specifically, the night of Christmas Eve. **A custom developed in our East European days that Jews were not to study Torah on Christmas Eve.** Indeed, there was a special name given to Christmas Eve. It was referred to as "Nittel Nacht." "Nacht" of course means "evening" or "erev." There is a difference of opinion of what "Nittel" means. Some say that it is a variant of the Latin word, "Natalis" meaning "day of birth;" the same word that gives us the French "Noel," Christmas celebrating the nativity – the birth of Jesus. Others say that "Nittel" comes from the Hebrew word "nitleh" which means "hanged," which could refer to Jesus' crucifixion. Still others say this word, "Nittel" comes from this tradition of *not learning* on Christmas Eve. "Nittel" – "Nit toren lernen" is Yiddish for saying you are not allowed to learn. And indeed, there are many stories told of great sages who would not learn Torah on Christmas Eve. There is a famous picture of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and his father playing chess. When would they take the time out from studying Torah to play chess? It had to be on Christmas Eve! It is told that the Maharal would pay all his bills on Christmas Eve. And taking it to its extreme, it is said that the Vilna Gaon would tear all the toilet paper he would need for the year on Christmas Eve!

**But why this tradition not to study Torah on Christmas Eve?** Here too, the explanations vary. Some say it would be inappropriate for Jews to go to the Beit Medrash and learn on Christmas Eve; showing their Christian neighbors that for us as Jews, the day means nothing ... it's just business as usual. Others go to the other extreme and say: how can we rejoice in the study of Torah on a night that led to thousands of years of anti-Semitism and persecution? Still another explanation is based on the tradition that learning Torah on the birthday – or the day of death – of someone elevates their soul in Paradise, and no Jew wanted to appear as if he was doing anything to "elevate" the soul of Jesus. But most feel that the reason for not going to the Beit Medrash and learning Torah on Christmas Eve was simply **a matter of safety**; learning meant going out on the streets on Christmas Eve which for a Jew **meant taking your life in your hands.**

We've come a long way from those days. And certainly here in America, our relations with Christians is so good that we now have a question that perhaps never had to be asked before in Jewish history. The question? **Can you give your Christian friend a Christmas gift?** And the question is not as simple as you might think! Because there is a mishnah in the tractate Avodah Zarah which clearly states that "on the three days preceding the festivities of idolaters, it is forbidden to transact business with them, to lend articles to them or borrow anything from them, to advance or receive money from them, to repay a debt or receive payment from them." Not only are we being told that three days before their holidays are we not to give them gifts, we're not allowed to do any business with them! Because in so doing, we will be making their holiday merrier ... something we shouldn't do for idolaters. **And that is the law! But that was then ... and now is now.** By the time the Code of Jewish Law was written it tells us, "There are those who say that all these things were only said in those times, but in our times they are not idol worshippers and therefore it is permissible to do business with them on the day of their festivals, and to loan them money and all other things." And then we have the additional statement: "And even to give money to their priests. They don't use the money for sacrifices or idol worship. They only use it to eat and drink." **It seems that rabbis and priests have much in common.**

.... And unlike for Jews of previous generations, that is really no problem for us. Christians deserve to celebrate their holidays just as we deserve to celebrate ours. And if you really are looking for something to do on Christmas, I – as your rabbi – I tell you: it's all right to study Torah! And if you find it difficult to do that all day, a nice tradition has developed within some Jewish organizations to **volunteer to work on Christmas in jobs at hospitals and other 24/7 jobs, so that Christian workers can have the day off.**

This is the season of the year when the Christian world prays for peace on earth and good will toward all mankind. **That's a prayer that we can join in, that some day the Messianic dream will come true: "On that day the Lord shall reign over all the universe, He will be one and His name shall be one."**



### With Our Congregational Family

**“Im ayn Kemach, Ayn Torah-Without sustenance, there is no Torah”**

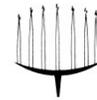
Rental of worship space, Music honorarium and Onegai Shabbat and Festivals are welcome. Will you help? You can by contributing your tax-deductible offerings. Sponsorship levels (see our webpage) above regular contribution levels help develop and implement additional special programs and events. These gifts are the backbone of the year's needs, augmenting dues contributions. We do not make solicitations during services in order to preserve the sanctity and decorum of our prayer hours. We do not operate a deficit Budget, nor use commercial lines of credit.

**Shalom! We welcome you** most cordially to scheduled services conducted by Hazzan David Silverstein, David Miron, accompanist and our Voices of Israel Professional Chorale. Daily Minyan and Memorial services available by request 24 hours in advance. We are a Jewish religious community that encourages professional and lay participation. All members of the Jewish faith who wish to participate in Hebrew or English please contact Hazzan Silverstein. If you are new to San Antonio, kindly advise Hazzan so that we may welcome you. We especially welcome our active and retired Military and Law Enforcement personnel without charge to our services and events. To include a name in our bulletin for Yahrzeit (Remembrance) or Mi Sheberach (Healing) prayer list, please provide those names to Hazzan Silverstein (210) 387-2436 by 2:00 p.m. each Wednesday. You may also submit a prayer for healing at the service itself. Please hand it to the Hazzan prior to services. If you know someone who is hospitalized and would like to be visited by Hazzan Silverstein, please contact him directly. In observance of the Shabbat, Holy Days and Festivals, **we ask that communication devices remain in silent or vibrating modes and used only in emergencies** outside the prayer venue; we ask that you refrain from smoking anywhere on the rental properties.

**Mazal Tov to: Kayla and Ali** on their marriage. Their ceremony took place in Austin on December 16, 2017. Kayla and her family were members at Congregation Agudas Achim where Kayla became a Bat Mitzvah under Hazzan Silverstein's tutelage. We welcome them to the CISA community. We welcome Dr. Teresa and Jack Mynier as members of the CISA Community as well. Teresa and Jack are the parents of Kayla. We welcome **Anne and Gil Atzmon** to the community. We wish them a heartfelt Mazal Tov on their wedding celebration which took place on December 22, 2017. To our **webmaster Charles Gruber** who was appointed to the **CRC** (Community Relations Committee) representing CISA on matters of importance to the Global Jewish community.

### **Our Hazzan in the Community**

**Hazzan Silverstein.** On **Thanksgiving morning**, Hazzan officiated at the Annual Raul Jimenez Dinner at the Henry B. Gonzales Convention Center as a member of the Ecumenical Interfaith Clergy. This is his 18<sup>th</sup> celebration with the Raul Jimenez Dinner. See Facebook for some photos of the event for the **25,000 attendees**. We're talkin' Turkey here!



**Congregation Israel** of San Antonio, Texas  
*'Conservative-Covenantal Judaism in Prayer and Practice'*

**January 2018 "News for the Pews"**

**Hazzan David Silverstein, JD Ritual Leader**  
*(on Sabbatical)*

**David Miron, Accompanist, and Choir Director**

**George Siglin, Honorary Administrator**

**Charles Gruber, Webmaster**

**210.387.2436; a 501c3 Jewish Religious Community**

*Our Congregational Philosophy Our Jewish congregational community, now in its 12th year, provides an authentic Jewish atmosphere of welcome to all. Expressed with the beauty of music and study of Jewish text during worship, we pray in a manner consistent with the principles of a Covenantal Conservative Judaism.*

*Our philosophy blends ritual aspects of Jewish practices-traditional and contemporary- intellectual thought with the concept of a brit kodesh – mutual stewardship with holiness. We pray in Hebrew and English. We strive for an intellectual pursuit of Jewish philosophy to create a spiritual path through inquiry and study of Torah. Together we invite all who are committed, interested and inquiring to become better Jews. We learn, celebrate and mourn together in a Jewish way.*

*We affirm the inherent dignity, honor, and integrity of every human being as b'tzelem Elohim: created in God's image. Torah study, deeds and acts of kindness, a partnership in observances work to attain tikkun olam, by improving our personal deeds, then our community. We welcome everyone, most cordially. We invite you to think deeply in a higher in covenant with God and with us.*

*A Conservative "Covenantal" Jewish Congregation*

*Parsonage Residence 2652 Inwood Briar San Antonio, Texas 78248 210.387.2436; 210.764.0859 (fax) A Texas 501c3 Spiritual Community*

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