

Sim Shalom

Tevet 5774
December 2013

THE NEWSLETTER OF TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL, HARLINGEN TEXAS

1702 E. Jackson
P.O. Box 3398
Harlingen, TX 78551
(956) 423-2928
www.harlingentemple.com

Rabbi Frank Joseph
1832 Cooper Dr.
Irving TX 75061
214-293-6515
frank@
rabbifrankjoseph.org

TRUSTEES

Richard Newman,
President
718-419-6202
rocknewman@gmail.com

Abby Warshowsky,
Vice President
956-412-3520
956-536-0705 cell
gonsky@sbcglobal.net

Bert Wolf,
Treasurer
956-535-6629
bertwolf3@gmail.com

Anne Weiss,
Secretary
956-433-6318 (cell)
aweiss44@yahoo.com

Laurel Steinberg,
Past President
956-550-9530
wberg@fastmail.fm

Susan Ander,
454-4647
sbethmark@aol.com

Joel Smith
956-534-8883
jpsm31@sbcglobal.net

Rollins Koppel,
Trustee Emeritus
956-428-1789
rkoppel@rkoppel.com



TONATIUH ABEL GONZALEZ WARSHOWSKY

Bar Mitzvah
December 27-28

My name is Tonatiuh Abel Gonzalez Warshowsky. Tonatiuh is the G-d of the Sun in the center of the Aztec calendar, but I was not named after him. I was named after another great Tonatiuh who gave up his life in the service of others. Tonatiuh Ramos was a doctor who served the poor during a time of conflict in El Salvador. While working in a clinic, government soldiers killed him. He was a man of courage and integrity to risk his own life to help others. He had empathy for the struggles of his patients in El Salvador. Although he was strong and agile, he could not avoid the soldier's deadly bullets. Since I

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FROM ABBY WARSHOWSKY

Jewish people call themselves “Am Yisrael” -- “the people of Israel” -- rather than “Dat Yisrael,” or “the religion of Israel.” A sense of peoplehood has long been the defining characteristic of the Jews. Jewish texts treat participation in communal affairs not as an option, but as a religious obligation. Even more strikingly, one midrash likens removing oneself from the community to destroying the world. If one makes oneself like terumah (portion of produce that is set aside as an offering), set aside in the corner of the house, and says, “Why should I trouble myself for the community? What’s in it for me to take part in their disputes? Why should I listen to their voices? I’m fine [without this],” this person destroys the world.

“There is a story about Rav Assi, that when he was dying, his nephew entered and found him crying. He said to him, ‘Why are you crying? Is there any Torah that you did not study and teach to others? Look--your students sit before you. Are there any acts of lovingkindness that you did not do? Furthermore, despite your stature, [you humbled yourself and] you stayed far from disputes and did not allow yourself to be appointed over the affairs of the community.’

“Rav Assi replied, ‘My son, this is why I am crying. What if I am asked to account for the fact

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Calendar

DECEMBER

- 27-29 *Rabbi in town*
 27 Shabbat services, 7 p.m.
 led by Rabbi Joseph with Tona
 Gonzalez-Warshowsky
 28 Shabbat service 10:30 a.m.
 Tona Gonzalez-Warshowsky
 Bar Mitzvah, followed by
 kiddush luncheon

JANUARY

- 3 Shabbat service 7 p.m.
 5 Religion School, 10 a.m.
 12 Religion School, 10 a.m.
 16 Tu B'Shvat
 17-19 *Rabbi in town*
 17 Early services/Potluck Dinner
 18 Shabbat service 9 a.m. with
 breakfast to follow, and
 Torah discussion
 6:30 pm: Lecture by Rabbi
 Joseph, followed by
 Havdalah service
 19 Tu B'Shevat outing

Celebrations

BIRTHDAYS

- 12/4 Ivan Shirazi
 12/7 Liliana Cohen
 12/10 Jan Cassidy
 12/10 Lori Suissa
 12/17 David Goldstein
 12/20 Jose Cohen
 12/21 Jacquelyn Goldstein
 12/21 David Martin Jacobson
 1/9 Rosalie Berg
 1/13 Gabriel Hernandez
 1/18 Nivia Fisch
 1/23 Zachary Wolf

ANNIVERSARIES

- 12/16 Fernando & Alma Russek
 1/1 Ronald & Dyan Banks

Did we miss you?

*Please send birthdays & anniversaries
 to laurie.b.joseph@gmail.com.*

NEWS

■ **MAZEL TOV:** To Mike Freeman, who graduated from UT Brownsville on December 14 with a BS in biology and a minor in nanotechnology. In February he plans to go to Israel for 6 months to participate in medical research.

■ **MAZEL TOV:** To Ivan Shirazi, who is now teaching English to pre-school children and adults at Kenji Takikawa American Preschool in Ashikaga, Japan!

■ **SCRIP FUNDRAISER:** Temple Beth Israel has started a new fundraiser that is painless, fun, and easy for all to participate in. We are selling "gift" cards and certificates for many of the businesses we all use regularly, through the Great Lakes Scrip company. The temple gets a percentage of each purchase, from 2 to 10 percent, and sometimes more. Here's a tiny sample of the available businesses: Amazon.com, Starbucks, Target, Best Buy, Home Depot, Marshall's, Gap, Neiman Marcus, Bed Bath & Beyond, HEB, and Subway.

Some congregants have ordered already and it works!!!

Go to the Great Lakes website to see a list of businesses for which you can buy cards: <http://www.glscrip.com/> The denominations available are listed. If you decide to order, send a check for your total amount to Temple Beth Israel, PO Box 3398, Harlingen, TX 78551, and write "scrip" on your check. List out the cards you want to buy, how many, and what denominations.

The next card order will be made some time in January. We will send all the orders together, probably once a month.

Read more about the scrip company and see the list of gift cards available at <http://www.glscrip.com/>

Help the temple to raise some funds at no extra cost to you. Contact Liz Holzman at 459-5433 for more information. Thanks to Liz for coordinating this project.

■ **JANUARY POT LUCK SHABBAT DINNER:** This January, on Friday the 17th, will be our annual Pot Luck Shabbat Dinner. This is a chance to have an, informal, relaxed, delicious meal with Rabbi Joseph and each other.

Services will start early, 6:30 pm, and the dinner will follow. The usual rules apply:

- 1 Let Laurel know what you want to bring (550-9530)
2. Cook something great, try something new. (no meat please)
3. If you don't want to cook or bake, bring plates, coffee, plastic ware, cups, wine, juice, or water, or help with clean up or set up.
4. Bring and take home the serving dish for your food, or be prepared to stay and clean up.

■ **SAVE THE DATE: FEBRUARY DINNER TO HONOR STAN AND NIVIA FISCH:** on Saturday Night, Feb 15, a special adults only dinner and fundraiser.

■ **WATCH FOR DATE NIGHT** at the temple this winter, brought to you by the Confirmation Class. Movie and desert, for adults, with babysitting available.

■ **THE BROWNSVILLE CHAPTER OF HADASSAH WILL HOST ITS ANNUAL DELI LUNCH** on Friday, February 7 at Temple Beth El located at 24 Coveyway Drive. Take out orders will be served from 11 AM to Noon and eat in will be from Noon to 1:30 PM. Tickets are still only \$10.00 each and include a sandwich, coleslaw, potato salad and dessert. Please contact Emily J. Alpert at 956-455-2442 for more information.

FROM RABBI FRANK JOSEPH

Shalom,

My favorite form of Jewish sacred literature is the genre known as Wisdom Literature.

The Wisdom Texts in the Bible are Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. Proverbs and the postbiblical book of Sirach belong to the genre of didactic wisdom. These books offer instructions and observations directing the reader in the formation of an ethical character and in leading a successful and happy life. Through this literature we are instructed how to do what is wise in our everyday lives. We learn ways of behavior that strengthen our personal relationships, the forms of communication and commerce that make the life of the community congenial and secure, and the types of prudence and industry that help one achieve financial security. This instruction is in the form of short pithy sayings.

Throughout our history we have continued composing this literature. Postbiblical and Apocraphal literature would include Pirke Avot (Sayings or Wisdom of the Fathers) and Aboth D'Rabbi Nathan. This Wisdom Literature has continued to the present day.

An example of modern Wisdom Literature and the sayings that come closest to my philosophy of life are the sayings of the last Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994).

Our tradition teaches us that the wise are those who learn from all. In that spirit, I would like to share a few of my favorite teachings of his.

ESSENCE GARDEN

There are people who do much good, but with pessimism — because to them the world is an inherently bad place. They do good things, but without light and vitality. Who know how long it can last?

We must know that this world is not a dark, sinister jungle, but a garden. And not just any garden, but G-D's own pleasure garden, full of beauty, wonderful fruits and fragrances, a place where G-D desires to be with all HIS Essence. If the taste to us is bitter, it is only because we must first peel away the outer shell to find the fruit inside.

HIGHER LOWER

The higher something is, the lower it falls. So too, the loftiest revelations are to be found in the lowest places.

Therefore, if you find yourself in a place seemingly devoid of anything Spiritual — do not despair. The lower you are, the higher you can reach.

ON THE THIRD DAY THERE WAS PEACE

First there was One. There was no peace, because there was nothing with which to make peace. There was only One. Then there were Two. There was Plurality. From this point on, an infinite cacophony of conflict extended in all directions and forever.

And on the Third day G-D created peace.

Peace is not homogeneity. Peace does not mean that everyone thinks the same way. Peace is when there is plurality that finds a higher Oneness.

NOW

For hundreds of years, perhaps since the beginning of Creation, a piece of the world has been waiting for your soul to purify and repair it. And your soul, from the time it was first emanated and conceived, waited above to descend to this world and carry out that mission. And your footsteps were guided to reach that place.

And You are there now.

BE THERE

In each journey of your life you must be where you are. You may only be passing through on your way to somewhere else seemingly more important — nevertheless, there is purpose in where you are RIGHT NOW.

YOUR JERUSALEM

People want to run away from where they are, to go to find their Jerusalem. Wherever You are, whatever you are doing there, make that a Jerusalem.

RUNNING AWAY

When you run from the responsibility of one place to be in another, two things are amiss: The place where You are needed, and the place where you are and should not be.

PERCEPTIVE REPAIR

If you see what needs to be repaired and how to repair it, then you have found a piece of the world that G-D has left for you to complete. But if you only see what is wrong and how ugly it is, then it is yourself that needs repair.

NOT AND IS

G-D is not Nature.

But Nature is G-DLY.

BLACK HOLES

In recent years, astronomers have discovered that not all stars shine. There are some stars of tremendous density. Instead of radiating outwards, they only draw light in. Therefore, they have named those stars "black holes." Fortunately, the universe has enough black holes already. If you have light, shine forth.

DESPAIR ON PURPOSE

Despair is a cheap excuse for avoiding one's purpose in life. And a sense of purpose is the best way to avoid despair.

GRATEFULNESS

A person is happy when he or she knows something worthwhile belongs to him or her. A person is very happy when he or she feels that he or she is small and yet owns something very great. We are all finite owners of THE INFINITE.

IN ALL WAYS

People imagine a place of G-DLINESS as a place for

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Jews in the News

Animated Anne Frank movie in the works

Israeli director Ari Folman has committed to writing and directing an animated feature based on the life of Anne Frank, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*.

Folman's animated film "Waltz With Bashir," about the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, was nominated for an Oscar, and his Israeli TV series "En terapia" was the basis for HBO's "In Therapy." This is his first foray into the family-friendly realm.

"Bringing the Anne Frank Diary to all screens is a fantastic opportunity and challenge," Folman said. "There is a real need for new artistic material to keep the memory alive for younger generations."

To paint the picture of who she was, Folman will have more material than just the well-known contents of Frank's diary. The Anne Frank Fonds Basel, set up by her father Otto Frank, has granted the filmmakers total access to their archives.

Production is scheduled to begin in the winter of 2014.

www.jta.org/2013/12/12/arts-entertainment/animated-anne-frank-movie-in-the-works

FROM RABBI FRANK JOSEPH,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

seriousness, a solemn place, a place that fills you with trepidation. The truth is, where there is G-D, there is Joy.

That is why our every moment is a moment to celebrate and fill with joy. Because at every moment we are fulfilling our mission of bringing G-DLINESS into this world. Not just the obviously joyful matters, such as Study, Prayer, and Good Deeds, but also regular mundane activities and the ways we earn an income and go about life — all are ways by which we know HIM and bring HIM into our world.

EVERYTHING

Everything must be done with Joy.

ALL OF YOU

Where your thoughts are, there you are —all of you.

Although this is the tip of the iceberg of the Rebbe's wisdom, may we reflect on these thoughts and may we all have a wonderful, happy, healthy, prosperous, peaceful, fulfilling New Year of 2014.

Shalom U'V'racha,
Rabbi Frank Joseph

Thank You

DONATIONS

YIZKOR FUND

William Berg & Laurel Steinberg In honor of Gabriel Hernandez' Bar mitzvah and Rebekah Russek's Bat Mitzvah
Susan Ander in memory of Min Ander
Robert I & Anne B. Weiss

TORAH FUND

Ron & Dyan Banks Donation toward a new Torah, in memory of Albert Fridkin from Dyan & Ron Banks and Quentin Keyes

GENERAL FUND

Rollins Koppel
Oziel and Dalila Gonzalez
David & Lori Suissa Donation for Torah Books
Robert I & Anne B. Weiss Donation for Torah Books
Stan & Nivia Fisch Donation for Torah Books in honor of Jaqueline Goldstein's Bat Mitzvah and Gabriel Hernandez' Bar Mitzvah
Bert & Jamie Wolf Donation for Torah Books in Memory of our parents Marky Wolf, Mary Wolf and Irvin Wolf, donated by Jamie, Bert, Zachary, and Brett

Jose & Liliana Cohen Donation for new Torah Books
Harry and Elizabeth Holzman Donation for new flowers and plants
Fernando and Alma Russek Donation of labor and plants for a beautiful landscape in honor of Rebekah's Bat Mitzvah
Abby Warshowsky Donation of building materials and supplies for Boy Scouts project
Jesus and Angela Silguero
Rene y Eliza Gonzalez Donation for a new bookcase
Patty Gaytan Donation for a new bookcase
Samuel and Ada Barrios Donation for a new bookcase in honor of Rebekah's Bat Mitzvah
Victor and Judy DeLeon Tevah Meldado Memory of Ezra De Leon
William Berg & Laurel Steinberg Donation for Torah Books
David & Elizabeth Goldstein Donation for a new bookcase
Rene & Eliza Gonzalez

YAHRTZEIT DATES

DECEMBER:

Amy Koppel 10 Dec
Susan Feuerman
Marcielle Wolf 15 Dec
Rosalie Steinberg 22 Dec

JANUARY:

Dorothy Fridkin 8 Jan
Frank Fridkin 30 Jan
Ned Sondock 1 Jan
Ben Levine 19 Jan
Gertrude Greenfeld 19 Jan

FEBRUARY:

Burton Liberman 7Feb
Helen Koppel 28 Feb
Bertha Berg 19 Feb

Please consider a donation to the temple in memory of your loved ones.

FROM TONATIUH,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

was a total surprise to my parents, they wanted to name me something special because they believed me coming meant I was supposed to do something special with my life.

My Hebrew name is Shmuel. My great-great grandfather, Samuel or Shmuel, fled Europe to escape persecution as a Jew. My Hebrew name is in his honor. My other great-great grandfather was also Samuel for whom I was also named.

I have always been taught that even though my last name in school is only Gonzalez, my full name includes both Gonzalez and Warshowsky because I should never forget where I come from on both sides of my family. Both sides were immigrants fleeing bad situations. I am Salvadoran and Jewish. Both sides of my families have had struggles like the Jews in Europe and the Salvadoran people. Both were in times of conflict and hatred. I have been taught, like Tonatiuh Ramos, to care for others not just myself. I am proud to share his name because he stood up for others, not just himself, in times of crisis. I am also proud to be named after my great-great grandfather because of my Jewish heritage.

I am thirteen years old, and I attend South Texas Preparatory Academy. I love Math, playing video games, and hanging out with friends like everybody my age. Now, that I am about to celebrate my Bar Mitzvah, I also know what a responsibility I have. My responsibility as a Bar Mitzvah in the Jewish community is only part of it. I have to remember the great people who share my name, and the responsibility of honoring them.

Please join me on December 28, 2013 for my Bar Mitzvah.

FROM ABBY WARSHOWSKY,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

that I was able to arbitrate disputes among the people of Israel and did not?' [This is the meaning of] 'the fraudulent person destroys [the world]'" (Midrash Tanhuma, Parshat Mishpatim 2).

Though the precise structure of Jewish communities has changed according to place, time and current interests, membership in a Jewish community has always demanded a sense of shared destiny, manifested in the obligation to care for other members of the community, as well as in the joy of partaking in others' celebrations.

At this time when we look forward to celebrating my son Tona's Bar Mitzvah, I am cognizant of the fact that this was a community effort to reach this milestone. I want to take the opportunity to thank all that have contributed to the process of providing my children with a Jewish education and such a wonderful Jewish home. For those I may have offended over the years, I apologize. I have always fought and intervened in the hopes of maintaining this beautiful Jewish home we have had at Temple Beth Israel. I also want to reach out to the community at this time to ask for your involvement.

Many of us have served on the Board out of this sense of obligation to the community. It is not, however, our role to make all decisions, do all the work and finance everything. We welcome input and ideas and participation. The Board is merely a group of volunteers who, hopefully, only desire the continuation of our community at Temple Beth Israel. However, it is our community that needs to step up and get involved. Contributions come in many forms. This is a small community and we must rely on one another to sustain ourselves. If we don't have enough programs or activities for either adults or children, then volunteer to lead an activity. We are responsible for the success or failure of our community. Everyone should contribute in some way to the betterment of our Jewish home. Something is better than nothing. If money is owed, try ten dollars a month or volunteer to help. We do not belong to a bigger organization that provides us a religious leader as do many other churches and organizations. We pay for our own Rabbi. The majority of all monies collected are for that purpose. All contributions are welcome and needed. Please understand that this is not meant to criticize or diminish the many efforts of our members. We have a new website, Facebook page, hot water, new books and delicious Onegs due to our

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Oneg Shabbat Hosts

Each member household is asked to host one Shabbat oneg during the year. **If you do not have a date to host, please let me know.** You can view the calendar at http://www.rab-bifrankjoseph.org/Temple_Beth_Israel.html to see when Rabbi Joseph will be in Harlingen. Remember hosting now

involves setting up, cleaning up, and providing challah, Kosher wine, grape juice, paper/plastic goods, coffee and drinks. You can bring other treats you like, but the congregation will share the responsibility of bringing snacks and desserts. Call Laurel Steinberg at 550-9530 for information.

ONEG HOSTS

DECEMBER: Warshowsky, Warshowsky, Barrios

JANUARY: Pot luck supper, Berg coordinator

FEBRUARY: Silguero, Rodriguez

FROM ABBY WARSHOWSKY,
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

community's participation. Rather, this is a plea for continued and wider participation from all our membership.

At this time, we will be reading the story of the Exodus. While Pharaoh's leadership came from a place of power and subjugation, Moses's leadership centers on humility. That humility begins with Moses's admission of his own deficit, his impeded speech. Moses's speech impediment underlies other critical leadership qualities: the courage to admit his weakness and the ability to ask for help. Moses implores God: "See, I am of impeded speech; how then should Pharaoh heed me!" (Exodus 6:30). God responds by appointing Aaron to stand with Moses and speak to Pharaoh for him. Moses knows his own limitations, and is neither afraid to admit his weakness nor threatened by sharing the mantle of leadership with his brother Aaron. I certainly do not equate myself to Moses, but I do know that it is important to humbly reach out to our community and ask for your help.

I am so very grateful to our Temple Beth Israel community. Although my father, Benjamin Warshowsky, passed before any of my children were born, his legacy has lived on through our involvement at Temple Beth Israel. The names of my children's grandparents and great grandparents are memorialized on plates on the wall. My youngest child will be called as a Bar Mitzvah on December 28, 2013 honoring all who have preceded him. *Idor vador*, from generation to generation. Please join us in this celebration and let's all contribute to the continuing legacy of our wonderful Temple.

FROM DEBORAH RUSSEK

Dec 10 2013

Yesterday I finished basic training — the first stage of my service in the IDF. I had an amazing time and thanks to all the lovely ladies who were with me and my commanders for making it so! My swearing-in ceremony was so emotional, and I'm so honored to have received the highest award of honor out of my entire company of over 150 girls for being an outstanding soldier. I'm ready for what's next to come!



Read up

Study: Why Ashkenazis are susceptible to Crohn's

By JUDY SIEGEL-ITZKOVICH

American and other researchers have discovered five new genetic mutations that make Ashkenazi Jews four times more likely than other populations to develop Crohn's disease.

The findings, from a multicenter study, are the first step in an attempt to explain why Ashkenazi Jews are at significantly higher risk for the disorder, which is an autoimmune condition in which the immune system attacks healthy tissue in the gastrointestinal track, causing chronic inflammation. While it can occur at any age, the typical ages of onset are between 15 and 35. People at high risk include smokers, those with a family history of Crohn's and Jews of Ashkenazi origin, but until now, the defective genes had not been identified.

Dr. Burrill Crohn first characterized the disease exactly 80 years ago at New York's Mount Sinai School of Medicine. Prof. Inga Peter, a geneticist at Mount Sinai, led the international research team to search for unique genetic risk factors in Ashkenazi Jews.

Previous studies had identified 71 genetic variants of Crohn's disease risk in people, especially Jews of central and eastern European ancestry. Peter and her team conducted a two-step genome-wide association study comparing 1,878 Ashkenazi Jews with Crohn's disease to 4,469 Ashkenazi Jews without the disease, using DNA samples to evaluate their genetic make-up. The research team found 12 of the known risk variants, but also discovered five new genetic risk regions on chromosomes (5q21.1, 2p15, 8q21.11, 10q26.3 and 11q12.1).

"This is the largest study to date, and the first to discover the unique risk factors of Crohn's disease in the Ashkenazi Jewish population," said Peter.

"The research team, funded by the New York Crohn's Disease foundation, also evaluated previous findings in non-Jewish Europeans with Crohn's disease and found that the genetic structure of the novel regions associated with Crohn's disease risk in the Ashkenazi Jewish group was much less diverse than that of non-Jewish Europeans.

<http://www.jpost.com/Health-and-Science/Study-Why-Ashkenazis-are-susceptible-to-Crohns>

Read up

'Tis merry being Jewish at Christmas

By Jeff Pearlman

(CNN) -- Back in the winter of 1982, I was a fifth grader at Lakeview Elementary -- and I was not happy.

Because it was late in the year, and because I lived in a town, Mahopac, New York, with about six-and-a-half Jews, I was required by law to participate in the school's annual holiday concert. It was, for a boy who always felt resentful over having to spend December 25 inside Ming's Chinese Restaurant, the worst of the worst of the worst.

Of the 11 songs we were told to sing, 10 were Christmas carols. Of those 10, seven or eight evoked either Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.

Finally fed up, one day I swallowed my anxiety and approached Mrs. Hart, our fifth-grade teacher -- a woman who scared the living hell out of me.

Jeffie: "Ms. Hart, I have a complaint."

Ms. Hart: "What do you want?"

Jeffie: "I'm Jewish."

Ms. Hart: "So?"

Jeffie: "I don't think it's fair that there are no Chanukah songs in the concert."

Ms. Hart: "Don't be stupid."

That was that. I put on my stupid white collared shirt and my stupid red tie, and when the special night arrived I crooned loud and proud about the miracle of Jesus Christ's birth. Later that evening, I told my father that I would never engage in such an endeavor again.

"Why?" he said. "What's the big deal?"

I was stunned.

"It is a big deal," I said, "because these people act like Chanukah doesn't even exist. It's all Christmas, all the time, and we get no equal treatment whatsoever."

"You're right," Dad said, "and it's an absolute blessing."

It took me several years to grasp my father's thinking but, with 41 Decembers now under my belt, I agree 100% with his take: There's no better time to be Jewish than December.

I know ... I know. Christmas is soooooo-o-o awesome. Presents! Ham! A tree! More presents! As a Jewish boy in a Christian town, I heard these paeans over and over and over, and I even used to believe them. Why, oh why, couldn't we celebrate, too?

Then, one Christmas Eve Dad took me into the city to observe the madness. We entered Macy's (ground zero for 1980s holiday madness) with nary a care in the world, kicked back and soaked in the insanity. There were people fighting over the last Rubik's Cube and Cabbage Patch doll; folks nervously gazing down at their crumpled lists -- contained in their faces the looming stress of the emptying wallet, of the materialistic mayhem, of the pure, unadulterated holiday hell.

"Does this look fun to you?" Dad asked.

"Um, no," I said. "It doesn't."

"Is this what you want Chanukah to be?"

"No," I said. "Definitely not."

We returned home, lit the menorah, belted out our off-tune rendition of "Rock of Ages" and exchanged the regular sixth- or seventh-night gift. Probably socks. Maybe a Hall & Oates record.

My father is a quirky guy: a Brooklyn-born Jew who spent his childhood attending Hebrew school and avoiding bacon. If anyone has pride in his religion, it's Stanley Pearlman. And yet, Dad never seemed to mind Mahopac in all its Christmas splendor, or carolers standing at the front door, or the inane school concert. I'd moan and complain and cry, and he refused to flinch.

His stance was a simple-yet-wise one: Enjoy it. Enjoy it all. Take an evening drive to see all the lights. Buy eggnog at the supermarket. Walk into Dennis Gargano's house and smell the pine needles. Study the ornaments, suck on a candy cane. "I love Christmas," Dad has said myriad times, "because it's not my holiday. There's no stress or pressure. You can embrace it without having to own it."

Hence, this past Friday I took my daughter Casey out of school for our annual New York City fun day. We roamed through Toys R Us and the Disney Store, watched the Macy's Christmas puppet show, walked past Santa's village. The decorations were nice and the lights, while blinding, were pretty. But everything was overcrowded and excessively hyped. The materialism was painful. The anxiety was palpable.

"This," Casey said to me, "is pretty crazy."

"No," I replied. "This is fantastic."

<http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/20/opinion/pearlman-being-jewish-at-christmas/>