

Rabbi Zamore's Message for December, 2013

Celebrating Imperfection

When I was a child, there was something magical about driving around at dusk. The sun would be setting, the sky slowly darkening into night, and folks would be turning on the lights in their houses. Yet, the time to draw the drapes had not yet come. This time of year, with its early sunset, creates such moments by early afternoon. As a child, sitting in the back of my parents' car looking out the window, I gawked in wonder at the vignettes appearing before me. Every few feet offered a new living diorama to interpret. In my mind I would enjoy making up the stories that glimpses prompted. It was living theater and make-believe rolled into one.

As an adult I have come to realize that we all play this game of make-believe, especially at the holidays. Rather than being young children who wonder at the magic of dusk and delve into their imaginations to dream up narratives based on the glow of lit up homes, we adults do something much more dangerous. We buy into the myth of the perfect holiday.

Our communal expectations, created by society and pounded into our psyches by seasonal advertising, are that when we celebrate our holidays – Chanukah, Thanksgiving, and even secular New Year's – we should have a perfect holiday. Media messages tell us if we buy the right gifts and decorations and create the right menus, we will have that picture perfect holiday. And we often believe it. We start to believe the myth that there is such a thing as a perfect family moment and we even think that everyone else is achieving that which we cannot seem to have. But the reality is that we do not live in a Norman Rockwell picture.

Fueled by this societal message, we come to our holiday tables with high expectations and, as a result, are in danger of walking away disappointed or worse -- feeling like failures. While we come to believe that others are happier, more financially secure and have more harmonious families, the reality is that we are human and, therefore, imperfect. We come to our holiday tables as imperfect individuals with imperfect families living lives filled with challenges. Before we despair and never invite the family over again, we can simply let go of the myth and be thankful for who we are, for what we do have, and for the loving, although imperfect, people who are our friends and family. When we let go of the myth of perfect, we can celebrate with full hearts.

At this season of holidays, I invite you to celebrate the imperfect. As we celebrate the final days of Chanukah, I wish you and your family a holiday filled with light.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Mary L. Zamore