

Dear Friends,

The end of December ... a time of year when rabbis huddle together and pray for the strength to shepherd their communities through the “holiday” season, what feels like a very Christian season, without compromising on Jewish pride and identity. I understand the initial discomfort. I even share in the discomfort. Beyond the awkwardness, however, we may find great comfort and shared purpose in remaining open to the many humanitarian lessons of the Christmas season.

These are difficult times. Our people are held hostage, our homeland is at war. Political divisions continue to worsen. Gun violence is on the rise, virulent antisemitism is surging, and increasing numbers of Americans face food and shelter insecurity.

At any time – but particularly during such difficult days – we would be well advised to take comfort wherever we can find it, regardless of its origin.

To be sure, Christmas is not our holy day. All the same, that does not mean we can't dwell in the aura of peace, joy, and generosity it seems to usher in each year. Yes, Jewish tradition maintains an imperative for tzedakah – it is a core mitzvah after all – but we have Christmas to thank for bringing it to the forefront of American consciousness at this time of year.

Gifting – figuratively and literally – is a funny thing. Though we can't legislate what other people give us, nor how they give it, we certainly can control what we give others, and the spirit in which we give. We may not be able to establish peace throughout the world, but we can strive for peace within our families, neighborhoods, and workplaces. We may not be able to feed the entire world, but we can find the compassion to chip away at hunger in our own communities. We may not be able to clothe the entire world, but we can find the humanity within to collect and distribute warm coats to many in our greater community who otherwise would go cold this winter.

I am deeply grateful for each and every reminder to live peacefully and lovingly, wherever they may originate. One need not be Christian to embrace the Christmas spirit, just like one need not be Jewish to pray for the increase of light in these dark times. Christians may have exclusive rights to their own messianic understanding of Christmas, but generosity and Tikkun Olam by any name will always be values that we, as Jews, ought to support.\

L'Shalom,
Rabbi Dubin