

Inspired by Standing Rock

The story of Chanukah is a narrative of the victory of a small group of righteous fighters against a powerful empire. It is a redemptive story of standing for one's beliefs (and existence) and triumphing in the end.

The end of 2016 is a time when redemptive stories are even more welcome and the decision by the U.S. government last weekend to accede to the defiance of protesters in North Dakota is just such a story. Plans to run an oil pipeline through a cemetery and under a water reservoir near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation were kiboshed. This doesn't mean an alternative route won't see the project completed, but it does alleviate the immediate fears the people had of the potential destruction of their water supply and further desecration of sacred sites, some of which have already been bulldozed.

The example of the Standing Rock Sioux and their allies from all over the country who stood up to the oil company is already being held up as a model for British Columbians, many of whom spent the weekend fuming over an announcement by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The prime minister declared that cabinet had approved the Kinder Morgan Trans-Mountain pipeline – which would see the number of tankers transporting bitumen from Burnaby, through Burrard Inlet, to Asia, increase to 34 per month from five – as well as another pipeline to the United States, while rejecting the Northern Gateway pipeline, which would have sent diluted bitumen to Asia via northern British Columbia. The incongruity of the decision – that the government recognizes the pristine fragility of the northern coast, but not that of the southern coast – is among the causes of outrage. Other concerns involve larger global issues of fossil fuels and the range of options that could, if we are going to use this non-renewable resource, at least reduce the negative environmental impacts.

Abavat ha'beriot, love for (God's) creation, is at the heart of Jewish identity. There is also the commandment to not stand by the blood of your neighbor; that is, do not behave passively in the face of violence toward others. While there was violence at Standing Rock, the greater threat was to the livelihood

of the community there, based on the necessity of potable water. Likewise, the potential for ecological disaster as a result of the increased tanker traffic along Vancouver's coast could destroy much creation, while the commitment to non-renewable fuels exemplified by the pipeline infrastructure will have global consequences.

Protecting creation is at the heart of First Nations identity as well, as was so articulately expressed at Standing Rock and which has also been demonstrated by reaction to Western Canadian pipelines, much of the opposition to which is led by indigenous people. Among the most heartening aspects of the Standing Rock story was the solidarity between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

Even if we disagree on this issue – we who drive cars or otherwise exploit non-renewable resources should demonstrate commitment to reducing emissions with our actions as well as our words – the lesson of Standing Rock goes beyond this single topic.

The United States and much of the world is experiencing a political upheaval. Particular challenges will emerge from the stunning U.S. election result, which handed the White House and both chambers of Congress to a party that rejects much of what has been termed “progressive” – environmental regulations, equality for women and minorities, protections for workers and a long list of other advances that cannot now (if they ever could) be taken for granted.

In the face of a Washington that is uniformly Republican, there may be a renewed need for public demonstrations that advance alternative viewpoints. People stood up at the coincidentally but aptly named Standing Rock. People may have to do the same in many places, including Burrard Inlet, during the coming years.

We need not be modern Maccabees to take such a stand. It is highly unlikely that any of us will see our lives threatened for opposing a pipeline, or acting within the law to advance or oppose some other viewpoint. Conversely, if action is not taken, if voices do not coalesce to demand alternatives to our world's rapacious appetite for fossil fuels, all of creation may well be threatened. ❏

Happy Chanukah

This letter was sent to the Independent as an open letter to the community.

Editor:

The holiday of Chanukah is upon us and its lessons live clearly in our current days. With outbreaks of antisemitic graffiti on multiple synagogues on the East Coast, the distribution of a white supremacist flyer in our local Richmond community, as well as the largest level of hate crimes in the United States since the 1930s, as per the Anti-Defamation League, the fear of a similar climate to what the Maccabees faced is in the back of our minds, but this couldn't be further from the reality.

I, for one, am confident that the state of our current Jewish community is strong and united. The harmony among all Richmond Jewish organizations and the commitment to our joint community is a model for other communities. We have all been able to work and grow with each other and make Richmond the strongest Jewish community outside of Vancouver. We have amazing synagogues, a vibrant Jewish day school in Richmond Jewish Day School, Chabad and the Kehila Society, with all their amazing work and programs, Geshet Jhub offering services to newcomers and a kosher bakery (that even provides for most of Vancouver). We are home to Tikva Housing's newest project, as well as many Jewish-owned businesses throughout our area. With affordable housing, education and close proximity to Vancouver, Richmond is becoming the number one option for Jews living in Greater Vancouver.

So, on this holiday, when we remember a time when Judaism was outlawed, the miracle of the oil lasting eight nights and the struggle of our brave warriors Matisyahu and the Maccabees to liberate the Temple, we must be grateful for the community we live in and those who run it. Our community organizations are our modern-day Maccabees, working tirelessly to keep Judaism alive in our current period of history.

So, to all those Maccabees, to all those who donate time and/or money to make everything possible, to our community leaders who receive very few “pats on the back” and to all our spiritual leaders, this year, I light my shamash thinking of you.

Hope to see you all at one of the many Chanukah celebrations around Richmond.

Michael Sachs, president
The Bayit

Getting through Chanukah

These few tips might help change how you relate to family.

LYNN SUPERSTEIN-RABER

It's that time of year again! For many, the holiday season is spent with family and is filled with nothing but joy, love, laughter, gratitude and giving. If this is you, you can go ahead and stop reading now.... This piece is for those of us who don't live on the Hallmark Channel.

Let's be honest with ourselves. We love our family. At the same time, getting together with our families or our in-laws around the holidays can get stressful, awful or even painful. Some people end up in my therapy office after the holidays, shattered from family celebrations.

If you're tired of the stressful dynamics in your family, maybe this year it's time to try something a little different. Let's call this an early Chanukah list.

Set boundaries. Setting boundaries is the foundation for standing up to the family difficulties that we deal with every year. Maybe the lessons we learned in childhood were to not “stir the pot” and to avoid conflict. The end result of this is that we end up acting as if we are OK when, quite frankly, we aren't.

When your mother-in-law pulls up an old dig about your weight, you don't have to sit quietly and let your blood pressure go through the roof. Instead, you can say, “I don't like it when you make comments about my weight.”

Another way to set boundaries is to put space between yourself and whatever or whomever you're trying to set boundaries with. You may not be able to control what others say, but you can certainly move yourself to another room or go for a walk.

Don't regress. Perhaps you always got dragged into being the mediator or the scapegoat in your family when you were growing up. When we, as adults, spend time with our families in the present, we tend to slip back into old roles. Don't be who you were when you were 14. Be who you are now, even if your family doesn't see it. If they continue to define you as your past, don't stoop to their level by doing the same to them. Be the grown-up in the room.

Don't be held back by the prospect of negative outcomes. You might plan to do things differently around your family, but it doesn't mean the results will be rosy. You might set boundaries and get a lot of backlash.

This is not advice for the faint of heart. It's advice to help you survive your family holiday. These are suggestions for people who are tired of getting sucked into the same old family patterns, and are ready to find their voice and get unstuck.

There's no way to know for sure how your holiday will turn out as you try some of these ideas. At best, you might become a catalyst for actual change in your family and holidays might get better.

But, whether family time improves or continues on as it always has, you can at least know that you are taking charge of your life and taking steps toward a happier you.

Enjoy the latkes! ❏

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