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# the Shofar



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Etz Chayim Conservative Synagogue's Monthly Newsletter

DECEMBER, 2021

KISLEV/TEVET , 5782

For information on joining virtual services and events, please see our website:

<http://www.etzchayim-hsv.org>

## FROM THE RABBI

### IN A BAD WORLD, WE'RE STILL THE 'GOOD GUYS'

Majid Khan was an Al- Qaeda recruit who pleaded guilty to terrorism and murder charges for helping to finance a deadly bombing in Indonesia.

A military jury sentenced Khan to 26 years in prison. Good! We have no sympathy for terrorists.

However, the jury foreman, Capt. Scott Curtis, wrote a letter asking for clemency for the prisoner. What?!? Our first reaction is, no sympathy no clemency. Problem is, the CIA tortured Khan. The abuse apparently was physical, sexual and psychological. From what I can discern, the torture was not necessary and not justifiable.

Such behavior is not the American way. For the record, Capt. Curtis' clemency letter was co-signed by a Marine lieutenant colonel, two Army lieutenant colonels, two Navy commanders and a Marine major. Those soldiers risk their lives to

protect us. But that doesn't mean that they abandon a sense of justice. Torture, at least in the case of Majid Khan, was pragmatically wrong, and (this is my field) morally wrong.

The CIA has done bad things. Really, and this is well beyond the scope of my article, our country has done a lot of bad things from 1776 until today. And so this is the point of my article: Our country is far from perfect. Everyone is far from perfect. But you can still be good, and honorable and (usually) decent. Human nature, and political entities, are inherently flawed. But there is no excuse. We must do the best we can. And when wrong, we must do better.

As Capt. Curtis himself put it, despite his disgust with the torture: "I think the United States is still the good guys, for lack of a better term, throughout the world."

I think so too.

Happy Chanukah, happy December,

Stephen Listfield

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

"Here comes Hanukkah," beginning November 28 and concluding December 6. Wishing a very happy Chanukah to all our Etz Chayim Congregation. At our home, we just now put out a few Chanukah decorations, which include our collection of dreidels and menorahs that we have been collecting over the years.

The synagogue is gradually and cautiously reopening for on-site participation as we end the year, and in January we hope to open up for services and onegs as you remember. The Board will re-evaluate the COVID situation after the holidays at the January Board meeting.

I enclose a link to the cheerful "Here Comes Hanukkah" song by Adam Sandler from Saturday Night Live (1994), which should leave you smiling.

<https://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/adam-sandler-sings-the-hanukkah-song/3634772>

I was also checking out the internet (which we are accustomed to by now) for Presidential messages and came across this Wikipedia story about Gen. George Washington at Valley Forge. Like all things internet maybe it's fiction, maybe it's true, but in any case, there are some references and sources with this article (trust but verify). If it's fiction it is still a good story.

Pre-White House Hanukkah story: George Washington and Hanukkah  
(Source:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White\\_House\\_Hanukkah\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_House_Hanukkah_Party))

Although the truth of the story is impossible to prove, there is an account about George Washington and the meaning of Hanukkah that has become part of American lore:

For centuries, the lights of the Hanukkah menorah have inspired hope and courage. They may have also been responsible for inspiring then-General George Washington to forge on when everything looked bleak when his cold and hungry Continental Army camped at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777/8. The story is told that Washington was walking among his troops when he saw one soldier sitting apart from the others, huddled over what looked like two tiny flames. Washington approached the soldier and asked him what he was doing. The soldier explained that he was a Jew, and he had lit the candles to celebrate Hanukkah, the festival commemorating the miraculous victory of his people so many centuries ago over the tyranny of a much better equipped and more powerful enemy who had sought to deny them their freedom. The soldier then expressed his confidence that just as, with the help of God, the Jews of ancient times were ultimately victorious, so too would they be victorious in their just cause for freedom. Washington thanked the soldier and walked back to where the rest of the troops camped, warmed by the inspiration of those little flames and the knowledge that miracles are possible.

The historical source for the above story is a second-hand account, but is nonetheless fairly credible. In December 1778, General George Washington had supper at the home of Michael Hart, a Jewish merchant in Easton, PA. It was during the Hanukkah celebration, and Hart began to explain the customs of the holiday to his guest. Washington replied that he already knew about Hanukkah. He told Hart and his family of meeting the Jewish soldier at Valley Forge the previous year. (According to Washington, the soldier was a Polish immigrant who said he had fled his homeland because he could not practice

his faith under the Prussian government there.) Hart's daughter, Louisa, wrote the story down in her diary. The story has been quoted by several Jewish historians, including Rabbi I. Harold Sharfman in his 1977 book, *Jews on the Frontier*. (Krensky, Stephen (2006). *Hanukkah at Valley Forge*. Dutton Children's Books. ISBN 0525477381)

Steve Goodman

REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR  
DECEMBER 7, 1941  
80 YEARS AGO  
THE START OF WW II

Etz Chayim Sisterhood  
Sponsoring  
Free Latkes Pickup on  
Sunday, Dec. 5  
between 1pm-3pm at  
the synagogue  
parking lot



## SUCCOT TO THANKSGIVING FOOD DRIVE

Thank you to those of you who tuned in for the Food Drive Concert. You may have recognized that I played Kol Nidre as the opening song on the violin. The video featured Jewish music and a guitar solo played by Larry Levitt.

Donations were accepted from Succot to Thanksgiving. Some folks made their donation through Etz Chayim Pay Pal. \$229 was collected at Etz Chayim and will be forwarded to the Food Bank. Other donations were made directly to the Downtown Rescue Mission Huntsville, including cash and a donation of 80 pounds of beef.

Lynne Edmondson

## BOOK CLUB

The intelligentsia had a lively discussion of the book "1949, The First Israelis". No dishes were broken during the exchange of ideas.

We will next tackle the book "Abraham," by Bruce Feiler and will present our earth-shaking analysis of the book on Thursday, January 20, at 11:30 at the synagogue.

We would welcome your participation in the review.

Max

## SISTERHOOD

All,

Sisterhood is sponsoring a Drive-By Latke Pick-Up again this year, in lieu of our

customary Latke Party. We are providing a box of latkes for each family that is a member of Etz Chayim. Come by on Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup> from 1-3 PM for pick-up.

Many thanks to the members of Sisterhood who searched the city to collect the boxes of latkes we needed, and thank you to the people committing their time to be at EC to help during the pick-up time, as well.

Happy Hanukkah,

Sandra

### DONATIONS

#### General Fund

From: Ron Goldberg

From: Maxine & David Persons  
To: Congregation - Enjoyed participating in the Zoom services for the High Holidays. Wonderful to see Jonathan, Michelle and Zachary. And thanks to Rabbi Listfield.

From: Roni Shem Tov

From: Diana & Howard Polin  
To: Shirley Roberts - In Honor of Shirley's good health and the marriage of her granddaughter, Lizzy.

To: Lucy Fisher - In loving memory of Charlie Fisher.

To: Barry Meyer - Wishing you a speedy recovery.

From: Antonia Spector  
In memory of Charlie Fisher

#### Rabbi Fund

From: Lucy Fisher

From: Millie & Max Rosenthal  
To: Harry Yedid & Family - With great sorrow we learned of Arlene Yedid's

passing. We have many fine memories of both of you in Huntsville. Take care and keep in touch.

From: Shirley Roberts

To: Harry Yedid & Family - Thinking of you, am so sorry for the loss of Arlene. Stay well Harry.

From: Shirley Roberts

In honor of her grand-daughter, Eliza's, marriage

#### Sisterhood

From: Shirley Roberts

In honor of her grand-daughter, Eliza's, marriage to Jake Itzkowitz on November 7, in Memphis, TN.

#### Outdoor Lighting Fund

In Memory of Gertrude & Perry Schlein from their daughters Natha Hancock and Robin Slomka and their families.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov 28-

Dec 06 Chanukkah

Nov 28 Chabad Menorah Lighting,  
Bridge Street at 4:30 PM

Nov 30 Rabbi Listfield Meeting, 6:45 PM

Nov 30 Chabad Menorah Parade and party, leaves by car from Huntsville Middle School at 5 PM

Dec 03 Kabbalat Shabbat with Rabbi Listfield, 7:15 PM

Dec 05 TBS Menorah lighting, 5:30 PM at TBS followed by beignets and Silent Auction

Dec 05 Sisterhood Drive-by Latke Pick-up, 1-3, for EC members

Dec 09 Rabbi Listfield Meeting, 6:45 PM

Dec 18 Rabbi Listfield Shabbat morning & Torah Service, 9:45 AM

Dec 23 Rabbi Listfield Meeting, 6:45 PM

## ANNIVERSARIES

Dec 23 Dorothy & Bill Goldberg

## BIRTHDAYS

Dec 04 Joe Paddock  
Dec 06 Gabi Lapidus  
Dec 12 Nicole Sacks Dillard  
Dec 13 Joe Roberts  
Dec 13 Martin Freeman  
Dec 16 Sue Paddock  
Dec 21 Eric Bram  
Dec 23 Sarah Shepard  
Dec 27 Kaitlin Polin  
Dec 30 Tia Smith  
Dec 31 Joshua Dixon

## YAHARZEITS

Light the Memorial candle at sunset of the previous evening

Nov 28	Kislev 24	Charlie J. Fisher
Dec 01	Kislev 27	Moe Post
Dec 02	Kislev 28	David Amiel Wertheim*
Dec 02	Kislev 28	Morris Freeman
Dec 03	Kislev 29	Rita Goldstein*
Dec 05	Tevet 01	Meyer Rodkin*
Dec 05	Tevet 01	Murray Golub
Dec 06	Tevet 02	Dr. David Sidel
Dec 07	Tevet 03	Max Theodor Hoehne*
Dec 08	Tevet 04	Freida Makower*
Dec 10	Tevet 06	Fannie Ginsburg
Dec 10	Tevet 06	Estelle Okeon
Dec 12	Tevet 08	Dan Polin*
Dec 13	Tevet 09	Florence Goldstein*
Dec 13	Tevet 09	Rose Kahn*
Dec 16	Tevet 12	Gilbert Brodkin
Dec 16	Tevet 12	Lou Herbin*
Dec 16	Tevet 12	Bea Smolker*
Dec 18	Tevet 14	Betty K. Greenberg
Dec 20	Tevet 16	Bertha P. Smolker*
Dec 20	Tevet 16	Walter Delengowski
Dec 21	Tevet 17	Joseph Cohen*

Dec 22	Tevet 18	Howard S. McCall
Dec 23	Tevet 19	Bruce Roberts*
Dec 24	Tevet 20	Abigail Michaela Sawyer*
Dec 24	Tevet 20	Alex Harris
Dec 27	Tevet 23	Anna Rodkin
Dec 29	Tevet 25	Martin Klazmer
Jan 03	Shevat 01	Harry Warshaw
Jan 04	Shevat 02	Harry Zeruld*
Jan 05	Shevat 03	Hannah Rosen bat Schmuel
Jan 06	Shevat 04	Sylvia Kalachman*
Jan 07	Shevat 05	Royal Milton Jacobs*

\*Memorial Plaque

## GOT SOMETHING TO TELL US?

Please send in any articles, notices, flyers or information you'd like included in the Shofar by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month preceding the edition in which you'd like it published. For example, if you have something to go in the January edition, send it by the 20<sup>th</sup> of December. The preferred email is [shofar@etzchayim-hsv.org](mailto:shofar@etzchayim-hsv.org), or you may use [bailabat@comcast.net](mailto:bailabat@comcast.net).

Thank you

## CHANUKAH AND CHRISTMAS: A STUDY IN ECUMENICISM

By Ted Roberts (1930-2020), the *Scribbler on the Roof*



Chanukah and Christmas have many similarities: They both fall in December. They both delight the merchant classes. They're both lighthearted holidays that don't sufficiently

emphasize their religious and historical origins. And both festivals love light.

Jews light candles. Christians light up evergreen trees. And finally, they're both followed by a flood of bankruptcy filings by Christian and Jewish families who have blown the December budget on munificent gifts to kids who will forget their parents' names, address, and phone number by the time they're 21. ("City Bank writes monthly about their new credit card, but not a word from Marvin," says one of my neglected friends.)

Chanukah used to be a skimpy little holiday – more patriotic than religious. Jewish families feasted on fried potato cakes or latkes – a delightful medley of potato, onion, and matzoh meal – de riquer on Chanukah. This is followed by long periods of togetherness as the family holds hands, suffers from heartburn, and chews Roloids together.

The Jewish family laps up potato cakes while their Christian neighbors dine on a great, golden goose surrounded by festive delicacies. This menu inequality, and perhaps a disagreement over the arrival date of the Messiah, is all that keeps Christians and Jews from some serious cost-cutting with a corporate merger.

In Jewish homes, after the prayers, candle lighting, latke feast and anti-acid therapy regimen, a long-winded story teller, like this author, tells the tale of Chanukah: the campaign of liberation waged by the Jews of the 2nd century before Christ.

In the old days, kids enjoyed a frugal Chanukah. They usually received a coin each day of the eight-day celebration. But sometime around the middle of the 20th century, inflamed by their Christian neighbors and their frenzied December generosity, Jews turned Chanukah into an eight-day orgy of gifts. It was a giant step

toward economic assimilation and bridge building between the two sister religions. Jews were now ALSO broke in January. Their checks bounced as well as those of their Christian friends. They could even tell better shopping stories due to the eight-day frenzy of exercising their credit cards.

I remember the scene when I was a youthful Chanukah celebrant. My grandmother, enthroned in the softest chair in the living room, handed out holiday coins to a line of grandkids, nephews, and nieces. There was a protocol – like when you were introduced to the Queen. You held out your hand as Grandmother reached into her purse and selected your coin.

This was no egalitarian exercise. The coins ranged from quarters to silver dollars. Both behavior and kinship went on the scale. A courteous, well cleaned up cousin with clean fingernails could cop a bigger prize than a grandkid who never called grandmother. The ceremony ended with a long, slow kiss to grandmother's cheek, an obligation which smart kids realized affected next year's disbursement.

My cousin, Arlene, as far-sighted as the prophet Elijah, was even smart enough to help cut up her Bubbe's latkes. And that was Chanukah in my day.