



Casting Light on the

Holidays

Close your eyes and envision the holidays without light. There'd be no menorahs or Christmas trees; no kinaras or colorful street lights.

Now open your eyes and bask in the light—especially if you're near West Hefner Road in OKC. That's where the nine-foot menorah will appear at the new Chabad Community Center. Rabbi Ovadia Goldman is Chabad's Spiritual Leader.

Chabad offers one of several Jewish educational programs in OKC. "Everyone's welcome at our Center," notes Rabbi Goldman, "but we definitely focus on the Jewish community."

Come sundown on December 21, that focus will be on Hanukkah. Hanukkah commemorates the Jews' defeat of Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek king who obsessively persecuted the Jews. When the Jews rededicated the temple, a one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days; thus the practice of lighting a menorah with eight candles.

"My wife and I, together with our five children, each light individual menorahs," notes Rabbi Goldman. "Then we have a beautiful tradition of watching the candles because they tell a spiritual story."

Rabbi Goldman's menorah also tells a story. "It's not a family artifact, but I know my menorah came from a Jewish community in Poland and survived the Holocaust. We place it, along with the rest of our menorahs, in the doorways of our home so we will see the lights when we pass by."

Home is also where Bill Green, Worship Pastor at Western Oaks Church of the Nazarene in OKC, shares his treasured holiday stories. In this case, the stories center around Immanuel (meaning "God with us").

"Even though our kids are married and live a distance away, we make a point to be together during Christmas," says Pastor Green. "Family members share how God has been with them—through thick and thin—during the past year. It's a very meaningful occasion."

Regarding church traditions, Pastor Green favors a candlelight communion service because, as he puts it, "Candlelight seems to have such a calming effect on the spirit."

"And I think we crave that same spirit all year long—not only the calmness, but also the spirit of giving. That's really the spirit of Christmas—God's gift of His only begotten Son. It seems to permeate through faith lines and cultures and grip

us with something that is almost mystical."

Giving is certainly an important part of Hanukkah as well: Rabbi Goldman's children are rewarded for progress made in their Jewish educational journey.

Gifts are also a part of Phyllis Davis' celebration; she is a member of the Temple B'nai Israel congregation. "My children received gifts on every night of Hanukkah," recalls Phyllis. "A special gift was reserved for the last night."

"In Sunday School my kids made clay menorahs. And my refrigerator was covered with menorah drawings. The kids got very excited about the holiday."

Lampstands are mentioned throughout the Torah. Rabbi Goldman references Numbers 8:1-4, when God directs Moses to "set up the seven lamps... to light the area in front of the lampstand. [The lampstand is] made of hammered gold—from its base to its blossoms."

Light also recurs throughout the New Testament. Pastor Green cites Jesus' words in John 8:12 (NLT). "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."

Both holidays share another common theme: the priceless gift of freedom.

As Pastor Green puts it, "Christmas is not just a sweet little story about a baby born in an unusual place. It's about the freedom we can have in Christ."

Rabbi Goldman casts freedom in a different light. "Hanukkah commemorates the first time in recorded history when any group fought for religious freedom."

"One of the most incredible gifts the U.S. offers to any human being is freedom of religion. We Jews believe that this country is extremely blessed because of that freedom."

"We keep hearing that the light of the western world is being diminished. But Hanukkah reminds us that we must stay the course. When we do the right, godly, beautiful thing, lightness will prevail."

Lori Williams lives in Bethany with her husband Dean and daughter Aurelia. This year her family will celebrate Christmas and light candles to dispel the darkness.

Secular holidays in December:

Kwanzaa (December 26-January 1):

Candle lighting is an essential part of Kwanzaa celebrations.

- The holiday was established in 1966 to help African Americans reconnect with their cultural and historical roots. Thus Kwanzaa is a cultural, not a religious, holiday.
- The kinara, or Kwanzaa candle holder, holds seven tapers. The lights represent the Seven Principles of the holiday: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith.
- Although lighting a kinara differs from lighting a menorah, many Jewish traditions have been incorporated into African American culture. Both cultures know firsthand of slavery and freedom.

Winter Solstice (also known as Midwinter): (Dec 21-22):

- Winter Solstice is the shortest day of the year. (Solstice comes from the Latin, and means "sun stand still.")
- Ancient cultures performed elaborate solstice ceremonies. They believed that their antic rituals would cause the sun to shine more brightly and continuously.
- Science enthusiasts delight in celebrating what is known about the cosmos, while wondering what is still to be discovered.
- But could the Winter Solstice also be seen in a whole new light? The stars in the night sky are a reminder of the star that appeared in Bethlehem. Even the darkest night can be illuminated by candles.

Cross-Cultural Hanukkah Traditions:

Like other Jews living in America, Rabbi Goldman's family will enjoy potato latkas for the holiday (The oil used for frying is reminiscent of the oil used to light the Temple candles). "Generally speaking, I love food," chuckles the Rabbi. "There's something very special about both the ancient and the modern latka recipes."

Fried jelly donuts are prepared in Israel to symbolize an ancient Jewish tradition: To help a child associate learning with sweetness, young scholars tasted honey while studying. In Arabic, this ritual is known as *hanakka*.

Cross-Cultural Christmas Traditions:

Jose and Haydee Morales, native Puerto Ricans now living in OKC, share their favorite "island" Christmas traditions:

Food: "Roast pork is typical," notes Haydee. "Hogs are ordered in August. You can have a 30 pound pig or a 300 pound hog. My grandmother roasted a hog over live coals. Everyone helped turn the hog and pick the rind. Yes, fingers got burned, but it was worth it!"

Music: "We love parrandas," recall Jose and Haydee. "A group gets together, usually after midnight, and quietly approaches a friend's house. We shout Asalto! and begin singing at the top of our lungs. The family invites us in, we eat together, and move on to the next house."

Duration: "Christmas begins the day after Thanksgiving and lasts until Three Kings Day on January 6. On January 5, young children put out grass and water for the Kings' camels. When the Kings come, they bring gifts for the children. The next day, the grass and water are gone, and the kids believe they've helped the wise men get to their destination.

Jubilation: "The feasting and fellowship is like a jumpstart to the happiness and joy that comes with celebrating Christ's birth," says Haydee. "We tell everyone that Christ was born with the one purpose of salvation: for you, for me, and for the whole world."

Rabbi Ovadia Goldman is the director of the
Chabad Community Center
3000 W Heffner Road • OKC

Hanukkah festivities not yet scheduled at time of publication. Call 286-0900 or check **JewishOKC.org** for the latest events.

Pastor Bill Green is the Worship Pastor at **Western Oaks Church of the Nazarene**
7901 NW 16th (corner of 16th and Council) • OKC
787-2042 • wonaz.com

Sunday, December 14, 10:30am

Adult Christmas Musical:

"The Spirit of Christmas"

Sunday, December 21, 6pm

Candlelight Communion for all Believers

DECEMBER 2008
MetroFamily

