

January 2017

Dear Congregants & Friends

All religions have both a particularistic and a universal bent to them. The particularistic side reflects the rules, holidays, practices, and theologies that give strength to and differentiate between one religion, or even between one movement or denomination within each religion, and another.

In the United States, for example, the Orthodox and Conservative Movements do not currently permit their rabbis to perform interfaith marriages, while those in the Reform and Reconstructionist Movements are permitted to do so, as reflected by the fact that a respected senior rabbi in the Conservative Movement was recently expelled from the Rabbinical Assembly, the rabbinical arm of the movement, for having performed an interfaith marriage for his daughter.

The universal side of religion, on the other hand, emphasizes the values and theologies that all of the major religions share together, three of these common foundational principles being that 1) all humans are created in the image of God; 2) we are to love express gratitude to God, whatever name(s) we may assign to this Higher Power; and 3) we are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Our collective responsibility as a synagogue community, our individual responsibility as people of faith and members of this community, is to determine, first, how we want our synagogue community to integrate the particular with the universal, and, second, how we wish to find our particular place in our synagogue community.

With the secular year 2016 fast winding down, and with the secular new year of 2017 fast approaching, and with the first night of Chanukah, this year, falling on Christmas Eve, I would like to leave us with a universal message from the Dali Lama, the leader of the world wide Buddhist community, a message which is expressed, in various ways, in our own sacred texts, “[Whatever our differences may be], the essence of all religions [which serve to bind us together] is love, kindness, compassion, and tolerance.”

May our religious, political, and business leaders, may we, individually and as a community, each of us, heed and take this inspirational message to heart during the coming secular year. Wishing your loved ones and you a joyful, meaningful, and healthy 2017!

Rabbi Howard Mandell