

On Kislev, 5781

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**Happy Kislev!** With sunset today comes Rosh Hodesh, marking our Hebrew entry into winter. And though best known for culminating with Hannukah, Kislev is quite a good time for **thanks-giving**.

But before we leave Fall: today (Monday, 29 Heshvan) has been Sigd, the newest Israeli national holiday, brought from Ethiopia by the Beta Israel community. It originated as a delayed echo of Yom Kippur, 50 days later -- the root *sigd*, just as in *masjid/misgad*/mosque, means 'prostration.' And it's become a key time for Ethiopian-Israelis to both celebrate their heritage, and to share it with the larger Jewish world. **Happy Sigd!**

Heshvan, the month just ending, is also Mar-Heshvan, with the prefix meaning 'bitter' -- it's the only month with no holidays in it, until Sigd came along anyway. Kislev, the month now beginning, is most famous for its 25<sup>th</sup> day, when Hannukah begins. We associate Hannukah with winter, as it often overlaps with Solstice and Christmas. Indeed, the days of Hannukah sport the darkest nights (either side of the new moon), close in time to the shortest days (winter solstice). The calendar hints at the old adage: **"don't curse the darkness; light a candle!"**

It's easy to curse the darkness encroaching upon us right now, as Covid case counts reach new highs, and the death count ticks ever upward. In these cold months ahead of us, it's harder to be outside for long (though it's still quite possible!); the more we're cooped up indoors, our stir-craziness and loneliness increase, and so does the temptation to socialize. With that, the risk rises, too. By springtime, as brighter warmer days bring better treatments (and vaccinations?!), we'll yet sing out, "Here Comes the Sun!" -- but first, it's to be "a long, cold, lonely winter."

What can we do? First and foremost, we **mustn't let down our guard**. We must all reach the tail end of the pandemic, together -- hale and whole and healthy -- without putting undue burden and risk on the low-wage workers, health providers, and others who can't sequester themselves. Endurance, friends! *Netzach*, endurance -- and *savlanut*, patience.

Second, we can lessen winter's grasp on us, and keep enjoying the outdoors (for safer socialization as well as self-sanity). Here we can emulate our Scandinavian friends, and follow *Friluftsliv*, outdoor winter living -- google it for inspirational examples and tips (or start here via [BBC](#) or [NYT](#)).

And third, as ever, we can count our blessings. *Hoda'ah*, **gratitude**, is a key Jewish value that we must all amplify in the season ahead.

This is a time to re/visit and re/absorb what many of us learned with Rabbi David Teutsch and Marilyn Price last year at our Retreat. Their recent volume, *From Gratitude to Blessings and Back*, includes classical Jewish perspectives plus writing prompts, which can help us channel that **attitude of gratitude**. This practice can help us through even the darkest of days. Count your blessings -- and then, when you think you've run out, count more. They're there, waiting for you to recognize them, and smile.

And of course, **Thanksgiving** arrives with the waxing gibbous moon, so that Kislev is a two-holiday month. Interestingly, T-Day and Hannukah may have a common origin, each as an echo of Sukkot: the Maccabees in 163 BCE apparently prayed for some good old fire from heaven to re-light the Temple's *ner tamid*, as happened in the Tabernacle on the first Festival of Booths (and after two months

they gave up and lit it themselves); early European Americans read their Bibles, and decided to make a fall harvest Feast of Tabernacles theirs, too.

So this year of all years, let's get religious about Thanksgiving! Religiously **social distancing**; and religiously **giving thanks**. A new ['haggadah' for Thanksgiving](#) features songs, poems, and activities drawn from the Talmud, Woody Guthrie, Mother Teresa, Hollywood, and beyond (an online analog to *The Faith of America*, coauthored by Reconstructionist founder Mordecai Kaplan, with its own edifying ways to celebrate the key values behind our secular holidays). Keep updating the theme. What might you add to your **Thanksgiving "seder" dinner**?!

Stay safe; stay connected; stay meaningful. Blessings for a Kislev filled with light, and gratitude.