

Rededicate Against Hate:

A Hanukkah 5777 Resource for America 2016

Background:

At the core of the Hanukkah story, the Maccabees fight for their right to express the Jewish religion openly. They live under an oppressive king who forbids Jewish practice. It is said that the dreidel game was played by the Jews to hide the fact that they were really studying Torah. The Jews win victory and reclaim the temple.

“Hanukkah” means rededication, referring to how the Maccabees rededicated the temple after claiming victory. By lighting the menorah, they established the temple as a place where the Jewish religion could once again be practiced freely.

Since Election Day in America, there has been a startling rise in hate crimes and hate incidents. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, “in the ten days following the election, there were almost 900 reports of harassment and intimidation from across the nation. Many harassers invoked Trump’s name during assaults, making it clear that the outbreak of hate stemmed in large part from his electoral success.”¹

The FBI defines a hate crime as a “criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.”² At the time of Hanukkah, when we celebrate our right to express the Jewish religion openly, we need to be conscious of the rise of incidents in America which specifically seek to oppress and attack those for their identity and how they choose to express it.

What To Do:

For each night of Hanukkah, there is a description of a hate crime since the election as documented in the New York Times column “This Week in Hate.” There is also a discussion question to spark conversation about how to grapple with and respond to this moment in America, and to more deeply explore each of our own identities.

Post a picture of your Menorah on social media with the hashtags #RededicateAgainstHate and #Hanukkah5777 to show that the Jewish community is using this moment to stand up to the rise of hate in our society, and to show solidarity with other vulnerable groups. Invite others to join you in lighting the menorah and participating in these discussions. We hope this resource will spark conversations among Jews of all ages and backgrounds, but it may not be suitable in its entirety for children under 10. For more information on using this resource with children and possible adaptations, see the “for educators/parents” section at the end.

1st Night:

On December 3rd, “a Muslim police officer (wearing a hijab) and her teenage son were accosted in Brooklyn by a man who yelled ‘go back to your country’ and shoved the boy. The officer had received a medal in 2014 for saving a baby from a fire. A man has been charged with a hate crime in the case.”³

Discussion Question: What are the most important ways that you express your Jewish or religious identity? How would it feel if someone made fun of you or targeted you for those ways? Are you comfortable with expressing your religious identity in public? If not, why?

2nd Night:

“When an interracial couple returned to their rental property in Cincinnati after Thanksgiving weekend, they found it badly damaged and defaced with swastikas, a racial slur and the words ‘white power.’”³

Discussion Question: In some ways, white Jews both benefit from white privilege and are potential targets of antisemitism. If you are a white Jew, how do you navigate this balance? If you are a Jew of Color, what points of intersectionality do you find between your religious and racial identities?

3rd Night:

On December 9th, “a student at Nassau Community College on Long Island notified security of swastikas and the words ‘Germany’ and ‘Heil Hitler’ drawn in a men’s restroom. A security guard had found separate swastikas in a stairwell and on a wall last Wednesday, and three other incidents of anti-Semitic graffiti were reported in October.”⁴

Discussion Question: Have you ever experienced an incident of anti-Semitism? How did you respond?

4th Night:

“In Denver, on Nov. 16, a transgender woman discovered that her car had been vandalized with slurs, a swastika and the word ‘die.’ She had previously written the messages ‘#NotMyPresident’ and ‘Love Trumps Hate’ on the windows.”⁵

Discussion Question: Have you ever experienced an incident of hate due to another part of your identity? How did you respond? Do you feel comfortable publicly expressing your political views? Has that changed at all, for better or worse, since the election?

5th Night:

"A uniformed MTA worker wearing a hijab was called a 'terrorist' by a man while riding the 7 train in Manhattan. The man followed her into Grand Central Terminal and pushed her to the ground; she was treated for leg injuries."³

Discussion Question: Have you ever been a bystander to an incident of hate? What did you do? If you are a bystander in the future, how do you hope to act while still protecting your own safety?

6th Night:

In the last week of November, "three mosques in California and one in Georgia have received letters threatening that Donald Trump "is going to do to you Muslims what Hitler did to the Jews." The letters were signed 'Americans for a Better Way.'"⁵

Discussion Question: What is a way you can be an effective ally to another group that is vulnerable in the post-election climate? Does your Jewish identity affect your sense of obligation to respond to hate crimes?

7th Night:

"The home in Moonachie, N.J., of Nikita Whitlock, a fullback for the New York Giants, was vandalized with swastikas, the phrase 'KKK' and the word 'Trump.' Police are investigating the vandalism as a hate crime."⁴

Discussion Question: What Jewish and/or American values are most important to you? How are you working to see those values represented in the world around you?

8th Night:

"At a Smith's supermarket in Albuquerque, N.M., on Nov. 23, a woman began shouting Islamophobic abuse at a shopper wearing a hijab. Employees removed the shouting woman from the store, but she waited in the parking lot for the woman in the hijab to emerge. Eventually, employees escorted the woman in the hijab to her car."⁵

Discussion Question: What's one thing you'll actively do to make a difference and practice Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) in 2017?

For Educators/Parents:

This is a crucial moment to teach our children about standing up against hate, celebrating the diversity of America, and treating all people with kindness. Many teachers and parents described how children heard the rhetoric during the election season clearly in the category of bullying. As children look to our elected officials as possible role models, we must do our part to make sure that any form of bigotry or prejudice that might be spread by those in power is seen as wrong and unacceptable. The normalization of hate speech can escalate to violence, which is why it is so important for it to be called out forcefully and early on before it can escalate.

This resource is a tool for starting conversations on these difficult topics through our celebration of Hanukkah. Just as many families might choose a night of Hanukkah to give Tzedakah (charity) instead of presents, this is a moment to reframe our celebration to create a better world through our actions. Depending on the age of the children, you could choose to only discuss certain questions or incidents based on what you find appropriate. Even just asking one of these questions could start a really important and meaningful conversation. For some Jewish children, this could be the first time they have seen or heard about anti-Semitic incidents in America, and this could be a time to process the feelings that brings up. Another goal is to teach Jewish children about the importance of showing solidarity with other targeted groups, as inspired by our teachings in the Torah about protecting the stranger. We hope that this will lead to meaningful conversations in your home or classroom as you celebrate Hanukkah this year.

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About Bend the Arc's New York Chapter

Bend the Arc's New York Chapter is bringing together Jewish Americans to advocate and organize for progressive policy in New York state and nationwide. We partner with diverse coalitions to win concrete changes in people's lives through strategic legislative and electoral campaigns. We believe that the Jewish community has a unique voice, history, and resources to contribute to broader movements for justice and equality. Join us at www.bendthearc.us/newyork.

References

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