

HANUKAH FEATURE

IN HONOR OF HANUKAH, JEWISH 8-DAY TRADITION OF SACRED CANDLE LIGHTING, THE LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE WILL PUBLISH A SERIES OF STORIES TO COMMEMORATE THE HOLIDAY WHICH COMMENCES AT SUNDOWN THURS. NOV. 30, AND LASTS UNTIL THE EVENING OF FRI., DEC. 8, 1972.

(NO MATTER HOW YOU SPELL IT - CHANUKAH, HANUKKAH, HANUKA, HANUKAH - IT ALL ADDS UP TO HAPPY HOLY DAYS WITH SUCCESSIVE CANDLES ON THE MENORAH.)

Schools and Religion

BY ROBERT COHEN

What does a Jewish family -- or community -- do when the public schools are used to observe Christian religious holidays?

Is Christmas in the schools permissible if Chanukah is celebrated too?

The American Jewish Congress answers these questions in a new 15-page pamphlet, "Religious Holiday Observances in Public Schools: A Guide for Community Action," sent to Jewish community relations councils and Congress chapters and divisions throughout the country. (Copies may be obtained by writing to Joseph B. Robison, director of the Congress' Commission on Law, Social Action and Urban Affairs, at 15 East 84th Street, New York, N. Y. 10028.)

The American Jewish Congress pamphlet includes the text of two documents -- both calling for public schools to be "religiously neutral" -- which illustrate what can be achieved to help eradicate sectarian activities in the public schools.

The first "Suggested Guidelines for the Public Schools Concerning Religious Holidays," was formulated by the Long Island Interfaith Council, consisting of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish representatives.

The guidelines define "religious celebration" as:

"(1) A worship or religious service of any kind, regardless of whether or not conducted by a clergyman.

"(2) Religious exhibits or displays, except to the extent that such display is a necessary or integral part of the study of some subject in the curriculum; e.g., art, history, etc., and with no intent to indoctrinate.

"(3) The presentation of religious music, except to the extent that such music is presented for its musical content only, rather than as a devotional exercise."

The guidelines also take the position that the "substitution of the 'winter season' celebration for a religious observance is a "profanation and secularization of what truly is a period of religious significance for Christians and Jews."

The second document, "Guidelines for the Public Schools Concerning Religious Holidays," was issued earlier this year by the Massachusetts Department of Education.

While the importance of religion in history, culture and the arts "should have a place in education," the Massachusetts guidelines declare, the definition of what is appropriate rests on whether the purpose or effect of such practices is the advancement of religion.

Under these guidelines, music having significance for a particular religion (such as Christmas carols) would not be performed in school during the holiday period.

The possible effects of religious holidays on attendance should be considered in planning school-year calendars, and no student should be penalized or deprived of makeup opportunities for religious absences "or pressured to choose between school attendance and religious observance," the Massachusetts guidelines declare.

Both the Long Island and Massachusetts guidelines stress the responsibility of the public schools to teach brotherhood and respect for all individuals and all beliefs.

In the words of the Long Island guidelines: "Teaching in the public schools may take cognizance of the fact that religious holidays are observed differently by different religious groups. Such teaching, if presented, should be factual and not devotional, and avoid any doctrinal impact or any implication that religious doctrines on which such holidays are based have the support of state authority."

The American Jewish Congress "Guide for Community Action" asserts that while religion in the home, church and synagogue "serves incom-

parably to enoble the spirit of mankind," religion in the public schools "serves only to harass, hurt and dislocate children of minority faiths and to impair wholesome classroom relationships."

During festivities and celebrations which take up a major part of the school program during December, "the Jewish child is left with the cruel choice of participating in religious observances contrary to his belief or of standing exposed as odd and non-conformist," the American Jewish Congress report asserts, adding:

"Easter programs in the public schools present an even more serious problem of the Jewish child.

"It is frequently said that the most important single cause for anti-Semitism has been the Christian charge of deicide against the Jew. If there is one place where this dogma should not be repeated or reinforced in any form, it is surely the public school."

Despite the decisions of the Supreme Court establishing the impropriety of religious practices in public schools, sectarian holiday observances persist in many areas, the American Jewish Congress study reports, adding:

"It is appropriate for Jewish communities to review the situation in the public schools which their children attend and to take appropriate action where they find that an unacceptable situation exists."

Action proposals are spelled out in the memorandum, which states that while public school officials "would not knowingly hurt any child committed to their care," they are often "unaware of the harm caused to children of the Jewish or other minority faiths by sectarian intrusions."

Any community program to end religious observances in public schools may "draw on the full range of procedures by which Americans seek to win acceptance of their point of view," according to the American Jewish pamphlet. These include:

"(1) Efforts to educate school and other public officials, religious leaders and the public at large.

"(2) Arrangements for joint action by similarly minded groups.

"(3) Representations to public officials urging corrective steps -- backed, where necessary, by legal action to enforce constitutional principals."

HAPPY HANUKKA



Chanukah Greetings



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