

I light candles on the solstices. I drink on New Year's. We mark birthdays according to the Roman calendar. We wear costumes on Halloween. I converted to Judaism when I was 14, had my daughter baptized in the Episcopal Church before returning to my religion of choice, and absorb ethics from a variety of religious streams. But when I was invited to go caroling on Christmas, I felt more comfortable saying no. Why is that? What is it about Christian holidays that makes me so uncomfortable?

**The obvious answer would be that I am Jewish. Is it that simple?**

Christmas is a difficult holiday for me to wrap my head around. The tree is a solstice holdover. Jesus was not born in December, so it makes no sense to celebrate his birth in December. And the materialism associated with the season makes my skin crawl. I can't view Christmas as a secular holiday even though I think that is how most people celebrate it. Part of it comes down to the language of Christmas.

Christmas festivities use religious, Christian language. Words like **savior, king, and messiah** appear in the language of celebration. It is impossible for me to separate the ideas from the words. So while people who are comfortable with Christmas hear "re-birth" or "renewel" or "hope for humanity," all I hear is "**Christ the savior is born.**" This the main reason why I don't feel comfortable being an active participant in Christmas activities.

I also am afraid of Christmas. Afraid of how easy it is to celebrate it. Afraid of how seductive the "season" is. Afraid that if I get comfortable with Christmas my kids are going to get comfortable with Christianity and I'll end up being the-mother-who-let-her-kids-

assimilate. I feel unsettled when my kids want the holiday season costume packs for their online games. I feel happy when my kids don't know what date Christmas falls on.

Christmas plucks on my separatist nerve. **When I see red and green, I am reminded of the aggressive desire of Christianity (as a cultural force) to convert non-Christians.**

This coexists with my knowing that none of my Christmas celebrating friends (even the super religious Christian ones) have any interest in seeing me go Christian. So perhaps my reaction is driven by emotion, or by the same un-nameable thing that drives Christians to feel uncomfortable with Jewish practice. Maybe it is just a flavor preference, like enjoying black licorice, or hating it.

*At the core of my aversion is the feeling that I am forced to experience Christmas.*

**Christmas is a religious holiday that creeps into our culture under a cloak of faux secularism. It is cultural phenomenon that makes me an unwilling participant in a religious experience.** It is on the radio, on the street signs, on the White House lawn. I cannot choose it, or not choose it; it is force-fed to me. I want to be able to *share* Christmas with my Christian friends and family; not be subjected to Christmas by my ostensibly secular culture.

I am delighted that of all the places I've lived, Berkeley is the most un-Christmasy a spot I've been in. Very few people have lights and decorations out, the radio stations don't really play Christmas music, and there are so many other religions/experiences here that Christmas is just one of a slew of winter holidays.

This story came from a secular Jew who probably goes through this delima every year. However I picked up on some things that to me are very interesting.

- 1 Savior, King and Messiah are so Christian
2. Christian are such an evangelizing nation
3. Christmas is really a religious holiday cloaked in secularism

I thought we could dissect these things, and think it through with us as well, because even here at our Messianic Congregation, should we celebrate Christmas....does this make us Non-Jewish?