

My Early Hanukkah Gift (January 2006)

It is, as most implicitly know, extremely rare for Hanukkah to come after Christmas. Albeit they both fall on the 25th day of their respective months, Hanukkah invariably comes first. Sometimes we get lucky and find ourselves able to go shopping well in advance of the consumer rush, but this year is truly unique. If you play your cards right, you can actually go and buy all your Hanukkah presents during the post-Christmas sales. An “I-will-never-buy-retail” shopper’s dream come true.

For me, however, my gift came back in November. The celebration of my 25th anniversary here at Ner Tamid was an extraordinary act of generosity and *kovod* (respect) that most rabbis can only dream of. The truth is, that weekend was so overwhelming—in both scope and emotion—only now am I able to begin to unwrap it.

I write this at the beginning of our annual end-of-December slow-down. For the first time in nearly two months I finally have the opportunity to stop and reflect on that first Shabbat of November. I am genuinely awestruck and humbled at the thought of all the energy and love that went into making the celebration of my 25 years here possible. I will not name the individuals responsible for making it all happen, there are simply too many (and I fear that I would leave someone out). What I will say is that every one—from the chairs of the event and the committee organizers to those who came to the Friday night service to those who feted me at that service to those who contributed to the Ad Journal to those who donated the Torah covers to those who decorated the lobby with my favorite movie posters to those who made the movie about me to those who sang and danced in my honor to those who came to celebrate with me and my family at the gala dinner—touched me in ways I cannot articulate in words. It was the most rewarding and spiritually nourishing moment of my career. The hugs, the written notes and simple gestures of presence will sustain me for years to come.

The lesson you taught me that weekend, especially now as we enter the season of Hanukkah, is most powerful: The most valuable gifts anyone can give—as the Book of Exodus (Parashat Terumah) informs—are from those “*asher yidvenu libo / whose heart so moves him/her*”. The gifts that mean the most are those which come from and go to the heart.

For all of you who gave so willingly, please accept my humble thanks and know that your gift will always reside in the deepest recesses of my soul. As our credit card companies would have

us understand, the most valuable gifts we can give are priceless. (And they never break.) It's a lesson worth learning, especially in this season of giving gifts.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your rabbi. I consider it a sacred trust.