

TWO TRADITIONS. ONE WISH. PEACE ON EARTH.

As Kyle sang in South Park: "It's hard to be a Jew at Christmas."

Growing up, Christmas to me always felt like I was looking into a toy shop or sweet shop window at things I couldn't have.

I enjoyed the Christmas parties and the festivities – still do – but, being Jewish, I always felt like the outsider at the party.

At home, growing up, we neither celebrated Xmas nor Chanukah, the Jewish festival of lights, which takes place around the same time. Father Christmas didn't visit Jewish children and my parents treated Christmas just like any other day.

When I had children of my own, not wanting them to feel left out, OH (other half) and I experimented briefly with Christmas. We left out mince pies at bedtime and crumbs on the plates when they awoke.

Our children had pillowcases rather than stockings which we filled with goodies. I would stash these away until Christmas Eve. One year our six year old son found my hiding place. He marked all the things he'd found with a felt tip pen so, when they later turned up in his pillowcase, he was able to prove once and for all that Santa did not exist!

As our children grew older, Chanukah replaced Christmas. So our kids wouldn't feel left out we gave them a gift every day. Something special at the beginning or the end and small presents in-between such as you might put in a stocking. As Chanukah lasts eight days it more than compensated for Christmas!

Each night of Chanukah we light a candle on the special eight branched candlestick known as the Chanukiah or the Chanukah menorah. At the end of the eight days all eight candles are lit. Actually nine - because there is an extra candle on the Chanukah menorah that's used to light all the others.

There are Chanukah parties, songs, games and special Chanukah foods such as donuts and latkas. A spinning top – "the dreidel" is spun. Raisins are won or lost depending on where it lands.

Our son, when he was seven, wrote a poem about Chanukah:

"How I love to go to bed with the candles shining in my head.

And when I have dreams, how lovely Chanukah seems."

He's now a father himself. Each year, until Covid 2020, he and his wife have made a Chanukah party for their children, friends and family. The story of Chanukah is told and acted out with costumes, arts and crafts.

All the children make and decorate their own Chanukiahs. These are then lined up and lit for everyone to see. It is a magical moment.



Our children and grandchildren have grown up celebrating Chanukah and have never felt – as I did as a child – that they are missing out by not having Christmas.

In fact, you could say that we enjoy the best of both worlds!



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