



# The Bulletin Riverdale Temple

מִמִּזְרַח שָׁמֶשׁ עַד מְבֹאֵר מִזְרְחָל שָׁמַיִם

*From the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof,  
the name of the Eternal One is to be praised.*

**Worship Services (see calendar on p. 2 for details)**

**Fridays**

Jan. 1	7:00 p.m.	Shabbat Evening Service
Jan. 8	7:00 p.m.	Shabbat Evening Service
Jan. 15	7:00 p.m.	Shabbat Evening Service
Jan. 22	7:00 p.m.	Shabbat Evening Service
Jan. 29	4:30 pm	Tot Shabbat Service celebrating Tu B'sh'vat
	7:00 p.m.	Shabbat Evening Service

**Saturdays**

Jan. 2	10:30 a.m.	Shabbat Morning Service
Jan. 9	10:30 a.m.	Shabbat Morning Service
Jan. 16	10:30 a.m.	Shabbat Morning Service
Jan. 23	10:30 a.m.	Shabbat Morning Service
Jan. 30	10:30 a.m.	Shabbat Morning Service

**All services and events at Riverdale Temple are being offered remotely via Zoom or Facebook Live except where noted otherwise.**

**Please consult the e-blasts for the latest information on Zoom and Facebook Live links. To subscribe to our e-blasts, please email [administrator@riverdaletemple.org](mailto:administrator@riverdaletemple.org).**

**Please check e-blasts for up-to-date information.**

**Communal Challah Bake on Zoom  
January 24, 3:00 p.m.**

(see p. 11 for details and go to <https://riverdaletemple.org/virtual-rt/> to sign up)



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## THE RABBI'S COLUMN

Happy (secular) New Year! May this be a better year for all of us. Although I usually look forward in my bulletin articles, I would like to begin with a few words about Chanukah.

Last month, *The New York Times* published an opinion piece by the writer Sarah Prager, entitled, "Saying Goodbye to Hanukkah."<sup>1</sup> Prager grew up in an interfaith household, celebrating both her father's Jewish holidays and her mother's Catholic ones. Her spouse was brought up Catholic. Now that Prager has two children, she has decided not to celebrate Chanukah any more. Although she says she has a connection to Judaism, she will continue to celebrate Christmas and Easter, but will leave her menorah on a shelf in the basement.

It is important to note that Prager does not consider herself Jewish. We come back to the old question as to whether Jews are a people or a member of a religion. My answer is always "both," but Prager has, as an American, absorbed the Christian concept that Judaism is only a religion, and, further, a matter of belief. If you do not believe that the stories are true, then you are not Jewish.

Prager celebrates Christmas and Easter, because, to her, they are about family gatherings, Santa, and the Easter Bunny. This is, obviously, not Christian, but Prager would be first to admit that she does not consider herself Christian. So why does she feel it is okay to celebrate Christmas and not Chanukah?

The key difference is the blessing over the candles. Decorating a Christmas tree does not require any kind of belief or actual religious ritual. What sticks in Prager's craw are the two blessings over the candles: "Blessed are You, Eternal our Gd, who makes us holy with His commandments, and commands us to kindle the lights of Chanukah," and "Blessed are You, Eternal our Gd, who did miracles for our ancestors, in those days, at this season."

Could Prager light the menorah without the blessings? Could her Chanukah be simply about candles, latkes, and presents? I suppose that is possible. Even though that would be fairly meaningless from a Jewish standpoint, at least her children would grow up knowing that they have some connection to Judaism.

I believe that Prager is making two mistakes. First, in thinking of Judaism as only a religion, she writes herself out of the book of Judaism. I realize that many mainstream Jews would not consider Prager Jewish in the

1. [www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/parenting/hanukkah-family.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/parenting/hanukkah-family.html)

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