Do You Believe in Miracles?
Seeing the Extraordinary Within the Ordinary

On the 25th of the month of Kislev in the Jewish calendar (this year, nightfall of December 21) Jews around the world will light Chanukah candles in their homes. This act commemorates the miracles that occurred at the time of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, 138 BCE.

After a time of peaceful co-existence with the Greeks who had conquered and now governed the Land, some Jews became Hellenized while others remained true to the Torah. The Greeks began to oppress the observant Jews. This worsened over time, till at last one Jewish family, the Hasmonaeans, or Maccabees, rallied some followers and rose up against the mighty Greeks. Miraculously, they prevailed — the few against the many, the pious against the pagan, divine light over human darkness.

The Greeks had taken over the Temple sanctuary and defiled all the oils kept for the temple lamps, symbolically destroying the essence of the Jewish soul. When the Hasmonaeans defeated them, they found only one remaining jar of oil with the seal of the High Priest, with just enough oil for one day. Again, a miracle occurred as the oil burned for 8 days, until (continued on page 3)

Me and My Advent Wreath

I grew up in a family of Lutheran background. Today I still feel quite connected to my faith and traditions. Part of that tradition is the Advent Wreath; something one can find in many Christian homes and most churches in the month leading up to Christmas. As a child, I was always captivated by the Wreath, and as a young adult a lot of people ask me about its significance. The Wreath is symbolic in several ways, but also carries sentimental value for many individuals, including myself.

The construction of the Advent Wreath is quite simple, although many times I have seen elaborate wreaths that must have required days of labour to put together. Basically, some evergreen boughs wrapped in circle, with four placed upright in Although the roots, the wreath has taken on new meaning with the advent of Christianity. As a Christian symbol, the advent wreath originated in Germany, home of Martin Luther, where it was called an Adventskranz. Over time, it was adopted by (continued on page 2)

Enjoy the Bounties

STOP... stop being a slave of your desire... stop being a selfish, self oriented, egocentric, hard hearted, callous, narcissistic person... think of other human beings... think about their sufferings... think about their sorrows... think about their pain... have you ever stopped in the fast pace of life to reflect on the blessings you have instead of taking them for granted? Does the fear of dying from hunger ever seize you? No — Because you think that hunger’s paws can never scratch you...

Ramadan tapped at the closed door of my heart and opened it with its silver key so quickly that no one heard the sound except my soul.

Every year it knocks on the door quietly when I forget about my fellow’s suffering, when I become involved too much with my life, when I forget about the blessings that God has given me. I feel as though it awakens me from a deep slumber and touches my soul and recharges my spirit when I fast from dawn to sunset every day for 30 days. *

Only when I am so thirsty that my tongue is a desert do I know the value of rain. Only when my stomach is empty and growling for food do I know the real meaning of hunger. It is only then when I am really (continued on page 2)
many different Christian denominations but is still closest to the heart of the Lutheran tradition.

As a child, I always thought the Advent Wreath was just a wonderful example of beauty, and it reminded me of Sunday School pictures of Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus and the Wise Men under the Star of Bethlehem. But as my faith and education progressed, the wreath took on a bigger meaning. The greenery of the wreath reminds me of the world we live in, but also of the eternal nature of God, embodied in the circle of leaves which do not fall. The four candles also have a two-fold symbolism. Advent begins four Sundays prior to the Feast of Christmas on the first day of the church year. On each of these four Sundays one candle is lit on the Advent Wreath in homes and churches around the world. The lighting of each new candle symbolizes a growing light of promise and hope that the world has in the coming of Christ – a symbolism made more powerful by the darkness of winter. As a youth, I didn’t quite understand this point growing up in Southern California where light was never an issue. However, after living in Germany when I was in high school, I came to realize this wonderful significance!

Christmas is a season of wonder and hope and light for all Christians. As a Lutheran I think I’m able to give that hope and wonder a form — a wreath full of light!

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(Bounties continued)

forced to think of poor people around the world who do not know the smell of fresh white rice or the taste of creamy milk; people who get their food from the garbage cans and who eat the leftovers from my plate. Ramadan makes me humane enough to think of those poor people as my sisters and brothers and reminds me how important it is to share my wealth with them.

It also reminds me to abstain from lying, cheating, arguing, and all other forms of evil, cultivating a lasting awareness of God. It cleans the dust from my heart so that a fresh spring can flow. As I hear the rhythm of that spring, I bow in front of my Creator on the day of Eid and thank Him for His mercy and blessings on me.

Q you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you might become pious {Al-Qur’an 2:183}

I can now celebrate by meeting with relatives and eating the delicious food with which God has blessed me. As time passes, and my spiritual batteries start to lose their charge, once again Ramadan will knock at my heart’s door.

Affifa Naz is a member of the Muslim Students Association. Ramadan will run until the day of Eid; the breaking of the fast; this year, either Dec. 26th or 27th.

Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells... Happy Birthday Guru Gobind Singh Ji

The holiday season has arrived and finds us all scurrying around to malls and shopping centres as we try to decide on just the right gift for that special someone. But with all the Christmas hoopla, sometimes the special events of other religious faiths can be left out. Kwanza, Chanukah, and Ramadan for example, all take place in the month of December. And, not to be left out, so does the celebration of the birth of the tenth Guru of the Sikh religion, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji was born in 1666 to Sri Guru Teg Bahadur and his Wife, Mata Gujri Ji. Guru Gobind Singh Ji as the last Living Guru for the Sikh religion. Throughout his life, Guru Gobind Singh Ji epitomized the lifestyle of a Sikh 'spiritual-soldier'. On one hand, he was a very dedicated spiritual man who wrote and preached to the Sikhs the many wisdoms and principles of life everyone should follow. However, he also fought the oppression levied against Indian Sikhs and Hindus by leading the powerful Sikh army against the Mughal Emperor, Aurezabah.

One of the major achievements in his life was the creation of Khalsa. The Khalsa, or Universal Brotherhood, was an establishment created by Guru Gobind Singh Ji for all baptized Sikhs. Bringing together individuals from various castes and occupations, he made them symbolically equal in the eyes of the Lord by having them drink a special nectar of baptism water and having them carry the five symbols of a true Sikh -- Kes (uncut or shorn hair), Kangha (a 7-8 cm portable comb kept in the person’s turban), Kara (a steel bracelet signifying unity and universal brotherhood), Kachha (drawstring boxer briefs) and Kirpan (a ceremonial dagger, representing strength and willingness to stand up for what is right and just). With the establishment of the Khalsa, Sikhs have been able to retain a unique identity that is recognized all around the world.

This year according to the Sikh calendar, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s Birth Celebration will be held on January 5th, 2001. So in essence, Sikhs also have a lot to celebrate during the holiday season. If only I could figure out some carols in recognition of this glorious day, but I digress.

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new oil could be harvested. The next year, the Rabbis designated these days to be holidays of praise and thanks for the military victory, the re-dedication of the Temple and the miraculous oil.

For me, Chanukah brings to mind many questions regarding miracles. What exactly is a miracle? Do I believe in miracles? Are there miracles occurring in our time?

If we agree that a miracle is a beneficent occurrence that cannot be explained by the laws of nature, then we must first ask the question: What is a natural event? Why wouldn’t any natural event that awes and excites us be considered a miracle? The truth is that we don’t really understand the ‘laws’ of nature. We know that the sun will rise tomorrow, but we still have no idea as to why nature was created that way. If the sun were to rise only once in our lifetime, everyone would rush out to see it, proclaiming it a miraculous event, but since we experience a sunrise every day we see it as just another ordinary part of our lives. We become so accustomed to something that, no matter how extraordinary it may be, we take it for granted.

Many people say, “If I only saw a miracle, then I would believe.” What are we waiting for? Miracles are happening around us every moment. Life itself is a miracle — consider the wonder of human birth! We become so distracted by our daily round of responsibilities and obligations, we tend to ignore the miracles we live and see each day. It is not that we don’t believe in miracles; we simply stop taking the time to appreciate them. To see a miracle means to recognize the uncommon within the common, the extraordinary within the ordinary. When we can do this, supernatural occurrences are no longer impressive. Your faith, and life, should not be dependent upon such miracles, for if you have a mature relationship with a reality that is higher than yourself and you realize that the ultimate miracle is our very existence, you no longer crave the extraordinary. The divine miracle of nature is not to be found in its once-in-a-lifetime events, but in its relentless regularity.

Because so many of us take for granted the many wonders before our eyes, G-d does, on occasion, perform miracles to shake us, to elevate us to a higher plane of awareness. Such was the case in the miracle of Chanukah. But, we must realize that such obviously supernatural miracles are infrequent, especially today. This world was created with a natural or...
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