

Hanukkah was one of the first Jewish holidays I celebrated. I was in my early twenties and devouring Jewish books left and right. One of the first Jewish books I read was a book on Humanistic Judaism called '*God-Optional Judaism*' by Judith Seid (still in print and a great read if you are of a more secular bent!). In her book, the author talked about her ambivalence towards Hanukkah's message: were the Maccabees liberators or intolerant zealots? I remember pondering those questions and gathering with what would become my Jewish community in the Netherlands, in those dark, dreary December days. I remember the marvel of seeing an entire table covered in aluminum foil with candles ablaze: a glorious fire hazard I had never encountered before.

For years, I enjoyed celebrating Hanukkah in a low-key way. I would light my candles, eat my *latkes* and *sufganiyot* and belt out *Ma'oz Tzur*. Much of my focus was usually spent cooking elaborate

with the complexities of the 'December dilemma'; navigating Christmas expectations with extended family as well as encouraging my kids to enjoy the beauty of the Solstice festivals but also safeguarding and cultivating their own sense of unique Jewishness.

It is interesting how such a low-key Jewish holiday has become so high stakes in the contemporary Jewish conversation on assimilation, Jewish identity and interfaith relationships. How do we balance our own sense of self while extending love and grace to those who celebrate differently?

Perhaps this strange pandemic year, where everything is '*hafuch*', topsy turvy, we can all give ourselves permission and space to reimagine Hanukkah to make it more meaningful, more intentional and more relevant to our lived experience. Now, the imagery of a small band of brave Jewish warriors facing off against an overpowering enemy is speaking to me in new