

THANKSGIVI-KUH SAMEACH!

ONCE IN AN ETERNITY (OR AT LEAST ONCE IN A REALLY, REALLY LONG TIME), THANKSGIVING AND HANUKKAH COLLIDE

BY ANNA WELTNER

Have you conceived of something so magnificent as the Menurkey?

A (more than) successfully funded Kickstarter project by New Yorker Anthony Weintraub, the Menurkey is a menorah in the shape of a turkey: nine feathers, nine candles. It was actually conceived of and designed by Weintraub's 9-year-old son, Asher.

The Menurkey is just one of the ways American Jews are celebrating this year's uncommon intersection of Thanksgiving and Hanukkah. The eight-day celebration of Hanukkah starts this year on Thursday, Nov. 28, the same day as Thanksgiving. Depending on how you look at it, this overlap may never happen again.

Lauren Bandari, executive director of the Jewish Community Center of San Luis Obispo, discovered the anomaly when syncing her Hebrew and Gregorian calendars in late summer, around the same time many American Jews began noticing the overlap as well.

"The Jewish calendars are usually distributed at the end of the Jewish New Year, which is in September," Bandari explained, "so there was excitement around it. It's unusually early."

There are multiple schools of thought about the uniqueness of this occurrence. Last January, Jewish blogger Jonathan Mizrahi did some serious number-crunching to this effect, and the results of his calculations got the American Jewish community talking.

Thanksgiving occurs on the fourth Thursday of November, making Nov. 28 the latest date upon which Thanksgiving can occur. This date is also the earliest on which Hanukkah can occur, Mizrahi pointed out. The Hebrew calendar repeats every seven years, and the Gregorian calendar every 19. All other things being equal, the holidays

should overlap approximately every 7-times-19 years—or 133 years. (In fact, the last time the two overlapped was in 1888—although this would have been before President Roosevelt changed the date of Thanksgiving from the last Thursday in November to the fourth Thursday in November.)

But the overlap happens far less frequently than every 133 years, due to the gradual drift of the Hebrew year "through" the Gregorian one, at a rate of approximately four days every 1,000 years. Thus, Nov. 29 will become the earliest possible date on which Hanukkah can occur. The next time Hanukkah falls on Nov. 28 will be in 2146—but this will be a Monday.

Barring any modifications to the Hebrew calendar, it will continue advancing forward in the Gregorian calendar at an approximate rate of one day every 250 years, until it completes a full revolution. The next time Hanukkah falls on Thursday, Nov. 28, will be in the year 79811. By that time, who knows whether our planet will still be habitable—let alone if we will still be celebrating Hanukkah and Thanksgiving?

But the overlap of the two holidays is far more than just a chance to solve word problems that inevitably lead us to the end of the world as we know it. It's also a chance for reflection on what the two holidays have in common.

"I know for me personally this year, it makes me

think about Thanksgiving on a much deeper level than I probably have in years past," Bandari said. "It reminds me of what the pilgrims did stand for ... which was finding religious freedom and practicing how they wanted to practice ... I touch into the story of Hanukkah, which is about the Maccabees practicing the way they wanted to practice."

"It brings out the common denominator," said Rabbi Chaim Hilel, of the Jewish organization Chabad of San Luis Obispo. Hilel described the two overlapping holidays as "a symbol of religious freedom" and "a triumph of the American spirit."

In the spirit of both occasions, he said, Chabad plans to build a "candelah" or menorah out of canned food, which will later be donated to the food bank.

During the eight nights of Hanukkah, the Jewish Community Center holds a public menorah lighting in downtown San Luis Obispo's Mission Plaza every year. The first night is followed by a Hanukkah party with traditional food and games at the nearby San Luis Obispo Museum of Art. This year, Bandari said, the JCC plans to put a Thanksgiving spin on traditional Hanukkah dishes, offering cranberry-filled *sufganyot*, or doughnuts, and mock chopped liver in the shape of a turkey, the latter courtesy of chef Brenda Hack.

In addition to the usual Hanukkah decorations, Bandari added, "We'll add this year some Thanksgiving kitsch, some paper turkeys or pilgrim hats. We'll—I can't use the word 'ham it up,' not really kosher—but, you know, we'll turkey it up for this year's Hanukkah party." Δ

Arts Editor Anna Weltner says, "Challah! Challah back at aweltner@newtimeslo.com."

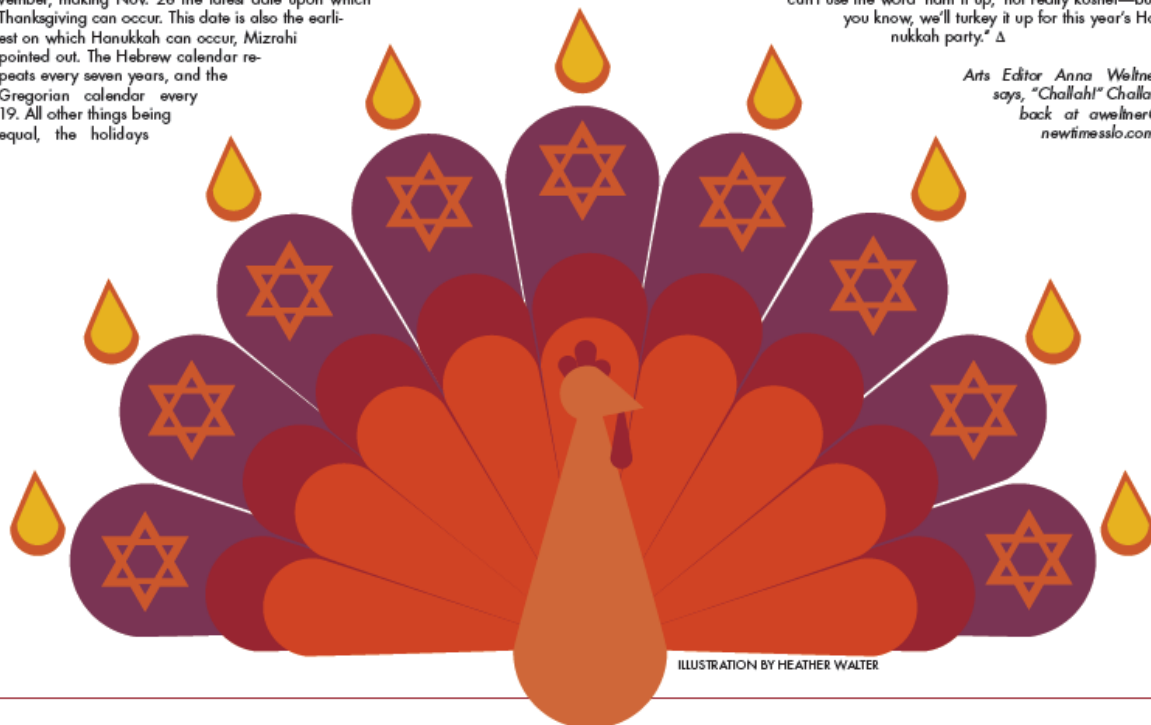


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