

The Gift of a Tree

By F. Hannah/Faith Kelman

My father is 83 now, an active and healthy New Englander. And I? Well, let us say I am a couple of respectable generations younger. In my later years, my spiritual journey, which has been a privilege in itself, has brought me to the Tents of Sarah, wherein I dwell with Joy.

When family members who love one another deeply, and take delight in celebrations of spiritual importance, find their spiritual journeys diverging, deep anxieties and losses are felt. For my father and myself, the tradition of the Christmas tree was full of incredible mystery, magic and beauty. We spent hours looking for the right tree on the days before December 25. We trudged through woods, sometimes snowy, always cold, in the fast-fading light of afternoon, sizing our intended choice carefully. A tree had to be cut all by ourselves, at least 8-10 feet tall to touch the New England parlor ceiling, always a white pine, with branches all around and no gaps. It would seem so small outdoors in its forest, but brought to the house, the tree became a giant and often had to be trimmed further. When dressed, the lights went on first and there in twilight stood this bushy beauty, glowing with magic, casting shadows on the ceilings, waiting for each ornament and the story of each, some of those stories coming from ornaments from my father's childhood. For many years there was a tinfoil pinecone that had been on my first Christmas tree, hung there by loving parents and pointed out to a baby not a year old as hers. The mere fragrance of cut pine yet brings back this memory of togetherness and happiness.

These days neither my father nor I have any desire to place a Christmas tree in the house. Yet, when talking with him, I encouraged he have a tree, offered to go with him to cut one and dress it for his own home, so that old as we both are, we could share that magic together. I would compromise not to lose that family bond of joy.

"I do not want a Christmas tree," my father said. "I have no further desire to end the life of a living thing, or to dress it in gaudy trappings that have no meaning for its nature, only for me and my needs. Let me show you something." Over the next few minutes from the windows he pointed out trees he had planted which have grown in beauty and have strong roots in the earth around him. "These will be here, I hope, for the next generations. And you should tell them I planted them." He paused a few moments. "Don't you folks have some sort of holiday about planting trees?"

I wish everyone of us who chooses to embrace Judaism, and faces the "December Dilemma" of Christmas trees might have a father who with wisdom gives us the gift of Freedom, to choose our own paths, and to see in a new light and with a full heart, the true meanings of those things this Universe gives us as gifts, not only things, but the understanding of their meanings in our lives. I wish everyone might have the gift of Peace and a happy heart while embracing different truths.

I am so grateful to the father who gives me freedom and love, and finds ways for us to share. I am grateful for a father who continues to grow in his own life and pursue his own spiritual journey without, for one moment, being less than encouraging to me in mine. I

want him to know, from where I stand, his action is very “Jewish”. I thank the Holy One for the incredible man I know as father.

Perhaps my father’s gift is also for you, as well as for me.