

The hidden holidays

A few days ago, Seattle-Tacoma International Airport management removed all the Christmas trees from a holiday display in response to a rabbi's request to add a giant Jewish menorah to the decorations. This is disturbing. Apparently, Rabbi Elazar Bogomilsky thought a prominently displayed giant menorah would give adequate Jewish representation to a Christian-oriented theme.



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

Bogomilsky even hired an attorney and threatened to sue the Port of Seattle if it did not add the menorah to the display of trees decorated with red ribbons and bows. However, he found the decision to remove the trees appalling. "Everyone should have their spirit of the holiday. For many people the trees are the spirit of the holidays, and adding a menorah adds light to the season," Bogomilsky said.

Bogomilsky's lawyer, Harvey Grad said, "They've darkened the hall instead of turning the lights up. There is a concern here that the Jewish community will be portrayed as the Grinch."

According to airport spokeswoman Terri-Ann Betancourt, the port staff consulted their attorneys and decided that adding the menorah could have led to adding symbols for other religions and cultures. Nonetheless, they must not have felt too confident in their decision because they asked maintenance workers to remove the trees during the early Saturday graveyard shift, when few people would be around to notice.

Bogomilsky was right when he said, "For many people, the trees are the spirit of the holidays." Trees have been a center of celebration for some time, and not exclusively for Christians. The ancient Egyptians were the beginning of a long line of cultures that treasured and worshipped evergreens long before Christmas existed. They brought branches into their homes when the winter solstice arrived to symbolize life's triumph over death. The Romans celebrated the winter solstice by decorating their houses with greens and lights and exchanging gifts. The practice of using trees, exchanging gifts, and displaying lights for celebrations whether religious or secular is nothing new.

The evergreen trees decorating

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the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport should not be considered a Christian-oriented display that gave no recognition to its Judaic roots. The use of trees as symbols of celebration is as secular as it is religious. They were just decorated trees being used as symbols of the holiday season. The season is equally as holy for Jews celebrating Hanukkah as it is for Christians celebrating Christmas.

However, that is not the point. The point is that in our efforts to again be "politically correct" and not offend anyone, we are denying ourselves the right of religious freedom. What happened to tolerance, acceptance, and diversification? Our forefathers fought and died so we could have the freedom to worship and practice the religion of our choice. We have a few laws that restrict some extreme rituals in this country, but for the most part, we welcome and encourage everyone to feel free to pray, hold services, and celebrate their religious holidays with impunity.

Decorated trees and gifts have a commonality that has been shared by the major religions for millennia. Even the pagan religions used symbolism and exchanged gifts as part of their re-

ligious practice, and they existed long before Judaism, Christianity or Islam.

If everyone hides their religious beliefs and practices out of fear of offending their neighbors, can outlawing Santa Claus be far behind? The idea of Santa could easily offend the religious because Santa is a distraction from the origins of the Christian celebration. Will Santa be relegated to a "Secret Society of Santa" and hide in little rooms in dark alleys where wary parents will sneak their children in for a clandestine visit with the jolly old elf? I certainly hope not.

Ladies and gentlemen in case you forgot, you live in America. If you're a Christian, park a Nativity scene in your front yard, a tree in your window, and display Merry Christmas in bright lights on top of your house. If you're Jewish, hang a menorah on your door, a star of David in your window, and a Happy Hanukkah sign in bright lights where it will be seen by all. And if you're Muslim, Buddhist, Bahai, or any other religion I haven't mentioned due to space and ignorance, get out there and celebrate the holidays according to your beliefs. And if you are not religious and want to celebrate the coming of the winter solstice with a visit from Santa Claus, then park a sled pulled by reindeer on your roof and Seasons Greetings in lights and have at it. It is your right. If you feel you are being denied that right, then you live somewhere other than America in a system I have no desire to understand.

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LEGAL TIP

A hotel chain can't be held liable under Illinois law for a jet ski accident that occurred at one of its resorts in the Bahamas, even though the plaintiff booked his reservation from Illinois through the chain's website, the 7th Circuit has ruled.

A Chicago resident and fan of the Marriott hotel chain made a reservation on the chain's website to stay at a resort in the Bahamas. At the resort he rented a jet ski, but fell off and broke his leg. He sued Marriott, alleging that it was responsible for the Bahamian resort's negligence.

Marriott argued conflict of law principles dictated that Bahamian law applied (which the parties agreed would result in dismissal of the suit).

The court agreed, affirming dismissal of the suit.

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