

In praise of Halloween and Trick or Treating Rabbi  
Nesson MJCBY 2013

Last night, Thursday night, when I left the synagogue, I rushed home so that I could be there to open the door for the trick - or - treaters who would be ringing the bell in honor of Halloween.

That is a strange confession for a Rabbi. After all, we all supposed to know that Halloween has definite Christian and Pagan origins.

Here is the second part of my confession. When my kids were young enough, I used to take them out on Halloween night along with the all the kids in the neighborhood.

The truth is that you don't find many rabbis out on Halloween. Some people were surprised, some, even upset, to find their rabbi and his kids in costume celebrating a holiday that was not Purim.

It's not that I, or my children, needed any more candy in their daily diet.

So why did I bring my kids out on Halloween and why did I want to be home to open the door on Thursday night?

For me the answer to that question lies in the fact that at least in my view, something remarkable happens on Halloween, something I wanted my kids to see then, and something I want to be a part of now

You see, on Halloween, we open our homes to one another. On Halloween, we come out from behind solid-core doors and dead bolts locks and electronic burglar alarms. The doorbell is met, not with a gruff "Whose there?" and a suspicious eye in the peephole, but with a smile and sweets. On Halloween, and only on Halloween, we pretend we are a neighborhood again...families from disparate backgrounds who share common civic values, making life together in a common space. If only once a year, I wanted my kids to see then and children to see now, what it's like when fear subsides, and people trust one another enough to open their doors.

The Jewish purists will say- you know Rabbi, we have a holiday too when we open the door, to welcome Elijah Yes, that is true, but think about the

difference... when you open the door on the Seder night, is there anyone standing there, with a grin on their face, happy to accept the treats you are giving out? Passover is specific to our one community, Halloween is about the communities in which we live.

In American cities today, fear of violence is a way of life. The evening newscast consist of a 20-minute recitation of the horrors of the day (followed by sports and weather): City living is an exercise in creative self-defense: For fear of mugging, you always know who is walking behind you. For fear of robbery, you never give anyone the time of day. For fear of being accosted, you never look a stranger in the eye. Watch the way parents cling to young children in the mall, or police them at the playground. Or stand behind them in the background on Halloween night When I was a child, there were no adults following us on Halloween night...we went, we had fun, we came home Today, You never let a child go anywhere alone. And you never open your door to anyone without credentials...except on one night, Halloween

Halloween is the one night of the year when we can return to some sense of trust, when our freedom to be neighbors and our sense of community returns.

As a father, as a rabbi, I am worried. I am worried about the impact of this sense of constant fear upon our souls and those of our children. Years ago, we were instructed to drive defensively. Now we live defensively. We put up high walls and forbidding gates and let no one unfamiliar into our lives.

So we used to canvass the neighborhood, and dragged home bagfuls of candies. And after three Snickers bars and a Tootsie Roll, the kids went to bed, to dream of a warm and loving community, where homes are open, and kids are cared for, and everyone dresses up as goblins and ghosts to have a good time. What a nice lesson, what a nice vision for our world

That is why I took my children when they were young, and that is why I rushed home on Thursday night, to open the door and hear the gleeful voices of the children..trick- or- treat..have a nice night, thank you ...