

# Newsday

## LONG ISLAND

By Jim Merritt

# Asking the Clergy: How does commercialism impact your religious holidays?



Rabbi Mendy Goldberg, left, of Lubavitch of the East End, the Rev. Enid Kessler, advisor to the Interfaith Community of Long Island and Narinder Kapoor, member of the board of directors of the Multi-Faith Forum of Long Island. Credit: Richard Lewin; Enid Kessler; Narinder Kapoor

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Decrying the over-commercialization of religious holidays has become an annual refrain for some Long Islanders. This week's clergy discuss how commercialism can compromise but in some instances enhance religious holiday celebrations.

### **Rabbi Mendy Goldberg**

Lubavitch of the East End, Coram



Rabbi Mendy Goldberg, Lubavitch of the East End, Coram Credit: Richard Lewin

The approach of Hanukkah reminds me of the Talmudic passage regarding the celebration of the holiday: “The mitzvah of Hanukkah is to publicize the miracle of Hanukkah” as well as to “illuminate the dark.” To publicize the miracle of Hanukkah, Chabad Lubavitch worldwide hosts public menorah lightings in malls and in shopping centers, on Main Streets and in town, state and city lawns and in front of public buildings.

The White House has commemorated Hanukkah every year since President Jimmy Carter participated in the lighting of a menorah at a public ceremony in 1979. In Jewish thought, holidays are all about getting out there and celebrating with the masses.

Commercialization helps by making it convenient for any person, in any place, to celebrate

with ease and feel part of the holiday spirit. (In fact, although Hanukkah and Passover are the most widely celebrated Jewish holidays, there are many other Biblical holidays that are not as well known or known at all.)

At the same time, a holiday is a time for families to get together, celebrate, reflect and enjoy the moment; to relish the opportunity and intensify their relationship with God and one another — this is everything but commercialization. So, as with anything, the impact is great and welcomed, as long as it's meaningful and thoughtful, and brings people together to spread warmth and light, and illuminate the dark.

### **The Rev. Enid Kessler**

Adviser, Interfaith Community of Long Island, Brookville Multifaith Campus

As an interfaith minister, I have the opportunity to celebrate and observe many different religious holidays throughout the year. And yes, there is an abundance of commercialism surrounding holidays today. Well before Thanksgiving, TV commercials and seasonal decorations make us aware that the holidays are fast approaching. Even before we sit down to eat our Thanksgiving turkey, we are besieged with advertising to rush off and take advantage of the Black Friday sales. I remember when the Thanksgiving weekend was a time for family and reflection; a peaceful time of retreat and renewal before we even began to think about the December holidays.

So, how does commercialism impact my holidays? It doesn't. I make choices to observe and celebrate each holiday as meaningfully as possible with thought and consideration. I start planning early so that I can avoid the stress and hype that seems to surround us during holiday times. I make it my priority to spend time with family and loved ones. I attend services that refresh and flood me with spirit and God. It is a deliberate choice that I make that allows me to glean the spirit of the holy days in the way that works for me. And, of course, I respect that others may have a different way of approaching the holiday season. We are each entitled to find joy in our own way.



The Rev. Enid Kessler, adviser to the Interfaith Community of Long Island, Brookville Credit: Enid Kessler

## **Narinder Kapoor**

Member, Board of Directors of the Multi-Faith Forum of Long Island, Melville

In an age of information and technology, commercialism has become rampant in America and in some, but not all parts of India, the birthplace of Hinduism. In small towns and villages in India, commercialization has had less of an impact on the Hindu faith than it has in urban India where priests ask for money to perform religious rituals. That practice gives a bad impression to locals as well to foreign tourists, as the monetizing of the Hindu religion may obscure teachings such as yoga, meditation, the law of karma and reincarnation.

Hindus living in the United States are well aware of the impact of commercialism on their religion. Millions of dollars are donated to America's 400 temples and other places of Hindu worship. Emphasis on the expansion and extension of these religious buildings can have the effect of distracting from such core values of Hinduism as simplicity, detachment, purity and service to the community irrespective of race, color, creed and religious belief. Commercialism compromises the meaning of the divine mantra, Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, which Hindus always recite in Sanskrit at the end of each prayer: "May all



become happy / May all be free from illness / May all see what is auspicious / May no one suffer / Om Peace, peace, peace.”



Narinder Kapoor, member of the board of directors of the Multi-Faith Forum of Long Island, Melville Credit:  
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