



ACCSS Associated Chaplains in California State Service

Benzion Lew, President

accss@accss.org

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Brothers and sisters in State service,

My name is Benzion Lew; I am the Jewish Chaplain at Calipatria State Prison. I have been working at Calipatria for fourteen years, and I am blessed to work with a great team. I have had the great privilege of working closely with quite a number of you over the years, and I hope to continue my friendships with you, and I would also like to acquaint myself with those with whom I have not yet had the privilege of meeting.

I was recently elected President of ACCSS. I would like to thank my predecessor, who, together with the ACCSS board, kept our issues and concerns at the forefront, and worked diligently in ensuring the ethos of ACCSS was always championed.

As the state of Chaplaincy evolves, it is my fervent hope that ACCSS will be able to be a great asset and resource, and to continue ensuring we are given the suitable tools and training we require.

ACCSS is an often misunderstood association, and one of my priorities is to reintroduce to all of you what it is we do: ACCSS was formed for the professional development of its membership and the support of their ministries as they serve those who are institutionalized by the State of California. ACCSS works mostly behind the scenes, and without much fanfare. We are here to support the Chaplains in training and development, areas of high importance.

It would be great to hear from any and all of you. I am open to any ideas, suggestions, complaints, or other areas where ACCSS may be of help to the Chaplaincy; we are in this together. It is my commitment to be as open as I can with you, to listen to you, and to work together with you.

During this holiday season, no matter which holiday you celebrate, I would like to wish you and your loved ones a very safe, healthy, joyous, and meaningful holiday.

As a Jew, I celebrate Chanukah. Chanukah signifies the embodiment of light. It is also a symbol and message of the triumph of freedom over oppression, of spirit over matter,

and of light over darkness. On each night of Chanukah we add another light, thus always adding light, we must always increase in matters of goodness. Sure, a single flame was good enough for yesterday, but today needs to be even better.

It is a timely and reassuring message, for the forces of darkness are ever present. Moreover, the danger does not come exclusively from outside; it often lurks close to home, in the form of insidious erosion of time-honored values and principles that are at the foundation of any decent human society. Needless to say, darkness is not chased away by brooms and sticks, but by illumination.

And while this illumination begins at home, within oneself and one's family, by increasing and intensifying the light of righteousness in the everyday experience, it does not stop there. Such is the nature of light that when one kindles a light for one's own benefit, it benefits also all who are in the vicinity. Indeed, the Chanukah Lights are expressly meant to illuminate the outside, symbolically alluding to the duty to bring light also to those who, for one reason or another, still walk in darkness. This is especially true in the environment in which we work.

Let us pray that the message of the Chanukah Lights will illuminate the everyday life of everyone personally, and of the society at large, for a brighter life in every respect, both materially and spiritually.

Thank you for everything you do.

Ben Zion Lew