

A Shana Tova Card at Hanukkah?



What is this? Is it a Shana Tova card or is it a Happy Hanukkah card?

The National Library of Israel contains a large collection of historic postcards and greeting cards. These postcards contain fascinating photographs and illustrations, but more than that they contain secrets just waiting to be discovered.

And the best way to discover those secrets is to examine the postcard step by step.

Stage 1 - First Impressions

The first stage is to describe the item:

What does the item look like? What is it made of? What is your first impression on looking at it? Describe what is happening in the picture?

At first glance we can see that this is an illustrated postcard. It seems to be celebration – a family celebrating the holiday of Hanukkah.



Stage 2 - Exploring the Details

Now we'll look at the details on the card:

Which characters appear in the illustration? Which objects? What is in the background? What is going on? What is the writing on the side of the postcard? What are the most important items in the postcard?

The postcard displays a family of five lighting Hanukkah candles. The father (or perhaps grandfather) is lighting the candles in the Hannukiah (menorah) on the windowsill. The other family members – mother (or grandmother), adolescent, young boy and infant – are watching intently. The family are wearing traditional garments: the father has a kippah (yarmulke) and a beard, the children have head-coverings and tzitzit over their clothes.

To the right of the illustration there is an interesting Hebrew text which reads:

"שלחנוכה נר להדליק" "For Hanukkah a candle you will light, for a good year you will be inscribed."

Stage 3 - Understanding the Meanings

Having received a general impression of the postcard and its contents, it's now time to understand the significance of the details and draw some conclusions:

What do the details of the postcard tell us about the time period? What do we learn about the illustrator of the postcard? What can we understand from the text?

The illustration stirs different emotions. On one hand, we see the warmth of a family. The light that draws our attention is reflected in the peaceful faces of the family. On the other hand, there are those who will see a stereotypical depiction of Jews with hooked noses and old-fashioned clothing. What emotions does the postcard inspire in you? Do you think a Jew created the postcard? Would a Jew illustrate Jews differently?

The text on the right of the illustration is perhaps the most intriguing element. On the postcard is written "שלחנוכה נר להדליק" "For Hanukkah a candle to light," yet we



can quickly understand that the Hebrew text is backwards and should read: "To light a candle for Hanukkah."

Why is this?

There is no answer to that question. We can only guess: maybe the text was copied from another source by someone who didn't understand Hebrew? Maybe the publishing house was owned by non-Jews who couldn't read Hebrew? Maybe it was just an innocent printing error?

And then there is the most important question of all: what is the connection between the postcard, Hanukkah, and Rosh Hashanah? Here, too, we can only guess. Maybe the publisher printed a line of postcards on a wide range of Jewish themes? Maybe the image of a Jewish family lighting Hanukkah candles seemed like the perfect stereotype of Jews, despite the lack of connection between Rosh Hashanah and Hanukkah?

Stage 4 - Thinking and Evaluating

After analyzing the postcard and attempting to discover its hidden secrets, other questions emerge.

What was the purpose of the postcard? Who printed it? When and where? Were there others in the series? Who was the illustrator? Were the illustrator or the printers Jewish?

It could be interesting to explore the effect of non-Jewish publishers or illustrators on literature created for Jews.

We could compare the illustrations of Jewish characters from different times and places and investigate whether there is a connection between the illustrators' Jewishness or lack of Jewishness and their depiction of the characters. Or what about examining the differences between illustrations of Jewish and non-Jewish characters?

In short, an analysis of this postcard can lead to additional questions which may, in turn, involve us in a research process resulting in unique new discoveries.

