

HANUKKAH

Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, begins on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev, and lasts for eight days.



HISTORY



In Israel during the 2nd century BCE, at the time of the Second Holy Temple, the Syrian-Greek regime outlawed Jewish observance (circumcision, Torah study, etc.). Many Jews - called Hellenists - encouraged this approach.



Led by Matitiyahu, and later his son Judah the Maccabee, a small band of pious Jews in the Judean hills led guerrilla warfare against the Syrian-Greek army.



The brave Maccabees recaptured the Holy Temple from the Greeks and re-dedicated it on the 25th of Kislev. The Hebrew word Hanukkah means "dedication."



The first thing the Maccabees did was light the golden menorah. They found only one jar of oil, but it burned miraculously for eight days.

Today we light a menorah for eight days to publicize this miracle and to be inspired by its message.

MENORAH

What kind of menorah?

The menorah can be any size, and made of any material. All eight candles (except the Shamash) should be at the same height, and preferably in a straight line.

How many candles?

One candle is added each of the eight nights - plus the extra helper candle called the "Shamash."

Why 8?

Hanukkah is celebrated 8 days even though the miracle of the oil was really only 7 (the first day's light shouldn't count - it's natural) to teach us that everything in the 'natural' world is really a miracle. Nothing happens without God willing it.



Where to light?



To publicize the miracle, many light the menorah outside their front doorway. Otherwise, the menorah should be lit in a window facing the street.

What to light?

The candles must be big enough to burn for at least 30 minutes. Many use olive oil, to recall the original miracle in the Temple.

How to light?

- Light the Shamash
- Recite the blessings
- Use the Shamash to light the Hanukkah candles.

When to light?

The first opportunity to light is at nightfall. Many wait until later, when all the members of the household are present.

Who lights?

In Ashkenazi tradition, each person lights his own menorah. Sefardi tradition is one menorah per family.

BLESSINGS

Two blessings are said with the Shamash already lit, but immediately prior to lighting the Hanukkah candles.

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-heinu melech ha-olam, Asher kid-shanu bi-mitzvo-sav, Vi-tzee-vanu li-had-leek ner shel Hanukkah.

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Hanukkah light.

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-heinu melech ha-olam, Shi-asa nee-seem la-avo-seinu, Baya-meem ha-haim baz-man ha-zeh

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the universe, Who made miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this season.

A third blessing is said on the first night only:

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-heinu melech ha-olam, Sheh-he-che-yanu vi-kee-yimanu Vi-hee-gee-yanu laz-man ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

After lighting, families enjoy sitting in the menorah's glow while singing Maoz Tzur ("Rock of Ages").

DEDICATION



The word Hanukkah means dedication. That's what it takes to launch a war against a superpower, and light a single flask of oil that can't possibly last enough time. With enough dedication and commitment, God creates miracles.

To Praise and Give Thanks

On Hanukkah we add "Al Ha'nisim" – a paragraph giving thanks for the Hanukkah miracle – to the Amidah prayer and to Grace After Meals. *Hallel* is also said during morning services.



Hanukkah is a time to appreciate all we have to be thankful for.

By publicizing the Hanukkah miracle, we express our "thanks-giving" to God for protecting us and providing for our needs.

TRADITIONS

Dreidel!



A favorite Hanukkah game is spinning the dreidel, a four-sided top with a Hebrew letter on each side: *nun, gimmel, hey, shin* – "A Great Miracle Happened There." Originally spinning the dreidel was done by students illegally studying Torah.

When soldiers made a surprise raid, students would whip out a dreidel, pretending to play a gambling game.

Donuts



To commemorate the miracle of the oil, there is a custom to eat "oily" foods like potato latkes and *sufganiyot* (donuts). Around 17.5 million donuts are eaten in Israel during Hanukkah. (Not a good time to start a diet!)

NOT THE JEWISH CHRISTMAS



There is no significance to giving gifts during the holiday. But there is a tradition to give *gelt* (money) to give kids an incentive to learn Torah (Hanukkah also comes from the Hebrew word "*hinuch*" education).