

CHANUKAH A FESTIVAL OF LIGHT

In the year 167 BCE (that is, Before the Common Era) Antiochus (an-tay-o-kus), a Syrian king, ruled Israel. During his rule, Jews were forced to hellenize: Jewish ritual was banned and Jews were forced to join the dominant culture and adopt its way of life.

Why did Antiochus care about limiting Jewish observance? Some suggest as an effort to consolidate his rule over the land and its people. Others think the Jewish elite of the time embraced hellenization and wanted to impose its will on fellow Jews. In each story, the goal was to fully assimilate Jews into the dominant culture of the ruling class.

BACK TO THE STORY

A small group of Jews who lived outside of Jerusalem in Modi'in, the Macabees, resolutely opposed these changes. They organized a small, guerilla-style, army under the leadership of Judah Macabee. Miraculously, this small group defeated both of their oppressors, Antiochus' army and the Jewish elite, and established themselves as the new ruling class for nearly 100 years.

WHAT ABOUT THE OIL?

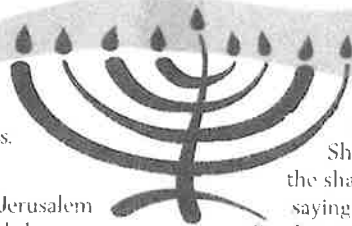
Several hundred years later, the religious leaders of the time (the rabbis) felt uncomfortable with this piece of history which celebrated aggression and civil clashes. They introduced a new feature to the story, which has now become the dominant symbol of the holiday.

HERE'S HOW IT GOES

When the Macabees celebrated their victory reclaimed the Temple in Jerusalem, they relit the flame of the Temple's Menorah with a small cruse of oil they found. The cruse contained enough for only one day. When they used the oil, it miraculously burned for not one but eight days. The "miracle of the oil" was integrated into the history of Chanukah, and lighting candles for eight days became its central ritual.

CHANUKAH AT HOME

Rituals often mean more than we can explain. In lighting the menorah we conjure our memories of the Maccabees, of the first Chanukah, of the meaning of "dedication." Even without full explanation or firm conclusions, we make rituals part of who we are. The Hebrew phrases lead us to gaze into the flames and reflect. To fully understand Chanukah, just observe how your children watch the candles.



LIGHTING CANDLES

On the first night of Chanukah, place one candle on the extreme right end of the Menorah. Light the Shammash (the server candle) and with the shammash light the first candle while saying the three blessings below.

On the second night, place two candles on the right end of the Menorah. Use the shammash to light the two candles, lighting the one on the left first while saying the first two blessings below. Follow the same procedure on all the rest of the nights...put candles in from the right end of the Menorah and light from the left hand side.

It is traditional to place the Menorah in the window so that it can be seen.

WHAT TO EAT

Traditional Chanukah foods are traditional (though not the most healthy) because they are fried in oil. The most common food is latkes, fried potato pancakes; in Israel, jelly donuts (*sufganiot*) fried in oil, are also eaten.

WHAT ABOUT PRESENTS?

While gift-giving has become part of the Chanukah celebration, no one knows exactly when and where the tradition originated. Jewish tradition does associate gift-giving with other holidays: Pesach (Passover), Rosh HaShanah (New Year) and Purim.

HOW TO PLAY THE DREIDEL GAME

A dreidel is a top with one Hebrew letter on each side. Together they form the initials for "Nes Gadol Haya Sham...A Great Miracle Happened There."

THE RULES

Each player starts with the same number of nuts, m&m's, pennies, (you get the idea).

1. Each player antes one piece

2. The first player spins the Dreidel.

3. When the Dreidel stops, do what the letter tells you:

נ (Nun) the spinner gets nothing.

ג (Gimel) the spinner gets the whole pot.

ה (Hey) the spinner gets half of the pot.

ש (Shin) the spinner adds one to the pot.

4. Go back to #1 and the second player plays, and so on!



THE CHANUKAH BLESSINGS

The first is a blessing over the candles themselves:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של חנוכה

Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melek ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah.

Praised are You, Adonai, Our God, Sovereign of the universe, who makes us holy through mitzvot and commands us to light the Chanukah candles.

The second blessing expresses thanks for the "miracle" of deliverance:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם שעשה נסים לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה

Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melek ha-olam, she'asah nissim la'avoteinu ba-yamim ha-hem ba-z'man ha-zeh.

Praised are You, Adonai, Our God, Sovereign of the universe, who did wondrous things for our ancestors in former times at this season.

The third blessing is chanted only on the first night:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melek ha-olam, she-hecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu la-z'man ha-zeh.

Praised are You, Adonai, Our God, Sovereign of the universe, who keeps us alive, sustains us, and brought us to this occasion.

