

Hanukkah

the Festival of Lights

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Observed typically in late November or December

Also known as the “Festival of Lights,” Hanukkah is an eight-day Jewish holiday celebrating the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in the Second Century B.C. Hanukkah is the Hebrew word for “dedication.”

The history of the holiday is tied to the time when Israel was struggling for existence. It is believed that after a successful revolt against a tyrannical monarch, the victorious Jewish community could find very little pure

olive oil to light the Menorah, only enough for one day. However, the oil lasted for eight days, long enough to purify more oil!

Jewish people light a candle on each of the eight evenings in remembrance of God’s provision. They also play games, exchange gifts, have family dinners and attend plays and concerts at synagogues and schools.

Jewish Tradition

The lighting of the Hanukkah lamp is to take place between “sunset and until there is no wayfarer left in the street.” The lamp should be placed outside the entrance of the house. If a person lives in an upper story, it should be set on the window nearest the street. This placement is to publicly affirm the Hanukkah miracle.

The entire Hallel (a verbatim recitation from Psalms 113-118) is said on each of the eight days. The reading of the law is from the portion of the Torah which describes the sacrifices brought by the princes at the dedication of the sanctuary, and the kindling of the candelabrum or menorah ([Num. 7:1-8:4](#)).

Maoz Tzur Yeshuati (“Mighty Rock of my Salvation”), a hymn composed in Germany by a 11th-13th Century poet, is usually sung in the Ashkenazi ritual after the kindling of the lights. The melody of this hymn is a little later than the lyrics and was adopted from a German folksong popular in the middle of the 15th century. This hymn extols God as Israel’s deliverer, which is the precise theme of this holiday. The Sephardim recite [Psalm 30](#).

Why Nine Candles?

The eight cups that hold the Hanukkah candles are arranged in a row, one for each night of the holiday. Every menorah has one additional cup, a ninth cup, which is located in the center or to one side and is usually slightly elevated.

The ninth candle is called “the *shammash*,” or, “one who serves.” Jewish tradition says the purpose of the *shammash* is that “Judaism gives light to the world.” At Hanukkah we light an additional candle on

each day. We use the *shammash* to light the other candles until all the candles give off their light. So, on the first night of Hanukkah, after sundown, the *shammash* candle is lit, which in turn is used to kindle one candle of the Menorah. The second night, the *shammash* again is lit and is used to light two candles, etc. The appropriate number of candles is placed in the menorah from right to left, yet they are lit from left to right.

The Dreidel

The Israelites were not allowed to worship during the Maccabean struggle for freedom to serve YHWH. If the Greeks caught them studying the Torah or praying they would be put to death. The Hebrews thought up a plan to

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