

# FUN FACTS ABOUT CHANUKAH

What is Chanukah? In English, the name Chanukah means 'dedication.' It is derived from the Torah's references to the original dedication of the altar by the 12 leaders: chanukat ha-mizbe'ach (Numbers 7:10), and from the dedication of Yerushalyim's walls after the return from Babylonian exile: ba-chanukat chomat Yerushalayim (Nehemiah 12:27). The holiday commemorates the triumph of a band of rebel Yehudim known as the Maccabees in reclaiming their temple from the Greek Syrians in 164 BCE.

Chanukah is also known as the Festival of Lights (Chag HaUrim), or the Festival of Rededication. It begins on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev in the Hebrew calendar, and fluctuates in the Gregorian calendar between November and December. The festival lasts 8 days and is observed with joy, light and merriment.

About the spelling: does it start with a C or an H? End with an A or an H? Is there one K or are there 2? Actually, there is no 'wrong' way to spell Chanukah, and you may have seen it spelled a number of ways. Hannukah is a more popular spelling, while Chanukah is more of a traditional spelling. Because there is no correct way to directly translate the Hebrew sounds to English, it could be spelled a variety of ways, each equally correct.

## *Chanukiah*

A menorah called a 'chanukiah' is lit each night of the 8-day festival. The chanukiah holds 9 candles: 8 candles to represent the 8 nights and 1 servant or helper candle intended to light all the others. This is known as the 'shamash', and it is positioned either higher, lower, or apart from the other candles. Each night, one additional candle is lit from the flame of the 'shamash.' On the last night of the festival, all 8 candles are lit together. Among Ashkenazi Jews, the custom is that every male member of the household (and in many families, girls as well) will light a full set of lights each of the 8 nights, while among Sephardic the prevalent custom is to have one set of lights for the entire household.



Traditionally, either candles or oil are added to the chanukiah from right to left but are kindled from left to right. The newest candle is lit first. Light the 'shamash', then hold it as you say the blessings. When the blessings have been pronounced, light the candle (or oil wick) from left to right, then replace the 'shamash' in its designated spot.

## Fun Facts About Chanukah Cont'd:

The traditional Chanukah candle lighting service consists of saying 3 blessings on the first night, and only the first and second blessings for the 7 nights that follow.

### *The 3 Blessings:*

#### *1<sup>st</sup> Blessing*

Baruch A'tah Yahweh

Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam

Asher Kid'shanu B'mitzvotav

V'tzivanu L'hadlik Ner

Shel Chanukah

Blessed are You, Yahweh our Elohim

King of the Universe

Who has sanctified us with Your Commandments

And commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light

#### *2<sup>nd</sup> Blessing*

Baruch A'tah Yahweh

Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam

She'asah Nissim L'avoteinu

Bayamim Ha'hem

Ba'azman Ha'zeh

Blessed are You, Yahweh our Elohim

King of the Universe

Who performed miracles for our forefathers

In those days, at this time

#### *3<sup>rd</sup> Blessing*

#### *The Shehecheyanu is recited only on the 1<sup>st</sup> night*

Baruch A'tah, Yahweh

Eloheinu, Melech Ha'olam,

Shehecheyanu V'kiy'manu

V'higiyanu Laz'man hazeh

Blessed are You, Yahweh our Elohim

Sovereign of all

Who has kept us alive, sustained us

And brought us to this season

Here is the link for these blessings:

[https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/steveberkson/episodes/2021-11-16T09\\_36\\_29-08\\_00](https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/steveberkson/episodes/2021-11-16T09_36_29-08_00)



## Fun Facts About Chanukah Cont'd:

### *Olive Oil*

The lighting of the special chanukiah is inspired by the account of the miracle of the menorah lights, without which they could not have properly rededicated the cleansed Temple. This story is found in the Talmud, which was written about 600 years after the events described in the books of Maccabees. The Talmud says that after the forces of Antiochus IV had been driven from the Temple, the Maccabees discovered that almost all of the ritual olive oil had been profaned. They found only a single container that was still sealed by the High Priest, with enough oil to keep the menorah in the Temple lit for a single day. It would take another eight days for new oil to be pressed and made ready; yet the priests went ahead and filled the menorah lamps with what they had. Amazingly, that one-day supply of clean oil kept the menorah lamps burning for 8 days, until the new oil was ready.



### *Latkes & Sufganiyot*

Whether or not the miracle of the oil actually happened, Chanukah is usually celebrated by feasting on rich fried foods, as a symbol of the oil that was used in the Temple to light the menorah. Deep-fried potato pancakes (latkes or levivot) and jelly doughnuts (sufganiyot) are 2 popular dishes served at Chanukah.



### *Gift Giving*

The modern tradition of giving gifts to children for 8 nights was only adopted a few decades ago and was not originally performed during Chanukah. As Christmas became increasingly popular, more and more Jewish people began giving gifts in an effort to compete with the Christian holiday.

*We at MTOI do not endorse or promote this tradition.*

### *Oh, Dreidel Dreidel Dreidel!*

The famous dreidel, or 4-sided spinning top, is the Hebrew name for sevivon, which means 'to turn around.' The Greek Syrians had outlawed Jewish studies, so the Jews spun dreidels to distract their enemies, pretending they were merely playing games when they were actually engaged with their Scripture. On each of the dreidel's 4 sides is inscribed a Hebrew letter - nun, gimel, hey, and shin - which together stands for '**Nes Gadol Haya Sham,**' which means, '**A Great Miracle Happened There.**' In Yisra'el, the letter pey is often used instead of shin to say, '**Nes Gadol Haya Po**' which means '**A Great Miracle Happened Here.**' To give children incentive to learn Torah on this holiday, a new tradition was to gift them with 'gelt,' golden-wrapped chocolates that resemble coins. Gelt can also be won in a game of dreidel. Depending which letter you land on, you gain or lose a different amount of chocolate coins, or 'money,' with each spin. In gematria, the letters nun, gimel, hey and shin add up to equal 358, which is also the numerical equivalent of mashiach or Messiah!



### *Judah Maccabee the Hammer*

Wherever there is a tyrant we are also introduced to a hero. Judah the Maccabee was a Jewish priest and a son of the priest Mattathias. He, along with his 4 brothers - John, Simon, Eleazar and Jonathan - led the Maccabean revolt against Antiochus and the Seleucid empire. He was affectionately known as 'The Hammer.'

