



TEMPLE\*ALIYAH  
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# Hanukkah Guide



## Hanukkah: An Overview

Hanukkah, or the Festival of Rededication, celebrates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after its defilement by the Syrian Greeks in 164 BCE. Although it is a late addition to the [Jewish liturgical calendar](#), the eight-day festival of Hanukkah has become a beloved and joyous holiday. It is also known as the Festival of Lights and takes place in December, at the time of year when the days are shortest in the northern hemisphere.

## History

Beginning in 167 BCE, the Jews of Judea rose up in revolt against the oppression of [King Antiochus IV Epiphanes](#) of the Seleucid Empire. The military leader of the first phase of the [revolt](#) was Judah the [Maccabee](#), the eldest son of the priest Mattityahu (Mattathias). In the autumn of 164, Judah and his followers were able to capture the Temple in Jerusalem, which had been turned into a pagan shrine. They cleansed it and rededicated it to Israel's God. This event was observed in an eight-day celebration, which was patterned on [Sukkot](#), the autumn festival of huts. Much later [rabbinic tradition](#) ascribes the length of the festival to a miraculous small amount of oil that burned for eight days.

## At Home

Much of the activity of *Hanukkah* takes place at home. Central to the holiday is the [lighting](#) of the [hanukkiah](#), an eight-branched candelabrum to which one candle is added on each day of the holiday until it is ablaze with light on the eighth day. (The *Hanukkiah* is also referred to — erroneously — as a Hanukkah menorah, but a true menorah has a total of only seven branches). In commemoration of the legendary cruse of oil, it is traditional to eat [foods](#) fried in oil. The most familiar Hanukkah foods are the European (Ashkenazi) potato pancakes, or [latkes](#), and the Israeli favorite, jelly donuts, or [sufganiyot](#). The tradition developed in Europe to give small amounts of money as well as nuts and raisins to children at this time. Under the influence of [Christmas](#), which takes place around the same time of year, *Hanukkah* has evolved into the central gift-giving holiday in the Jewish calendar in the Western world.

## In the Community

Since *Hanukkah* is not biblically ordained, the [liturgy](#) for the holiday is not well developed. It is actually a quite minor festival. However, it has become one of the most beloved of Jewish holidays. In an act of defiance against those in the past and in the present who would root out Jewish practice, the observance of *Hanukkah* has assumed a visible community aspect. Jews will often gather for communal celebrations and public candle lighting. At such celebrations, [Hanukkah songs](#) are sung and traditional games such as [dreidel](#) are played.

## Theology and Themes

Like [Pesach](#) (Passover), *Hanukkah* is a holiday that celebrates the liberation from oppression. It also provides a strong argument in favor of freedom of worship and religion. In spite of the human action that is commemorated, never far from the surface is the theology that the liberation was possible only thanks to the miraculous [support of God](#).

## A How to Guide:

### Lighting Candles — How to Light

On the first night, one candle is placed at the far right (as you face the *hanukkiyah*). This applies whether the *hanukkiyah* is placed next to a doorway or by a window. Another candle is placed for the *shamash* (taller helper candle) which is used to light the others (it is not counted as one of the candles). Each night we place the *shamash*, then we add a candle to the left of the previous night and light it first and then light the rest of the candles.

### When to Light

The *hanukkiyah* should be lit after nightfall. It is best to wait, however, until all the members of the household are present. This adds to the family atmosphere and also maximizes the mitzvah of “publicizing the miracle.” However, the *hanukkiyah* can be lit (with the blessings) late into the night, as long as people are still awake. On Friday, the *hanukkiyah* should be lit just before Shabbat candles, approximately 18 minutes before sundown.

*Light the shamash, recite the blessings, and then light the candles.*

### BLESSING #1

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.

*Baruch ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu melech ha-olam, Asher kid-shanu bi-mitzvo-tav, Ve-tzee-vanu lei-had-leek ner shel Hanukkah.*

We praise You, *Adonai* our God, Ruler of space and time, who commanded us to kindle the *Hanukkah* light.

### BLESSING #2

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמַּן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch ata Ado-nai Elo-heinu melech ha-olam, She-asa ni-seem la-avo-teinu, Ba 'ya-meem ha-haim b'z-man ha-zeh.*

We praise You, *Adonai* our God, Ruler of space and time, who made miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this season.

### BLESSING #3

**This blessing is said on the first night only.**

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהִחְיֵנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמַּן הַזֶּה.

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

We praise You, *Adonai* our God, Ruler of space and time, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

It is traditional to sing *Maoz Tzur* following the final blessing.

- Listen to the [Hanukkah Blessings](#)
- Listen to the [Maoz Tzur](#)

## Dreidel

The dreidel has four sides: נ -Nun, ג-Gimel, ה -Hey, ש -Shin. The game is usually played with coins, chips, or gelt (chocolate coins). Collectively, these letters are interpreted as, “a great miracle happened there.”

Before spinning the *dreidel* each player deposits one coin into the “*kupah*” or pot. One of the players spins the *dreidel*. The *dreidel* stops and lands with one of the letters facing up and the appropriate action is taken:

- Nun – *nischt* (Yiddish) – “nothing” – the next player spins
- Gimel – *gantz* (Yiddish) – “all” – the player takes the entire pot
- Hey – *halb* (Yiddish) – “half” – the player takes half of the pot
- Shin – *shtet* (Yiddish) – “put in” – the player puts one or two in the pot

Each player is given a turn to spin the dreidel. Enjoy the game and eating the winnings.

## Hanukkah “Light” Latkes

*This recipe keeps the oil and fat calories at bay...*

2 large potatoes, scrubbed and unpeeled

1 small onion

1/2 small carrot

2 egg whites

1 1/2 tsp. baking powder

3-4 Tbls. flour

Pinch celery seed

Scant 1/4 tsp. each curry and fennel

1/4 tsp. pepper

Grate potatoes alternately with onion and carrot in the food processor. Drain. Mix with remaining ingredients. Spray a good quality non-stick frying pan with Pam or another oil spray. Drop mixture by heaping tablespoons into hot frying pan and flatten with a fork to make the latkes thin. Fry on medium — high heat until brown. Flip over and brown the other side as well. Serve with applesauce. Yields 16-20 thin latkes.

## 8 Nights — 8 Actions

1. According to the Hanukkah story, a small amount of oil lasted eight days, a miracle. Talk about ways we can make sure we are doing our part to ensure that our world's limited resources last?
2. Read aloud each night — *The Spotted Pony*, by Eric A. Kimmel (1992, Holiday House, New York) is a wonderful collection of Jewish folk tales to read aloud each night of Hanukkah. Some are funny, some are sad, and all of them appeal to both kids and adults.
3. Concentrate on enjoying the holiday's more traditional pleasures. Therefore, try to minimize gift giving — instead consider choosing a gift that can be donated to a worthy cause.
4. Israel Night — Everyone brings a clipping, item or idea about the modern *Maccabees* and their state: Israel. The clippings would be about both amazing and challenging things that are going on in Israel or about Israel. Let each person present what they brought and figure out a way to bless it after a thorough discussion.
5. On one of the nights of Hanukkah open all of the *tzedakah* boxes in the house and count the money. Have every person suggest a cause they believe needs funding and then decide which important causes to send the money to.
6. One night find a way to bring your light into someone's life — light your *hanukkiah* with friends or find a shelter for battered woman, or homeless persons or elders and bring your *hanukkiah* over their for lighting.
7. Think of something you can do to become the best possible version of yourself and then create a personal improvement goal. Write it on a piece of paper, place it with/under your *hanukkiah*, read it next Hanukkah, and evaluate progress.
8. Have fun and Hug your family and friends!