

– Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook - from "Arpilei Tohar", p. 27-28

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“Therefore, the pure righteous do not complain of the dark, but increase the light; they do not complain of evil, but increase justice; they do not complain of heresy, but increase faith; they do not complain of ignorance, but increase wisdom.

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Chanukah gifts are not an original feature of the holiday. Like these gifts, the outsized stature that Chanukah (a relatively minor holiday with no work restrictions) enjoys today is likely due to the non-Jewish holidays which share proximity on the Julian calendar and dominate our broader American milieu.

Fun Facts

When the Jews traveled, following the Exodus from Egypt to the land of Israel, the twenty-fifth place they encamped was called *Chashmonah*. This can be seen as an allusion to the priestly family of *Chashmonaim* (Hasmoneans), who led the Maccabee armies in the battle against the Greeks, and who rested on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev. According to Israel 21c, 'Israelis will devour some 24 million *Sufganiyot* during the eight-day holiday, addition up to 10.8 billion calories!

All about Chanukah

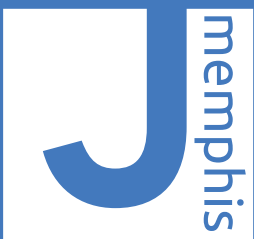
The festival of lights!

NIGHT OF

DAY OF

December 12–December 20

Tishrei 25–Tevet 3



Just a little bit of light can dispel much darkness!



The Backstory

Chanukah is a Rabbinic holiday which celebrates miraculous events taking place well after the five books of Moses were recorded. Nevertheless, the message of faith is clear. When the world seems darkest, it is then we must remind ourselves we are not alone, and together with God we can and will increase the light.

This idea lays the foundation for Chanukah's dual commemoration, the celebration of a miraculous military victory by the Maccabees over Antiochus's Syrian (Seleucid) Greek army in the 2nd century BCE, and the miracle of the oil which took place upon the restoration and rededication (Chanukah literally means 'dedication') of the 2nd Temple in Jerusalem.

The reign of Antiochus was a dark one. The practice of Judaism was outlawed, he banned *Brit Milah* (ritual circumcision), outlawed the observance of Shabbat and the Festivals, and declared all must convert to worshipping the Greek gods, or choose death. The 2nd Temple was looted and desecrated, idols erected within its holy confines, and pigs sacrificed on the alter.

Many saintly Jewish women willingly risked their lives to circumcise their sons (See the book of Maccabees). *Mattityahu*, a *Kohein* (Jewish priest), and his five sons *Yochanan*, *Shimon*, *El'azar*, *Yonatan*, and *Yehuda HaMaccabi*

(Judah the hammer) led a rebellion against the mighty and larger Greek army. Eventually, their revolt was successful, recapturing Jerusalem and the Temple, and rededicating it with light on the 25th of Kislev – the date Antiochus had issued his decrees of darkness and the date of the 2nd Temple's original dedicated.

The Talmud (T.B. Shabbat 21b) focuses on the metaphor of light amidst the darkness much more clearly. It tells the story of how all the ritual oil had been defiled by the Greeks except for one cruse of pure oil which the Maccabees found and used to light the golden Menorah (the Temple's 7 armed candelabra) despite the fact that the oil could only last one day. God responds to their hope with a miracle, ensuring that single cruse of pure oil lasted 8 full days, sufficient to extend the light of their actions until additional pure oil could be produced.

In response to this miracle, the Rabbis declared, the 25th of Kislev each year would be celebrated with the recitation of Hallel (praise) and thanksgiving.



How We Celebrate

Lighting the Chanukiah: Just as the world gets dark, we add light in commemoration of the miraculous eight-day lighting of the seven branched *Menorah*. In a place where *Pirsumei Nisa* – publicizing of the miracle - will take place, we light a special eight branched candelabra (nine if you count the *Shamash* - helper candle), increasing the number of candles from one on the first night, two on the second, etc, until we reach eight candles on the 8th and final night of Chanukah. When lighting these candles, the following blessings are recited:

First blessing: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר חַנּוּכָה

Ba-ruch A-tah A-do-nai E-lo-he-nu Me-lech ha-olam a-sheer ki-de-sha-nu be-mitz-vo-tav ve-tzi-va-nu le-had-lik ner Cha-nu-kah.

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

Second blessing: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁשְׁעָרָה נִסִּים לְאַבְרָהָם בְּיָמָיו הֵם בְּזִמְנֵנוּ הַזֶּה

Ba-ruch A-tah A-do-nai E-lo-he-nu Me-lech Ha-olam she-a-sa ni-sim la-avo-te-nu ba-ya-mim ha-hem bi-zman ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.

Third blessing, recited only on the first night (or the first time lighting this Chanukah): בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהִחִינּוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנֵנוּ הַזֶּה

Ba-ruch A-tah A-do-nai E-lo-he-nu Me-lech Ha-olam she-heche-ya-nu ve-ki-yi-ma-nu ve-higi-a-nu liz-man ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

Reciting Hallel and Al HaNissim: Within the daily morning prayer, *Hallel* – the special words of praise at God's miracles – is recited. Additionally, the *Al HaNissim* ('upon the miracles') prayer which recalls the miracle God performed in "delivering the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few..." during the revolt is inserted into the *Shmonah Esrei* (the petitionary prayer at the heart of each of the day's prayer services), and into our *Birkat HaMazon* – the grace after meals.

Songs and Games: While there are many great Chanukah songs (just ask Adam Sandler), two are perhaps most traditional. They are *HaNeirot Halalu* ('We kindle these lights') and *Ma'oz Tzur* ('Rock of Ages') recited immediately following the lighting of the Chanukah candles each night. The most famous song might be "I have a little *Dreidle*" which refers to a classic Chanukah game played with a 4 sided spinning top called a *Dreidle*. Each side of the *Dreidle* contains a Hebrew letter - נ (Nun), ג (Gimel), ה (Hey), and ש (Shin) standing for *Neis Gadol Haya Sham* – a great miracle happened there. In Israel, where the miracle took place, the last letter trades out for a פ (Pei) for the word *Po* – here.

Foods: Fried foods commemorate the miracle of the oil on Chanukah, with favorites including *Latkes* (potato pancakes) and *Sufganiot* (doughnuts). Additionally, many have the custom to eat dairy in memory of the courageous Jewish woman named *Yehudit* who seduced, fed and killed the Greek army. Chanukah *Gelt*, gold coins made of chocolate to go with the *Dreidle* game are also popular treats given to children.