

A Teacher's Guide to Judaism

Chanukah

Chanukah is a minor Jewish festival. Chanukah is celebrated for eight days, during the Hebrew month of Kislev, coinciding with December.

Meaning:

Chanukah means 'dedication'- the Jewish people rededicated and committed the Temple in Jerusalem back to God after it was destroyed.

Traditional activities:

- Lighting a Chanukiah: an 8-branched candelabra with an extra branch to hold the "lead" candle, used to light the other candles. One candle is lit and burns out on the first night, and on each successive night an extra candle is lit, totalling 8 on the eighth night
- Eating food fried in oil: e.g. latkes (potato pancakes fried in oil) and doughnuts
- Playing "dreidel" - a spinning top game with a single Hebrew letter on each side, each of which has a different value
- Giving presents to children

Torah reading:

Numbers 7, which lists the offerings the leaders of the different tribes gave to establish the Temple.

Story:

Over 2500 years ago, the Syrian king Antiochus tried to make the Jewish people worship Greek gods. A statue of Antiochus was erected in the Jewish Temple (place of worship) and the Jewish people were ordered to bow down before him. The Ten Commandments forbid Jewish people to worship statues or idols and so they refused.

A small group of Jewish people called the Maccabees rebelled and after a three year war they took back Jerusalem from the Syrians who had defiled the Temple. They had sacrificed non-kosher animals in it, had put up idols and had ruined Jewish art. The Jewish people had to clean and repair the Temple. There was only a tiny drop of special holy oil left to light the Menorah (Hebrew for "lamp" and generally refers to the seven-branched golden candelabra that was lit every day in the Temple) which was always kept alight to represent God's eternity. A group of men had to travel four days out and four days back to fetch more kosher oil from afar. The small amount of oil that was left was lit. It was only enough for one day but lasted for eight days until more oil was brought back. This is the Chanukah miracle.

Greeting:

The traditional greeting on Chanukah is "Chanukah sameach", but often "happy Chanukah" is used.

DEFINITIONS AND GLOSSARY

Temple - According to the Hebrew Bible, the First Temple (most sanctified and holy place of worship), was the Holy Temple in ancient Jerusalem before its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar II after the Siege of Jerusalem of 587 BCE and its subsequent replacement with the Second Temple in 516 BCE.

Chanukiah



Latkes



Driedel



Jewish months (lunar calendar)

Tishrei (September-October)
Heshvan (October-November)
Kislev (November-December)
Tevet (December-January)
Shevat (January-February)
Adar (February-March)
Nisan (March-April)
Iyyar (April-May)
Sivan (May-June)
Tammuz (June-July)
Av (July-August)
Elul (August-September)