

Hanukkah Overview

Hanukkah is the annual Jewish Festival of Lights celebrated on eight successive days beginning on the 25th day of Kislev (the third month of the Jewish calendar) corresponding, approximately, to November or December in the Gregorian calendar.

In Hebrew, the word "Hanukkah" means "dedication." The holiday commemorates the rededication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem after the Jews' 165 B.C.E. victory over the Hellenist Syrians, who had outlawed Jewish rituals and ordered the Jews to worship Greek gods.

In remembrance, a candle is lit on the menorah each of the eight days of Hanukkah. Children receive gifts or money and play games like spin the dreidel.



The Menorah

On each night of Hanukkah, the menorah is lit to commemorate a miracle. When the holy Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt after it was destroyed by the Romans in 165 B.C.E., there was only one small flask of oil with which to light the menorah, enough for one day. Yet, despite this, the lamp burned for eight days, by which time a fresh supply of oil was obtained.

Ancient menorahs were made of clay, with small, pearl-shaped vessels, each with its own wick, arranged side-by-side. Today's menorah resembles the holy Temple's menorah and comes in all shapes and sizes.



The Dreidel Game

The most popular game associated with Hanukkah is the dreidel game. A dreidel is a four-sided top containing a letter on each side.

The Hebrew letter, "nun" means "nes," or miracle; the "gimmel" stands for "gadol," or great; the "heh" means happened; and the "shin" stands for there or when played in Israel "peh'," which stands for here. Together, the letters create the phrase, "A great miracle happened there (here)."

