

Chag Urim Sameach! Happy Hanukkah!

From all of us at
The Jewish Community Center

INSPIRING JEWISH JOURNEYS



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Hanukkah: The Festival of Lights

In 175 B.C.E. Antiochus IV became king. An admirer of the Greek way of life, he decided that all people living in the territories under his rule should embrace Greek culture. He encouraged people to adopt Greek customs, clothing, and ways of thinking and urged Jews to give up their own Jewish traditions and customs. The Temple in Jerusalem was desecrated and changed into a Temple honoring the Greek god Zeus.

Some Jews decided that it was time to put a stop to these "Greek" changes. When Antiochus' officers tried to enforce some of the new laws in the town of Modiin, the Jews rebelled. Mattathias, the High Priest of Modiin, and his followers went to the hills, armed to defend their faith. Antiochus' army pursued them, but was miraculously defeated around 165 B.C.E. by Jewish forces led by Judah Maccabee.

On the 25th of the month of Kislev, an eight day ceremony of rededication was proclaimed. The traditional form of Jewish worship was reestablished and the Temple was cleansed. According to legend, when the Maccabees went to relight the lamps in the Temple, they discovered there was only enough pure sacred oil to last one day. But a great miracle happened there and the one day's oil supply continued to burn for the entire eight days.

In commemoration of the miracle of the oil and the military victory of the Maccabees, Jews each year light a nine branched menorah called a chanukiah. One candle is lit each of the eight nights, using the ninth candle, the shamash, to light the others. Hanukkah is therefore also called the Festival of Lights.





Lighting the Candles

On each night of Chanukah one candle is added to the chanukiah starting from the right. After reciting the following blessings, the candles are lit left to right.

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

Barukh atah adonai eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, who makes us holy through God's mitzvot and commands us to light the Hanukkah candles.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵה הַזֶּה.

Barukh atah adonai eloheinu melekh ha'olam, she'asah nisim lavoteinu bayamim hahem bazman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, who did miracles for our ancestors in those days at this very season.

Only on the first night include this blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהִחְיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנֵה הַזֶּה.

Barukh atah adonai eloheinu melekh ha'olam, she'hechyanu v'kiy'manu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, for giving us life, sustaining us, and enabling us to reach this season.

Family Activities



The Dreidel Game

The Hebrew letters on the dreidel Nun, Gimmel, Hay, Shin stand for nes gadol hayah sham—a great miracle happened there. In Israel the letters on the dreidel are Nun, Gimmel, Hay, Peh for nes gadol hayah poh—a great miracle happened here. Give each person the same amount of candy or nuts. Each person puts one piece in the pot. The first player spins and does the following depending on the letter. Nun=nothing, Gimmel=takes all, hay=take half, and shin=put one in the pot. After a player gets a gimmel, everyone puts one more piece into the pot. Everyone gets a turn. When you are finished playing, you can eat your candy or nuts.

Family Discussion Topics

Hanukkah is a holiday of important and relevant themes and issues such as freedom and rebellion, assimilation and distinctiveness, desecration and dedication, courage, miracles, and hope. Sample conversation starters: What are examples of courage from our world, even in our own city? What are some religious dilemmas that Jews have faced in modern society? What are some modern day miracles you have witnessed or experienced? Who are the modern day Maccabees?

A Different Type of Gift Giving

In addition to exchanging gifts with family members consider also giving to others who are less fortunate, fulfilling the Jewish value of tikkun olam, "repairing the world." As a family you can give to others by giving food to the St. Louis Jewish Food pantry, visiting the Jewish Center for the Aged, volunteering with Meals on Wheel of Greater St. Louis, or building a home with Habitat for Humanity. To learn about more opportunities to give to others contact the JCRC 314-442-3871.