

The Hanukkah Story

During the time of the Second Holy Temple, the Syrian-Greek regime of Antiochus sought to pull Jews away from Judaism, with the hopes of assimilating them into Greek culture. Antiochus outlawed Jewish observance — including circumcision, Shabbat, and Torah study — under penalty of death. As well, many Jews — called Hellenists — began to assimilate into Greek culture, taking on Greek names, abandoning Jewish life, practices, and traditions. This began to decay the foundation of Jewish life and practice.

When the Greeks challenged the Jews to sacrifice a pig to a Greek god, a few courageous Jews took to the hills of Judea in open revolt against this threat to Jewish life. Led by Matitياهو, and later his son Judah the Maccabee, this small band of pious Jews led guerrilla warfare against the Syrian-Greek army. After three years the Maccabees beat incredible odds and miraculously succeeded in driving the foreigners from their land.

Jewish fighters entered Jerusalem and found the Holy Temple in shambles and desecrated with idols. The Maccabees cleansed the Temple and rededicated it on the 25th of Kislev. When it came time to re-light the Menorah, they searched the entire Temple, but found only one jar of pure oil bearing the seal of the High Priest. The group of believers lit the Menorah anyway and were rewarded with a miracle: That small jar of oil burned for eight days, until a new supply of oil could be brought.

HOW DOES THE STORY OF HANUKKAH RELATE TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

Traditional Candle Lighting Instructions

1. On the first night, place one candle at the far right, as you face the menorah. 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.)
2. First light the Shamash, then recite the blessings, and then use the Shamash to light the Hanukkah candle.
3. On the second night, place two candles in the two far-right positions — and use the Shamash to light the left one first.
4. Follow this same procedure each night of Hanukkah... until all the lights are kindled and glowing brightly!

A Hanukkah Message to share with your family before lighting.

We sing in *Haneirot Halalu* that we are only allowed to look at the flame – we can't benefit from the light they give off. Perhaps, there is a poignant message here. For five minutes we should shut our phones, close the computers, and look at the beautiful flames in the window and think about how each and everyone of us has an inner flame just waiting to burst forward to illuminate the world. Let's think of ways we can nurture that flame.

Suggested Activity

Go around the room and ask each member of the family to share a story of when they felt extra pride in being Jewish.

Blessings:

FIRST BLESSING:

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

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Hanukkah light.

SECOND BLESSING:

Ba-ruch A-tah Ado-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 G-d, King of the universe, who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.

THIRD BLESSING IS ONLY SAID ON THE FIRST NIGHT:

Ba-ruch A-tah Ado-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 G-d, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

After the Hanukkah lights are kindled, it is customary to recite or sing Haneirot Halalu.

*Ha-nei-rot ha-lo-lu o-nu mad-li-kin
Al ha-te-shu-ot ve-al ha-ni-sim ve-al ha-nif-la-ot,
She-a-see-ta la-avo-tei-nu ba-ya-mim ha-heim biz-man ha-zeh,
Al ye-dei ko-ha-ne-cha ha-ke-do-shim,
Ve-chol she-mo-nat ye-mei cha-nu-kah ha-nei-rot ha-la-lu ko-desh hem,
Ve-ein la-nu re-shut le-hish-ta-meish ba-hen,
E-lo lir-o-tan bil-vad, ke-dei le-ho-dot u-le-ha-leil le-shim-cha ha-ga-dol
Al ni-se-cha ve-al nif-le-o-te-cha ve-al ye-shu-o-te-cha.*

We kindle these lights [to commemorate] the saving acts, miracles and wonders which You have performed for our forefathers, in those days at this time, through Your holy priests.

Throughout the eight days of Hanukkah, these lights are sacred, and we are not permitted to make use of them, but only to look at them, in order to offer thanks and praise to Your great Name for Your miracles, for Your wonders and for Your salvations.