

# CHANUKAH



## The Story

In the year 367 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered Judea and its capital Jerusalem. They became part of the Macedonian empire. After Alexander died, in 323 BCE, his kingdom was divided into 3 parts, with Judea falling to the Syrian Greeks. This did not affect the majority of the wealthy Jews. But the process of assimilation from Judaism to Greek culture began, both in Judea itself, and in the Diaspora. Some men were even prepared to undergo painful surgery to uncircumcise themselves and ceased to circumcise their sons. Although those who were willing to assimilate were sizeable, it was not the whole population. But at this stage it was still at least just assimilation by choice.

This changed when King Antiochus IV came to power. In the year 169 BCE a Greek city was established opposite the Temple mount. The Greeks insisted on a change in religious practices, including pig sacrifices and pagan cult worship in the Holy Temple. The Jews were forbidden many of their religious practices, such as study of Torah, observance of Shabbat and circumcision, in an attempt to remove the Jewish spirituality.

Some of the supporters, or Hellenists, as they are called, were happy with these changes, but there was a growing mass of resistance. This did not impress the King, who crushed the resistance firmly. Resisters were given a choice – paganization or martyrdom. The King did not realize the level of Jewish determination, and kept up huge pressure on them. So with the only choice left to the masses being to either escape or fight, that is what they did.

By 167 BCE a Hasmonean priest, a pious Jew named Mattathias and his 5 sons became outlaws after he killed a man for practising the new cult and destroyed the pagan altar. They escaped to the hills not far from Jerusalem. Gradually other Jews who wanted to stay faithful to the Torah joined them. They were called the Chasidim (pious ones).

Sadly Mattathias was not a young man, and he died shortly after moving into the hills. His son Judah took over the control of the growing group of men. Judah Maccabee (Judah the Hammer) as he became known, started planning and executing guerrilla warfare type strategies against the great Greek armies. The Maccabees, as the group was known, were remarkably successful due to their familiarity with the terrain, the support of the locals, and their do or die attitude.



After 3 years of struggle, the Jews recaptured the Temple mount. They cleaned and purified the Temple, demolished the pig-tainted altar, and rebuilt and rededicated a new one. They also rekindled the great Menorah which stood in the inner sanctuary, on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of Kislev in the year 165 BCE. The dedication ceremonies lasted for 8 days. Oil that should have lasted only one day lasted all eight as a result of a miracle.

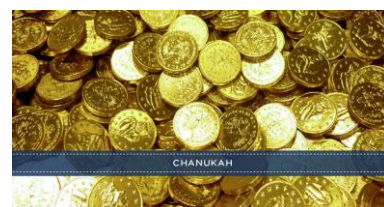
# The Customs

There are several customs that are related to Chanukah. The first is that of playing with a dreidle. The players must spin a four sided top. Each side has a Hebrew letter on it; nuhn (n), gimmel (g), hey (h) and shin (sh). These letters are the initials of the phrase Nes Gadol Hayah Sham – a great miracle occurred there. The dreidle is spun, and depending on what letter it lands on, the spinning player must either put in or take out of the ‘pot’. Nuhn equals nothing, gimmel takes all, hey takes half and shin puts in. The game can be played with small value coins, or even lollies.



Another custom is one relating to food. We traditionally eat foods fried in oil, to commemorate the miracle of the single container of oil that lasted for the whole 8 days. So latkes – grated potato pancakes are a favourite, as are donuts.

Another custom is that of giving our children a gift over Chanukah. Different families have different customs, some give just one gift, some give one small gift every day over the whole festival period. It is very typical to give Chanukah gelt – money - and often we will give chocolate money in addition to or instead of real money.



It is permissible to perform regular work and cook on Chanukah.

## Message from the Rabbi

### The Connection Between Chanukah and Christmas

There is a book that was written during the Tana'im time period about 2000 years ago, called Megilat Ta'anit. In this book there is a long list of special holidays that used to be celebrated at the time of the second temple for all kinds of events and miracles that happened at that time.

Once the Temple was destroyed all these festivals were cancelled except for two, Purim and Channukah.

We will discuss Purim another time, but since Channukah is coming up, we need to answer the question: What made Channukah so special that it was kept event after the destruction of the Temple?

It's interesting to note that a festival at this time of the year was celebrated even before the Jewish nation was born, all the way back to first man, Adam, who in fact established it.

The Medrash tells us that Adam was created on Rosh Hashana 5771 years ago. Being in the Northern Hemisphere the days were getting shorter and the sun was setting a few minutes earlier each day. Adam was worried because the thought the world was heading towards darkness, until one day this stopped and the sun started setting later and the days became longer. The next year on the shortest day of the year, Adam made an eight day festival to thank G-d for the light.

In the generations after Adam, this festival was kept, yet as the people forgot G-d, and started worshipping idols, they forgot the reason this festival was originally established and they stopped thanking G-d.

Jewish festivals are celebrated at a specific time of the year for a combination of historical and agricultural reasons; for example, Sukkot, the Jews dwelled in Sukkot in the desert for 40 years. To remember this G-d told us to celebrate a special festival, and the specific date was chosen to be the middle of the month of Tishrei which is autumn. This is the time when everything is gathered from the fields and by making the festival then, the Torah is actually directing the celebration of the end of the agricultural season so thank G-d.

The same idea applies to Pesach, where we remember the exodus from Egypt which was linked to the celebration of the harvesting season.

A similar concept is found with the festival of Chanukah. On Chanukah we mainly celebrate the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian-Greek Empire, which gave the Jews independence in their land for 200 years.

Aside from this, a miracle happened to a group of Cohanim in the Temple. The little jug of oil they found lasted them for 8 days.

The sages of the time, who heard of this miracle, also remembered the prophecies from 2 centuries earlier, of Chaggai and Zecharia, about the inauguration (the English word for Chanukah!) of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple (which took place at exactly this time of the year).

For these reasons (the miracle of the Menorah and the victory over the Greeks) the Rabbis re-established an old/new festival of lights at the same time it was celebrated by Adam, 3500 years before the story of Channukah.

It is fascinating to notice that this same festival which was established by the first man on earth, and drifted in the wrong direction by his descendants, is also the origin of the Christian Christmas and of many other religions festivals (eg the Hindu festival- Davali) who all have this common denominator of celebrating a festival of light at the same time of year.

The work, in the past 2000 years, has improved a lot in terms of moving away from idol worshipping and towards monotheism. The Muslims realized the importance of establishing and praying to one G-d, while the Christians have a longer way to go.

Please G-d, all the different religions in the world will realize and remember the original reason for the festival of lights and will return to the One and Only Master of the universe.

But before we worry about the rest of the world we should remember where we come from and what our task in the world is.

The Macabees, in their time, decided they must go into physical war once they realized that spiritually they were losing the battle to the Greeks.

Being a light until the nations is our collective goal. It can only be achieved once we are strong and firm enough in our Jewish identity.

Let each of us make it our individual aim to be proud of who we are and be able to set a good example to others.

Channukah Same'ach  
Rabbi Eldad Zamir  
Straus-Amiel Institute



# Chanukah Quiz

1. What is the Hebrew date for Chanukah?
2. What are the letters on an Israeli dreidel?
3. Two reasons for celebrating Chanukah?
4. What type of Hallel is said on Chanukah?
5. In which direction are the candles lit?
6. According to Beit Shammai, how many candles are lit the third night?
7. On what night would Beit Shammai and Hillel have the same number of candles lit?
8. What does Chanukah mean?
9. What was the name of the Greek ruler?
10. What were the names of Matityahu's 5 sons?
11. What Jewish mother displayed extraordinary courage during the early period of the struggle?
12. What kind of foods is it customary to eat?
13. Which candles are lit first, Shabbat or Chanukah?
14. How is the Parsha of 'Mikets' connected to Chanukah?
15. Who were the Hellenists?
16. What purpose does the 'Shamash' have?
17. How many blessings are recited over the candles?
18. For how long must the candles stay lit?
19. During which Temple did the story of Chanukah transpire?
20. Which tribe did Judah belong to?

(Answers later in newsletter)

## Candlelighting

The Chanukah lights are lit as soon after nightfall as possible. On Friday evening, they are lit before the Shabbat candles then on Saturday evening, they wait until after Havdalah is recited. It is important that the light from the Chanukah menorah is not used for any 'functional' purpose, eg to light a room, to light a cigarette, etc. This is why the 'shamash' or service candle is placed near the others, that it may be used, should a flame be required.

When lighting the menorah, one lights the service candle, or shamash, then recites the following blessings:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֵל הַיְנוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ  
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה

*Baruch ata adonai elohainu melech ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah*

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

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֵל הַיְנוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים  
לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ, בְּיָמִים הָהֵם בְּזֶמַן הַזֶּה

*Baruch ata adonai elohainu melech ha-olam she-asah nisim la-avotainu ba-yamim ha-hem bazman hazeh*

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

On the first night of Chanukah only, a third blessing is also added:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֵל הַיְנוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַתִּיּוֹנוֹ וְקִיּוּמֵנו  
וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch ata adonai elohainu melech ha-olam sheheheyanu v'kee-y'manu v'hee-gee-anu lazman hazeh*

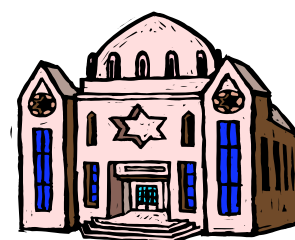
On the first night, only one candle is lit. When facing your menorah, this is the one on the far right. On the second night, two lights are lit, on the third, three, and so on until all eight are lit on the eighth night.

When adding additional candles each night, they are added from right toward the left, however the lighting itself takes place from *left to right*.

In addition to the lighting of the candles, there are 2 other formal observances for Chanukah. One is reciting the Hallel, the special prayer of praise of God, and the other is the Al Hanissim prayer, which is a short passage about victories and miracles that is inserted into the silent Amidah and into the Grace after Meals.

## Shul News

We celebrated the Induction of Rabbi Natti Friedler this month. This was a wonderful event was executed by interstate Rabbi's Freilich and Heilbrunn and attended by a number of the members of COSA, along with many members of our Kehilla. We once again thank those who



prepared and presented the food, did the flowers and generally helped make the day the success it was.

Please note that the Synagogue Office and Shop will be closed over the public holiday break from Monday December 20<sup>th</sup> and will reopen on Monday January 10<sup>th</sup>. **For the rest of January the office will only be open Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings.**

SPONSOR A KIDDUSH. A great way to celebrate your birthday/anniversary/or any other special event, is to sponsor a Kiddush in your honour at your shule on Shabbat. Phone the office on 8338 2922 to book the day and get all the details.

## Answers to the Chanukah Quiz

1. The 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev
2. Nun, Gimel, Heh, Peh
3. The miracle of oil; the victory over the Greeks
4. Full Hallel
5. Left to right
6. Six
7. They will never light the same number of candles!
8. Dedication, they rested on the 25<sup>th</sup> (of Kislev)
9. Antiochus
10. Yochanan, Shimon, Yehudah, Eliezer, Yonatan
11. Channah
12. Oily foods, to commemorate the miracle of oil
13. The Chanukah candles are lit first
14. It has 2025 words. The numeric value of the word 'ner' (candle) is 250. Multiplied by the number of days of Chanukah (8) = 2000. The remaining 25 represents the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev – the first day of Chanukah
15. The Jews who imitated the Greek culture
16. Its main purpose is to stay lit in case you receive any enjoyment from the candles (which is prohibited). This way we can always blame it on the extra candle!
17. Three on the first night, two on the remaining nights
18. At least half an hour (there is a dispute over whether from sunset or stars out)
19. Second
20. He was a Kohen (Priest) from the Tribe of Levi

קהילה קדישא בית ישראל

בס"ד

ADELAIDE HEBREW CONGREGATION  
**THE VOICE**



The President and Board of Management, along with Rabbi and Shiri Friedler and family wish all the community a Happy Chanukah