

Chappy Chanuka

A Guide To Chanuka For Gentiles, Secular Jews, and Other Interested Folks

While browsing through a large chain store's holiday section, and locating the tiny area set aside for the Jewish families in what is actually an area heavily populated by such, I was both surprised and not to discover they had nothing but some electric menorahs. You know the kind, you set them in your window, plug them into the outlet, and viola, you are honoring the Jewish holiday as well. Oi vey!

Don't get me wrong, I grew up in a Protestant home with one of those plug in menorahs. I can still remember just which window we displayed it in every year. The tree got the "good window" that could be seen clearly from the street. The menorah went in the one that was half covered by a decorated shrub and an equally Christmas festooned mailbox. Maybe if we'd known what you'll find in this resource, we might have done more.

Just What Is Chanuka?

Yes, that is the correct spelling. Yes, it is spelled two other ways as well – Chanukah and Hanukah. No, it is not a religious holiday but rather one that celebrates victory in war.

In the 2nd century BCE, the Jewish people lived and flourished in Palestine. The Syrian-Greeks attempted to oppress them but the Jewish population, led by Judah and his four brothers, led a successful rebellion against them. The revolt reached its height when the king of Syria at the time, King Antiochus IV pronounced the observance of any Jewish rituals illegal and declared the Jewish Temple a site of pagan worship. Needless to say, that was enough for the Jews who, in 163 BCE defeated the Syrian-Greeks and took control of their own land at last. The Temple was cleansed and rededicated hence the name, Chanuka, which means "rededication".

Why Is Chanuka Not In The Bible?

The story is contained in the Book of Maccobees, one of fourteen books that make up the Apocrypha, or books not included in the Jewish bible due to when they were written. The Protestant bible also does not include these books while the Catholic bible contains eleven of them.

Why Is Chanuka Celebrated For Eight Nights?

There are three generally accepted explanations for the holiday lasting eight nights. One has Judah and his brothers recapturing the Temple and rebuilding the alter, which took them eight nights to complete. One, which most are familiar with, involves refugees hiding in the Temple with just enough oil to light the menorah for one night. Through a miracle, the oil lasted eight nights instead. And the final explanation holds that, after the Syrians were defeated and the victorious Jews entered the Temple, they found eight iron spears, which they plunged into the ground, kindling a light atop each one.

Why Is Chanuka Called The Festival of Lights?

It is also called the Feast of Lights in honor of the miracle of the candle oil in the Temple.

And Jewish Children Really Get Stuff Each Night?

In many families, yes. But the Christians have themselves to blame in a way as it's a modern response – no one wants their kid to feel left out, especially during the holiday season. Traditionally, Jewish children only received gifts on the fifth night at a special family dinner and then just gelt, a special kind of chocolate coin candy.

We Want To Light The Menorah To Honor The Jewish People This Year, What Should We Know?

Don't get a plug in kind 😊 Menorahs have nine candle spots, one for each night and one for the candle used to light the others, called the shamash which means "servant." You insert candles from the right, one on the first night, two on the second, three on the third, and so on. You light them from the left though. This gives both directions equal value in the ritual (yes, that really is the reason.) The female head of household, AKA mom, traditionally lights the candles and they are allowed to burn out completely each night and replaced with new ones the next day.

That Covers The Actions, But What About Special Prayers?

Not really. And only on the first night. Remember, this is not a religious holiday or ritual you are performing so don't feel tied to praying as your Jewish neighbors might. One suggestion we've used is to focus on the meaning of Chanuka, that being rededication. Try to gear your prayers, ceremony, Wiccan dance, whatever you choose to do, around that idea – rededicating yourself – be it to your family, your hobbies, yourself.

Jews Take Days Off For Other Holidays, Do They Get Eight For This One?

Again, no, because it is not a religious holiday.

What Do The Letters On A Draydel Mean?

Draydel comes from Yiddish and means roughly “to turn.” It's a four sided top, each side with a Hebrew letter. Before 1948, the letters spelled the phrase “a great miracle happened there.” In 1948, however, the State of Israel was founded and the draydel was altered to read “a great miracle happened here” and “a great miracle happened in Israel.”

Why Do Jewish People Eat So Many Fried Foods At Chanuka?

The oil, used in cooking latkes, or potato pancakes, sufganiyot, or doughnuts, and other fried treats, is symbolic of the candle oil miracle in the Temple. And because they are yummy 😊

How Do They Decide When Chanuka Starts, It Changes Every Year!

Chanuka begins on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, which usually falls during the second half of December.

The Draydel Game

Materials:

1 Draydel

A bunch of small items to act as counters. Raisins, pretzel sticks, M&M's, chocolate coins, beans.

Game Play:

- Divide the counters equally among the players.
- Every player contributes one counter into a central pile. This becomes the "pot."
- Players spin the Draydel in turn and contribute or collect items from the pot based upon which letter faces up when the Draydel stops its spin.



- Nun - Nisht - the player collects **n**othing from the pot.
- Gimel - Gantz - the player **g**ets it all.
- Hey - Halb - The player collects **h**alf of the pot.
- Shin - Shtel - The player **s**ets one of his own items into the pot.

Potato Latkes

- 6 Potatoes
- 2 Eggs
- 1 teaspoon salt (optional)
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper (optional)
- 1 small onion grated
- 2 Tablespoons flour
- 1/4 cup oil for frying

Peel and grate the onion and the potatoes. (Use blender or food processor for best results.)

Mix all ingredients together except the oil.

Pour oil into frying pan and heat.

Once the oil is hot, drop the potato batter by tablespoonful onto frying pan. Fry latkes until golden brown and then turn and cook other side.

Optional: Serve Latkes w/applesauce and/or sour cream.

Serves six

Sufganiyot (Chanuka Doughnuts)

- 3 cups sifted flour
- 2 eggs (beaten)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 5 tablespoons sugar
- 1/2 cup oil
- 2 packages of dried yeast
- 1 packet (.2 ounce) vanilla sugar
- 1 cups warm water
- jam
- confectioners sugar

Place 2 cups flour in bowl with salt, sugar, yeast, vanilla sugar. Mix well.

Add oil and water and mix till smooth.

Add eggs and mix again.

Add remaining flour until smooth, elastic texture is obtained.

Let the dough rise in a moist warm place.

Knead again then roll out the dough with rolling pin.

Cut into the rolled-out dough with the rim of a glass.

Allow the doughnut rounds to rise for another 20 minutes or so.

Use a heavy pot to fry the doughnut rounds in deep hot oil (350-375 degrees) until golden brown.

Drain doughnuts on paper towels.

Inject with jam and roll in confectioners sugar.

Enjoy.

Homemade Menorah

Self-hardening clay, about 1 1/2 lbs.

Ruler

Butter knife

Hanukkah candles

Sheet of sturdy cardboard

Paintbrushes

Acrylic paint in assorted colors

On a clean work surface, roll the clay into a long cylinder with an even diameter of a little over an inch.

Then, measure the cylinder and mark off 10 even lengths (about 1 1/2 inches each).

Cut eight of these lengths, and leave the last two uncut (these will be the taller shamash).

Cylinders may flatten when cut; gently reshape them if necessary.

Using a Hanukkah candle, make a hole in one end of each cylinder, deep enough to hold a lighted candle.

Again, reshape gently.

On the cardboard base, line up the cylinders side by side, with the one for the shamash in the center.

Gently press the sides of the cylinders together, using water to make them stick (some separation may occur when the menorah dries).

To decorate your menorah, roll out a thin coil of clay to twine around the bottom or sides.

Alternatively, you can try adding stars or other clay shapes.

To help clay decorations adhere to the menorah, brush both surfaces with water before attaching.

Let the finished menorah dry for two or three days, then paint it in bright colors.

Handmade Menorah

Yellow construction paper
Black construction paper
Blue finger paint
White finger paint

Paint your palm blue and your fingers and thumbs white.
Make a hand print on the black construction paper.
Make sure all your fingers, including your thumb, are facing straightup.
Then do the left hand, and make sure the thumbs overlap.
This will create a menorah, with the overlapping thumbs being the
Shamesh, and the other fingers the candle holders with candles.
Next cut out candle flame shapes from the yellow construction paper and
glue in place.