

## Thanksgiving Meets Sukkot and Chanukah

by Anbeth Mark

The Hebrew Calendar can be strange to Americans. Jewish holidays appear to slide back-and-forth, never falling on the same English date from year to year. This year, for example, Thanksgiving and Chanukah fall within the same few days.

Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays, but, until I compared it to Chanukah, I didn't realize how alike they are. Growing up, Thanksgiving was mainly a family meal. My father was a chef who worked in Manhattan restaurants his entire career. Because he adored cooking, our Thanksgivings became fullblown family gatherings. Watching the Macy's Day Parade was always a wonderful family activity. Our children look forward to it every year, even now that they are adults.

As a child, Chanukah was, by far, the most fun: candles burning, latkes frying, and gift-giving were the best. It might seem unusual to find commonalities between Thanksgiving and Chanukah, but they are there if we look. Chanukah is a holiday of religious freedom, and the Pilgrims, regardless of how we look at them today, were also seeking that same freedom. The Maccabees fought the Greeks to preserve religious freedom in their homeland, and the Pilgrims, unable to find it in their homeland, sailed to far-off America searching for it.

It is significant that the "miraculous oil story" appears only in the Talmud, written years after the Chanukah military campaign. Scholars stress that the Maccabees, hiding in the hills and mountains from the Greeks, were unable to celebrate the Sukkot holiday. They delayed its observance until the war was won, counting seven days of Sukkot and one day for Simchat Torah. That is another reason why Chanukah lasts for eight days.

Sukkot was the model for the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims, who considered themselves "Old-Testament Christians," identified with the Israelites in the Bible. Their first Thanksgiving thanked God for their crops, as did our ancestors on Sukkot. Early on, they lived in huts which resembled Sukkot. Even their Thanksgiving meal was a harvest festival.

We may assume that the first Chanukah celebration included a festive meal, even if it didn't include latkes or sufganiyote (The potato originated in South America, and donuts are Dutch.).

Let us remember that we could not celebrate last Thanksgiving with family, because of quarantining due to Covid. We hope and pray that, this year, we can gather safely. Wishing you all a happy and safe Holiday Season!