

# CHANUKAH OVERVIEW & HOLIDAY GUIDE

We love the Festival of Chanukah. Lighting the candles has a beautiful simplicity and warmth, especially as the days get colder. Chanukah warms our hearts by bringing Jewish families together to celebrate. However, Chanukah also has a lot of depth and meaning. The guide below can be used to understand some of the concepts and give you some practical tips to celebrate.

We hope you can help us share the beauty of Chanukah and illuminate the UES by participating in our **100 HOMES OF LIGHT** initiative (see back page for information). We look forward to seeing you at our community wide Chanukah lighting on **Sunday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> 5:45 p.m.** (see back page for more information).

*Wishing you an illuminating Chanukah,*

**Rabbi Daniel & Rachel Kraus**

## History of Chanukah

The story of Chanukah occurred during the Second Temple Period (165 BCE), after the Seleucids (Syrian Greeks) had wrested control of Judea from the Ptolemies (Egyptians). Both the Syrian and Egyptian dynasties had succeeded Alexander the Great.

By the time the Chanukah story happened, the Tanach (the Hebrew Bible) had already been completed and canonized. Thus, even though there is a Hebrew record of the Chanukah story (called the Book(s) of Maccabees), it is counted among the apocrypha.

Chanukah was established by the Rabbis and holy leadership of that time, not by Biblical law. Both Chanukah and Purim were enacted by the leadership as new holidays because the Jewish people were miraculously saved from their enemies so that we can commemorate God's kindnesses to us.

## Meaning of the Word Chanukah

There are three possible meanings for the word "Chanukah" (none of which may be found in the Adam Sandler song):

**Dedication:** When a new building or program is completed, it is usually dedicated at or before its first use. The same is true of the Temple. When the Hasmoneans lit the menorah in the Temple after driving out the enemy, they re-dedicated the Temple. This represents the idea of emerging from impurity to purity and starting over. We take inspiration from the ability of the Hasmoneans to start building sanctity over again (even with the humblest of resources) to do the same in our lives.

**Education:** The word “*chinuch*” in Hebrew means “education”. It is often remarked that the evil Antiochus Epiphanes never meant to deprive the Jews of their bodies, only their souls. He wanted to make Hellenism the national ‘religion’, so he forbade the study of Torah and indoctrinated the Jewish youth with Greek values. Anti-semites always attack our Torah, because they know that it is from where we draw our strength. Chanukah represents a courageous stand against the forces that promote ignorance of Torah and assimilation.

**Rest:** The Talmud derives the date of Chanukah (the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month of Kislev) by making two words out of Chanukah, “chanu” “ka”, literally “they rested [on] the 25<sup>th</sup>”. In this, we celebrate the miraculous intervention of God, who delivered the strong into the hands of the weak and the many into the hands of the few. But the celebration is not done to commemorate the bloody battle or the slaying of our opponents, but only the end of the war. We do not desire the destruction of our enemies, only that they cease to be our enemies and let us live in our land (with Jerusalem as its capital and the Temple at its center) in peace. So may it be His will in our days, Amen.

### **Observances of Chanukah**

**Lighting the Candles:** The prevalent custom (and the most beautiful way to perform the mitzvah) is to light in ascending order, 1 candle the first night, 2 the second night and so on. It is also the custom to add the hiddurim (enhancements of the mitzvah; upgrades, so to speak) of using olive oil in one’s menorah and for every member of the family to have their own menorah. The candles should be lit at or about nightfall (5:15-ish) and should burn for at least half-an-hour. If you need to light earlier or later than nightfall, ask your local Rabbi for the time parameters.

We light the candles in order to publicize the miracles of a) our victory over the Greeks and rededication of the Temple and b) the flask of oil that lasted for eight days. Consequently, one should light in a place where the flames will be the most visible. Many have the custom of lighting outside their houses, while others light them in a window overlooking a public street. If one cannot do either, because of wind, anti-semitism or another reason, one can light inside one’s house. The proper method of doing this is to put it next to one’s front doorway on the opposite side of the *mezuzah*. This way, one is surrounded by *mitzvot* when you enter the house. If this too is unsafe (because of small children, say) put the *menorah* in a prominent indoor location, but not in the same place as or next to one’s Shabbat candles.

On Friday night, the Chanukah candles are lit before the Shabbat candles. The accepted view is that they should be set up to burn for 1 hour and 45 minutes from the time of their lighting, which should be 20 minutes before sunset.

Children should light Menorahs for the educational value. Needless to say, parents have a responsibility to educate their children about Chanukah and to study its messages with them, even if the children have learned it at school.

If one will not be home for Chanukah, the general rule is that one lights the menorah where one sleeps, even if it is just a hotel room and you are spending no other time there. Specific questions need to be clarified with a Rabbi.

**Special Prayers:** Because Chanukah commemorates a miracle, we say the Hallel prayer (Psalms 113-118) every day during our morning Service. We also insert the Al ha-Nisim prayer. In the Amidah (silent devotion) and in the Birkat ha-Mazon (Grace after Meals), a special prayer of thanks is added for Chanukah. “Al –ha-Nisim” literally means [we thank God] ‘for the miracles’ of the Chanukah story.

### **Customs of Chanukah**

**Chanukah gelt:** Because there is such an emphasis on education and family-time on Chanukah, it was always the custom to give children small gifts of money and sweets. This is a way to make being Jewish sweet and enjoyable for children. In America, the custom has evolved to full-blown present-giving, often one for each night of Chanukah. This sometimes gets out of control and makes the holiday more about lust for loot and greed than about light, God or the Jewish people. I think that it all depends on the intention. One’s intention in giving gifts ought not to be to keep up with x-mas or to spoil our children rotten, but to inspire, encourage and reveal to them the beauty of their Jewishness.

**Latkes & Sufganiyot (donuts):** Since the miracle of Chanukah was performed with oil, we see this as an opportunity to put on a few pounds, particularly by eating enough oil to keep us alight for eight nights. Say no more.

**Playing Dreidel (*s’vivon*):** The dreidel was originally a kind of school-child game played as a ruse (so the legend goes) to fool the Greeks into thinking that Jewish children were playing games when they were actually studying Torah. Since the study of Torah was forbidden by law, they would break out the dreidels anytime a sentry approached. Think about how much they put at risk just to study Torah! It should serve to inspire us to learn Torah when that education is at our fingertips. Nowadays, Diaspora dreidel have the letters “ “ (nun-gimmel, hay-shin) , standing for “nes gadol” (a great miracle) “hayah sham” (happened there). Israeli dreidels have the better version: a great miracle happened HERE. May it be His will that we witness miracles again in the land of Israel.

# Chanukah

AT  
KJ

## 12th Annual Chanukah in the Park

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2 | 5:45 PM

@ Carl Schurz Park, East 86th Street Entrance

JOIN KJ BEGINNERS AND CHABAD OF THE UES  
as we spread the light and warmth of the festival  
with live music, treats, holiday spirit  
and fun for the whole family.

### One Hundred Homes of Light

DECEMBER 2 - 9

Learn more @ ckj.org

Share the light of Chanukah with  
friends, families, and neighbors!

Share your #ChanukahSelfie  
on Facebook or Twitter using  
the tag #ChanukahSelfie.

### Chanukah Workshop

NOVEMBER 29 | 7:00 PM

@ KJ, 125 East 85th Street

Join Rabbi Daniel & Rachel Kraus  
for a deep dive into the Festival of  
Lights like never before.



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Feel free to email [rdk@ckj.org](mailto:rdk@ckj.org) with any questions