

Every year between the end of November and the end of December, Jewish people around the world celebrate the holiday of Chanukah, the Festival of Lights. Chanukah begins on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev, but the starting date on the western calendar varies from year to year. The holiday celebrates the events which took place over 2,300 years ago in the land of Judea, which is now Israel

Long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away

*WHOOPS!* Wrong story! :-)

Long ago in the land of Judea there was a Syrian king, Antiochus. The king ordered the Jewish people to reject their G-d, their religion, their customs and their beliefs and to worship the Greek gods. There were some who did as they were told, but many refused. One who refused was Judah Maccabee

Judah and his four brothers formed an army and chose as their name the word "Maccabee", which means hammer. After three years of fighting, the Maccabees were finally successful in driving the Syrians out of Israel and reclaimed the Temple in Jerusalem. The Maccabees wanted to clean the building and to remove the hated Greek symbols and statues. On the 25th day of the month of Kislev, the job was finished and the temple was rededicated

When Judah and his followers finished cleaning the temple, they wanted to light the eternal light, known as the *N'er Tamid*, which is present in every Jewish house of worship. Once lit, the oil lamp should never be extinguished

Only a tiny jug of oil was found with only enough for a single day. The oil lamp was filled and lit. Then a miracle occurred as the tiny amount of oil stayed lit not for one day, but for eight days

Jews celebrate Chanukah to mark the victory over the Syrians and the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple. The Festival of the Lights, Chanukah, lasts for eight days to commemorate the miracle of the oil. The word Chanukah means "rededication"

In America, families celebrate Chanukah at home. They give and receive gifts, decorate the house, entertain friends and family, eat special foods, and light the holiday menorah

The Chanukah menorah is called a *HANUKIYAH*. It has nine candle holders. There are eight candles, one for each night of Chanukah. The ninth is called the *SHAMASH*

The Shamash is used to light the other eight candles. The Shamash is lit first and then is used to light the other candles.

The candles are placed in the *HANUKIYAH* from right to left. But when the candles are lit, you light from left to right

One of the best known symbols of Chanukah is the *Dreidel*. A dreidel is a four sided top with a Hebrew letter on each side.

The four letters are:

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These letters mean "*A Great Miracle Happened There.*" In Israel the dreidel is a bit different in that their letters mean "*A Miracle Happened HERE!*"

Dreidel is also a popular game played during the Holiday. Players use pennies, nuts, raisins, or chocolate coins (gelt) as tokens or chips.

The player spins the dreidel. When the dreidel stops, the letter that is facing up decides the fate.

NUN - nothing happens - next player spins the dreidel

GIMEL - player takes all tokens in the pot

HEY - player takes half of the pot

SHIN - player must put one token into the pot

