

Chanukah – A Holiday of Lights

Chanuka, which can also be spelled as Hanukkah, is an 8-day Jewish holiday. It is known as the Festival of Lights, which celebrates the dedication of an ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem thousands of years ago. According to the Hebrew, or Jewish Bible, a miracle took place then. A one-day supply of oil miraculously lasted eight days. The dates of Hanukkah always change, but usually occur anywhere in late November to Late December.

The main way people observe the holiday is by lighting a candle on a candelabra, a special candle holder with space for 9 candles on each of the 8 nights. This candelabra is called a menorah. Now there are also electric menorahs. Some people also use oil lamps. The 9th candle space is usually higher than the others and is lit on every night. This 9th candle is there so that people can see the other candles they are lighting. So, two lights are lit on the first night, three on the second and so on. Some families have the head of household light the candles. Other families share the responsibility. The menorah is supposed to be placed somewhere visible like in a window facing the street. The candles are supposed to stay lit for at least 30 minutes after it gets dark. There are also special prayers people say and holy songs sung when the candles are lit.

Schools and government offices are open for Hanukkah since the observances happen at night. Some families exchange gifts on each night of the holiday. Some foods traditionally eaten on Hanukkah include latkes, fried potato pancakes, and doughnuts. These and other fried foods are eaten because they are cooked in oil and remind people of the oil that lasted for 8 nights. Children play with a special four-sided spinning top called a dreidel.