

# Eight Facts about Hanukkah

Even though Hanukkah is often included in "Christmas Around the World" celebrations, it's not the "Jewish Christmas." Here are some basic Hanukkah facts for kids.

Hanukkah does fall in December, frequently very near the dates of the Christian Christmas celebration and may involve the exchange of gifts, but that's where the similarity ends. Here are some basic facts about this Jewish holiday that will help children better understand the difference.

## 1. Hanukkah (The Festival of Lights)



The history of Hanukkah predates Christmas. Antiochus, the Greek King of Syria, outlawed Jewish rituals and ordered the Jews to worship Greek gods. Most Jews were angry and decided to fight back. In 165 B.C.E, the Jewish Maccabees managed to drive the Syrian army out of

Jerusalem and reclaim their temple. Hanukkah is the celebration of this victory. In history, Hanukkah has been a minor holiday, only gaining in popularity since the late 1800's. In Hebrew, the word "Hanukkah" means "dedication."

## 2. Spelling of Hanukkah

The guttural sound of the Hebrew letters cannot be duplicated by the English alphabet. For this reason, there are many spellings of this holiday in English and all are correct.

### 3. Hanukkah celebration dates



Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days and nights, starting on the 25th in the month of Kislev on the Hebrew calendar. Since the Hebrew calendar is lunar rather than solar, Hanukkah falls on a different day each year, anywhere from November to early January on the standard calendar.

### 4. Meaning of the menorah

The Maccabees wanted to rededicate their temple by lighting the "eternal flame," but they only had enough consecrated oil to burn for one day. Miraculously, that little bit of oil lasted for eight days until more purified oil could be found. Today, Jewish families light candles or burn oil in a candelabra called a "menorah" for the eight days of Hanukkah, adding one candle each day. The special "helper candle" used to light the rest of



the candles each night is called the Shamash. On the first night, the Shamash plus one other candle are lit. On the second night, the Shamash plus two candles are lit. This process is continued on through the eight nights. The eight-day lighting of the candles commemorates the eight-day miracle of the oil.



### 5. Giving of gifts

As part of the celebration, children received gelt (Yiddish term for "money") during each of the eight days in order for them to learn about charity. More recently, in regions where Jewish families have a lot of contact with Christians,

many families give children a small gift each of the eight nights. In areas where Christmas gifts are so important to non-Jewish children, this allows Jewish children to be included in receiving gifts.

## 6. Dreidels

During Hanukkah, Jewish children enjoy playing with a toy called a dreidel, which is similar to a top. The dreidel has four sides and features the Hebrew letters nun, gimel, hay, and shin. These letters stand for the Hebrew phrase Nes Gadol Hayah Sham, "A great miracle happened there." The game is played with candy. The player who has all the candy in the end is the winner.



## 7. Hanukkah foods

Fried foods are traditional during Hanukkah, in remembrance of the sacred oil. Popular fried foods are Latkes (potato pancakes) and Sufganiyot (sweet jelly-filled doughnuts).



## 8. Family celebration

As in many other celebrations of many other cultures, Hanukkah is about family. It's a joyous time of year when those you love gather together to share food, blessings, and music, as the traditions are passed on through the ages.

Adapted from

<http://www.sheknows.com/holidays-and-seasons/articles/806884/hanukkah-facts-for-children>