

CHANUKKAH

Chanukkah, an eight day celebration beginning on the 25th of Kislev, commemorates the victory of the Hasmonean (Maccabean) forces over those of the Seleucid Greeks in the second century BCE. The victory enabled the Jews to cleanse and rededicate the defiled sanctuary in Jerusalem, hence the holiday's name – Chanukkah – meaning *dedication*.

We observe this festival at home by kindling the lights of a *chanukkiyah* for eight days, eating festive foods (that are mostly fried) and playing dreidel. One light is kindled on the first night, and an additional light is added each succeeding night, until the total is eight.

Historical Sources for Chanukkah

Despite its preeminence today, Chanukkah was a minor festival of late origin that is not mentioned in the Bible but rather appears in the apocryphal books of *Maccabees I* and *II*. In these accounts, written around the time of the Maccabean revolt, the Temple rededication ceremony lasted for eight days (perhaps a deliberate replication of Solomon's dedication during Sukkot). Hence Chanukkah's eight day duration. There is no mention in these early sources of the miraculous cruse of oil.

Early in the morning on the 25th day of the ninth month, which is the month of Kislev, in the 148th year [164 BCE] they rose and offered sacrifice. . . At the very season and on the very day the gentiles had profaned it, the Temple was dedicated. . . Then Judah and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the 25th day of the month of Kislev.

I Maccabees 4:52ff

The miraculous oil story first appears many centuries later in the Talmud, in which the rabbis chose to attribute divine intervention over human military accomplishment as the source of the Maccabean victory. Nevertheless, the symbolic meaning of Chanukkah as the triumph of the few over the many continues to resonate today.

What is [the significance of the holiday of] Chanukkah? Our rabbis taught: “[From] the 25th day of Kislev are the days of Chanukkah, which are eight, on which eulogies and fasting are forbidden.” When the Greeks entered the sanctuary, they defiled all the oil in the sanctuary. But when the Hasmonean house grew mighty and defeated them, they searched and could find but a single cruse of oil which was sealed with the seal of the high priest. And in it there was sufficient [oil] for but a single day. A miracle occurred, and they lit [the menorah] from it for eight days. The next year they established them and made them festival days with Hallel and thanksgiving.*

Babylonian Talmud: Shabbat 21b

* Fulfilled by reciting *Al Ha-Nissim* during the Amidah during Chanukkah.



JEWISH HOME BASICS
Chanukkiot (in some families every member uses his or her own)

Dreidels

Words of Hiddur Mitzvah

Dr. Ron Wolfson

When I am invited to a synagogue as a scholar-in-residence, it is not unusual for me to spend time in someone's home – for Shabbat dinner or on Saturday night for Havdalah and a reception. The cultural anthropologist in me cannot resist the temptation of looking around for signs revealing the “Jewishness” of the house. I turn into a lookey-loo, making mental notes of what I see.

Quite often these homes are very lovely – large, beautifully decorated, and well-appointed. There are gorgeous antiques. There are expensive rugs and paintings. There are crystal vases and sterling silver. And, then, tucked away in a corner. . . I see it: a green glob of a menorah, a chanukiah marked “Souvenir of Israel,” made in China.

Yuck.

What is the message sent to family and friends when the Jewish ritual objects in the home are the tackiest things in the place? Do the people not know that there are creative artisans shaping magnificent kiddush cups, seder plates, chanukkiyot, challah plates and covers, mezzuzot, netilat yadayim utensils, Havdalah sets and Shabbat candlesticks?

The idea of hiddur mitzvah is to enhance the basic commandment and to beautify Jewish moments by using objects that are as lovely as anything in the home. Jewish families throughout the ages would invest in sterling silver candlesticks and jeweled kiddush cups. It pains me when those who could easily afford to support Jewish artisans by acquiring their creations settle for the green glob menorah.

Hiddur mitzvah is not only about objects, however. It is about dressing in white for Shabbat dinner. It is about flowers on the Shabbat table. It is about good wine for the Pesach seder and good shnappes for Shabbat lunch. It is about linens handed down through the generations, favorite foods made with family recipes, meals and ceremonies with relatives and friends to celebrate Jewish living.

Enhance your home with beautiful Jewish things, things at least as nice as your fine china and tzotchkes. It is a concrete way to exhibit your pride in being Jewish, a message that will resonate throughout the generations.

Judaic Mosaic

THE CHANUKKIAH: HISTORY AND PRACTICE

There are few ritual objects that are a better reflection of hiddur mitzvah than the chanukiah. While the mitzvah of Chanukkah is the act of kindling lights and reciting the berakhot, the chanukiah is, quite literally, the window dressing.

As the story of the miracle of the oil came to comprise the essence of the holiday in the era of the Talmud, the Chanukkah menorah or, properly, *chanukiah*, gained real importance. At this time, the rabbis codified laws for the lighting of the candles. The classic discussion between Shammai and Hillel about how the candles are to be lit – whether starting with eight and reducing to one (Shammai) or starting with one and increasing to eight (Hillel) – illustrates the development of a ritual practice. Hillel's position prevailed.

Our rabbis taught: The precept of Chanukkah demands one light for a man and

his household; the zealous kindle a light for each member of the household, and the extremely zealous, the school of Shammai maintains: On the first night eight lights are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced, but the school of Hillel maintain: On the first day one is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased. . . the reason of Beit Shammai is that it shall correspond to the days to come and that of Beit Hillel is that it shall correspond to the days that are gone.

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 21b

Synagogues today usually feature the traditional seven-branched menorah (a replica of those in the first and second Temples) (*Image 1*). On the other hand, the chanukiah holds nine candles or wicks. There are specific rules about the placement of the chanukiah. It must be visible to passersby, so ideally it should be placed outside where all can see and reflect on the miracle. If this is not possible, the next best place is a window sill. In times of danger, though, the candles can be lit on a table inside the house for only the residents to see.

Women are equally obligated to kindle the Chanukkah lights according to Rabbi Joshua ben Levi (a third-century Palestinian rabbi) who said that since they took part in the miracle they need to fulfill this commandment.

The Chanukiah: Historical and Regional Developments

In ancient times the chanukiah was made of stone or metal and burned pure beaten olive oil produced in olive presses supervised by representatives of the priesthood.

In the Middle Ages artisans developed backwalls for the chanukkiot since they were to be placed outside. The backwall, often triangular in shape, allowed for many distinctive motifs. (*Image 2*) Around the same time, the “servant light” was added. Since the lamp was hung outside, it had a ninth light or servant light – later called the *shammash* – for keeping it lit in all kinds of weather. The shammash was placed higher than the other lights. A drip pan was put under the oil burners, and some time later, sides were added so that the chanukiah could be placed on windowsills or tables.

The bench-type chanukiah appeared in Jewish communities throughout the world, including the far east and Africa. Many from Morocco, especially, were made of pierced brass; others, from Iraq, used painted glass and featured magical hands or hamsas. In 16th-century Italy, a rare bench type chanukiah contained Renaissance decorations, including the coats of arms or armor of cardinals and popes. In Germany chanukkiot were crafted of painted and gilded porcelain.

Later Jews began to display large standing lamps in their synagogues. These synagogue chanukkiot, like today’s synagogue menorahs, were intended to replicate those found in the first and second Temples, and were placed to the right (or south) of the ark (*Exodus 26:35*). (*Image 3*)

In 18th century Holland and later in England, simple brass lamps with floral and heart decorations were common. (*Image 4*) These often featured scenes from the prophets, most often Elijah. Popular silver chanukkiot from Germany and Eastern Europe

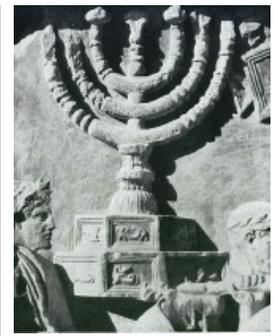


Image 1: The Arch of Titus in Rome with the golden menorah ransacked from the Temple in Jerusalem after the Jewish Revolt of 66-70 CE.



Image 2: From 14th-century Ashkenaz, this triangular-shaped hanging bronze chanukiah with Gothic motifs does not include a shammash.



Image 3: This early 18th century Polish chanukiah has a slightly raised shammash.



Image 4: Late 18th century Dutch copper chanukiah is decorated with iconic hearts and flowers.



Image 5: Early 18th century cast bronze, from Poland, decorated with animals and flanked by urns that presumably serve as the shammash.

had lions or other animals flanking a nine-branched lamp stand. (Image 5) Large early German lamps had architectural forms, biblical quotes and their owners' names.

Today, contemporary chanukkiot come in all sizes, shapes and patterns. While they must maintain the requirement that the eight holders form a straight line (with no one higher than another) they vary extensively in material and design – from etched glass and pounded metal to children's chanukkiot decorated with animals, soccer players, ballerinas, or crayons. (Image 6) A popular activity in schools is to create personal chanukkiot – a child's introduction to hiddur mitzvah.

For those authorities who do not view electricity and kindling as equivalent, electric chanukkiot are not permissible and thus the blessing cannot be recited over one. (It is the kindling that fulfills the mitzvah.) There are exceptions, however. Electric chanukkiot can be used where flames are prohibited such as hospitals and in dangerous situations where soldiers must use flashlights instead of candles. In either of these cases, the blessings are not recited.

The preferred fuel for a chanukiah is pure olive oil with a quality wick, but all fuels are permissible. During the 19th century, white wax candles became popular; colored candles appeared during the 20th century.

Most Jewish homes have some kind of chanukiah. Whether it is a hand-made, one-of-a-kind work of art or a mass-produced tin replica of the Jerusalem landscape, this ritual object is a clear indicator of Jewish identity. But its aesthetic quality – hiddur mitzvah – is an even clearer indicator of how we approach mitzvot.

Creative Judaic Arts Projects

CHANUKKAH TABLE RUNNER

Materials

Fabric for runner (36" x 14"). Recommended fabrics: quilted, denim, felt, fleece, or synthetic suede

Fabric for pattern pieces. Recommended fabrics include light weight fabrics, calico prints, T shirt knits, ultra suede

Stitch Witchery or similar iron-on bonding material

Iron

Scissors

Sewing machine, optional



Image 6: Contemporary children's menorah with Crayola lights.

Directions

Cut a piece of fabric to measure approximately 36" x 14" or desired size of runner.

Turn under 1/2" all around. Do this again so the underside has a finished look.

Stitch in place either on a sewing machine or by hand using the blanket stitch.

Select a shape or pattern to reflect your theme: shofar, Jewish star, dreidel, scroll, alphabet letters, leaves, etc.

Cut multiple pieces from contrasting fabrics, depending on size and design.

Following the instructions printed on your heat sensitive bonding material, apply it to each pattern piece. Be sure to cut away any excess bonding material before continuing.

Take the prepared pieces and arrange them on your table runner. Once you are satisfied with the arrangement, following the instructions on the heat sensitive bonding material, apply them to the runner.

Variations

The table runner can be quilted.

For those who do not sew or have access to a sewing machine, use a non-fraying material such as felt, fleece, or synthetic suede for your runner.

Pattern pieces can be applied by appliqué instead of bonding.

The runner can also be made square or diamond shaped. Suggested size for this is 25"-27" square depending on the shape of your table.



HAND DIPPED CHANUKKAH CANDLES

Materials

- Paraffin
- Cotton string or store-bought candle wicks
- Newspaper
- Cooking pot
- Tall tin can (should fit comfortably in pot)
- Fork
- Scissors

Directions

Candle dipping can be messy. Spread newspaper around your work area.

Fill the can with water and place in the pot. Fill the pot about half way with water and put over medium heat.

As the water in the pot and in the can begins to boil, add chunks of paraffin to the can until it is nearly full. Wax is lighter than water and, as it melts, it will form a layer on top of the water.

For candle dipping, the melted wax must be at just the right temperature – not too hot or the wax will slide off the wick; not too cool, or it will be too thick for dipping. You'll have to find the right temperature by trial and error. In general, turn the heat down to a low setting once the wax has melted, or else turn it off. (If you turn the heat off, make sure the wax does not begin to thicken.)

Cut a piece of cotton string or wicking material at least twice as long as the can is high, and weave it between the prongs of a fork, leaving the ends dangling.

Holding the fork handle, dip the dangling wicks into the can until they touch

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bottom. As the wicks pass through the layer of molten wax, the wax will be deposited on them. Pull the wicks out of the can and wait for the wax to harden. Be sure to keep the two wicks separated.

Continue to dip, always letting the wax harden between dippings. After a few dippings, the wicks may need to be straightened, but as the wax builds up, the candles become quite stiff and straighten on their own. Dip the wicks quickly in and out of the wax until the candles are the thickness you want. It takes many dippings – sometimes 50 – before the candle is fat. (You may want to speed up the process by filling a tall pitcher with cold water and alternately dipping candles between wax and water.)

When your candles are complete, they will have the connecting wick between them. Snip the loops with scissors and trim the wicks to about one-half inch.

TINA'S TIDBITS

- Grated potatoes turn black when exposed to air. Rinsing them under running water washes away excess starch, the discoloring culprit.

- Always grate the potatoes separately from the onions so that you don't lose any of the flavorful onion juice when you drain the potatoes.

- The best way to drain fried foods is on a plate covered with crumpled paper towels. Crumpling them yields more surface for absorption.

From Tina Wasserman, *Entrée to Judaism: A Culinary Exploration of the Jewish Diaspora* (New York: URJ Press, 2010). Reprinted with permission of the author.

Recipes

LATKES, LATKES EVERYWHERE

Yes, we all know that oil is the theme of Chanukkah, but these slight modifications might be welcomed when cooking for the holiday. Below are some helpful hints and new directions for this historically carbohydrate-fat-sodium-dense delicacy.

Hints: Many cooking experts, including Joan Nathan, Jeffrey Nathan (no relation to Joan) and Tina Wasserman, recommend Yukon Golds as the best potatoes for latke making. Today, many people don't bother peeling the potatoes. Just wash them well.

Baked — Not Fried

Bake-fried latkes are lighter and cleaner-tasting than oily potato pancakes. They also make less mess in the kitchen. Using your own recipe:

Place large nonstick baking sheet in oven and preheat to 450 degrees.

Prepare potatoes and onions as directed, squeezing handfuls of grated vegetables tightly to wring out as much liquid as possible. After all ingredients are added:

Spray baking sheet with oil. Spoon small mounds of potato mixture onto sheet to form pancakes 2½ inches in diameter. Leave 1 inch between each.

Bake-fry latkes until bottoms are golden brown, for 8 to 10 minutes. Spray tops of latkes with oil. Turn them, and cook until tops are golden brown. Repeat with remaining batter. Serve at once with sour cream or applesauce.

Variations on Potato Latkes: **Prepare and cook as you would regular latkes.**

SWEET POTATO AND CARROT LATKES

Ingredients

- 2 regular potatoes, grated
- 1 large sweet potato, grated
- 1 carrot or ½ cup of baby carrots, grated
- 2 eggs
- 3 tablespoons flour
- oil
- salt and pepper

ZUCCHINI LATKES

Ingredients

- 4 cups zucchini, grated
- 1 large white potato, grated
- 1 medium onion, grated
- 3 eggs
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 2 tablespoons bread crumbs or matzoh meal
- garlic (optional to taste)
- salt and pepper to taste

SWEET POTATO AND ZUCCHINI LATKES

Ingredients

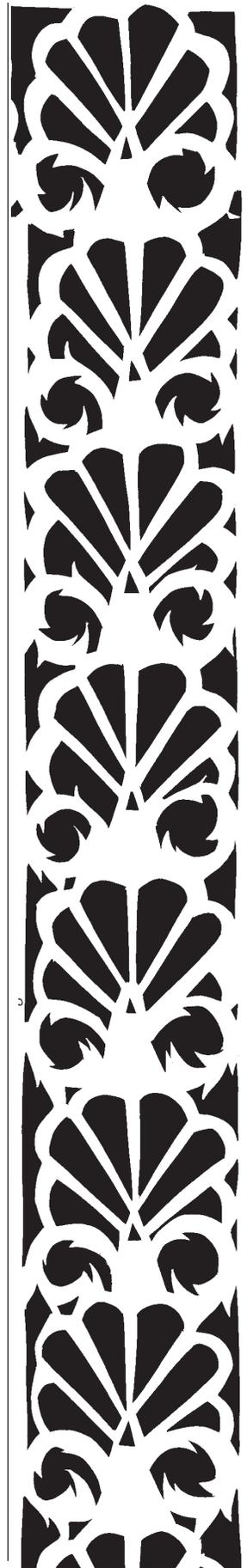
- 1 large sweet potato or yam, grated
- 1 medium zucchini, grated
- 2 medium carrots, grated
- 1 medium onion, grated
- 2 large eggs
- ¼ cup flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- pepper, if desired

Serve with latkes:

Potato latkes taste great with salsa, apple butter or chutney.

Make your own applesauce. (It's very easy!) Add a cinnamon stick and some whole cloves or a handful of fresh cranberries while cooking, or add dried cranberries or cherries after you have pureed the cooked apples.

Add fresh dill or wasabi to sour cream.





SUFGANIYOT

Israeli doughnuts, not quite as health conscious!

Ingredients

- 2 cups flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon, cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 egg, beaten
- ¾ cup milk
- 3 tablespoons oil

Directions

Stir together flour, baking powder, cinnamon and salt.

Pour in the egg, milk and oil. Mix until combined.

Fill large pot halfway with oil, leaving 2 inches at the top. Heat until it reaches 365 degrees.

Lower batter by spoonfuls into oil; fry turning until all sides are golden.

Remove and drain on paper towels; sprinkle with powdered sugar while warm. Eat while still warm.

Makes about 36.

GREASE FIRES: WHAT TO DO

While most of us have made thousands of latkes without incident, the following important information will help you handle a dangerous grease fire in the unlikely chance that one occurs.

If necessary call 911.

DO NOT PUT WATER ON A GREASE FIRE. Pouring water on burning grease or oil will only cause the burning oil to splash, spreading it around.

DO NOT TRY TO CARRY THE FIRE OUTSIDE. Trying to carry a pot or pan full of burning oil will just slosh and splash the grease fire.

The easiest way to smother a grease fire is to cover it with a lid. Be careful with glass lids; they can break from the extreme heat of open flame.

Grease fires can also be smothered with baking soda, but it takes a lot to do the trick. Unless the baking soda is easily accessible, it's usually faster to find a lid.

A dry chemical fire extinguisher will work, but it will contaminate your kitchen and food. Class K fire extinguishers are available to put out grease and other kitchen fires, but they are usually only found in commercial kitchens

If clothes catch on fire; **STOP, DROP, and ROLL** to extinguish the fire.

Treat burns only after the fire is contained or the building is completely evacuated.