



IT'S A MIRACLE

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After each evening of Hanukkah festivities, Grandma tells Owen a story. Sometimes these stories are unusual – like the one about the girl whose brother was supposed to be a rabbi, but who moved to Alaska to study wolves!

It is Grandma Karen who is the bearer of the family stories that Owen hears during the course of *Hanukkah*. If you are fortunate enough to have older relatives nearby who are the repositories of your family stories—perhaps even some you as an adult aren't familiar with—ask them to share these recollections with you and, especially, with your children. If distance prevents family members from telling these stories in person, invite them to share their reminiscences in written form or even on tape. These can be *Hanukkah* gifts that last a lifetime and have a profound effect on your family.

At the conclusion of *It's a Miracle*, Owen's extended family comes together for dinner. *Hanukkah* is a time to gather together with loved ones in celebration. Like the family stories Grandma Karen tells, festive meals can be gifts in themselves.

As *Hanukkah* approaches, reflect on uncommon forms of gift-giving: send family photos to far-off relatives; make it a family tradition to forfeit one night's *Hanukkah* gifts and donate the money you would have spent to a charity; designate one evening of the holiday as a Family Fun Fest, during which everyone gets to choose her/his favorite game or activity and all the family participates together; let a gift to your children be a baking party, to which each child invites a friend, and *Hanukkah* treats are the specialty of the house! Be creative with ideas that make the holiday enjoyable, rewarding, and meaningful to your family.

LIGHTING CANDLES

Hanukkah is observed for eight days beginning on the 25th of the Hebrew month of *Kislev*, which falls between late November and the end of December. One of the most well known *Hanukkah* traditions is the lighting of a special menorah with nine candleholders, called a *hanukkiah*. While some people prefer an oil *hanukkiah*, most people light candles. On the first night of *Hanukkah*, one candle is lit from a special helper candle, called the *shamash* in Hebrew (or, in Yiddish, *shammes*). An additional candle is added each night. Candles are placed in the *hanukkiah* from right to left, but lit from left to right, the newest candle always being lit first.

HANUKKAH MIRACLES

A miracle may be defined as an occurrence that defies or contradicts the natural order. Ideas concerning miracles vary greatly in Jewish thought. What constitutes a miracle in the *Hanukkah* story? Does the victory of the Maccabees represent a miracle? At what point does the Temple oil become a miracle rather than an event that can be logically explained? In *It's a Miracle!*, we might consider the love of Grandma Karen and the joy of family ties as miracles. A miracle may also be the privilege each of us has: to warm ourselves on wintry nights by placing in the window a sign of religious freedom and our proud Jewish heritage. Pj