



IT'S HANUKKAH

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Based on a Hebrew children's song, this book is a celebration of ritual and family. Hanukkah unfolds, one night at a time, until the eighth and last night, when all the candles shine brightly.

Hanukkah dates back to 165 B.C.E. The Greek King of Syria, Antiochus IV, forbid the Jews from practicing Judaism. In Modin, a Jewish priest, Mattathias, rallied an army against the Greeks. When Mattathias died, his son Judah assumed leadership of this small, mighty army; he was known as Judah Maccabee, from the Hebrew word *macav* (hammer). After three years, the Jews were victorious despite the Greeks greater numbers and weapons. Returning to their Holy Temple, the Jews found it had been desecrated. In order to rededicate the Temple, they needed oil to light the *menorah*, a seven branched candelabra. Legend says they found only enough sacred oil to burn for one night; to everyone's amazement the oil burned for eight days! *Hanukkah*, meaning "dedication," refers to this event.

DREIDEL

A popular game during *Hanukkah* is that of *dreidel*, a 4-sided top with a Hebrew letter on each side. The letters (*nun, gimme, hay, shin*) represent the first letter of each word in the sentence, *Nes gadol haya sham* (A great miracle happened there). Legend relates that during the Greek reign, Jews who met in hiding to study Torah kept a *dreidel* at hand; if discovered, they pretended to be gathered for the game. *Dreidel* can be played in various ways—with peanuts, chocolates or pennies. You can Find instructions online.

LIGHTING CANDLES

The eight days of *Hanukkah* begin on the 25th of the Hebrew

month of *Kislev* (falling between late November and December). An important *Hanukkah* tradition is the lighting of a nine branched *menorah*, the *hanukkiah*. On the first night, one candle is lit from a helper candle, the *shamash*. An additional candle is added each night. While candles are added to the *hanukkiah* from right to left, they are lit from left to right, the newest candle always being lit first.

HANUKKAH FOODS

In recognition of oil's importance in the rededication of the Temple, it is traditional during *Hanukkah* to eat foods that are fried in oil. The most familiar *Hanukkah* delicacy is latkes, potato pancakes. *Sufganyot*, filled jelly donuts, are also popular, particularly in Israel. *Hanukkah gelt*, chocolate coins wrapped in foil, are also favorites.

HANUKKAH GIFTS

Many American Jewish families have adopted the custom of giving gifts at *Hanukkah*, probably because the celebration often coincides with the Christmas season. As your children get older, designating each night for a special family activity—in addition to or in place of gift-giving—is a lovely way of elevating the season to one of greater significance: one evening may be for entertaining friends, another for a make-your-own pizza dinner, baking cookies, or candle lighting with Jewish seniors at a nursing home. Pj