



# THE EIGHT NIGHTS OF CHANUKAH

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*A child's family grows bigger and bigger as Chanukah approaches. Each night, one new item or person is added to the celebration and joy.*

**C**hanukah commemorates the first recorded fight for religious freedom in history. Leslea Newman, author of *The Eight Nights of Chanukah*, has included an instructive explanation of *Chanukah* and a wonderful glossary at the back of the book.

## HOW CHANUKAH IS CELEBRATED

*Chanukah* is observed for eight days beginning on the 25th of the Hebrew month of *Kislev* (which falls between late November and December). The only ritual of the holiday is the lighting of a special 9-branched menorah called a *chanukkiyah*. It is lit each night of the holiday. On the first night of *Chanukah*, one candle is lit from the *shamash*, a special helper candle. An additional candle is added each night. Candles are placed in the *chanukkiyah* from right to left, but lit from left to right, the newest candle always being lit first. Two blessings are recited each night, with an additional prayer on the first night only.

*Chanukah* is a fun and festive holiday with many traditions. The most popular game at *Chanukah* time is *Dreidel*. A *dreidel* is a 4-sided spinning top with a different Hebrew letter on each side. Legend tells us that during the reign of King Antiochus IV the Jews met in hiding to study Torah. They always had a spinning top at hand; that way if they were discovered by Greek soldiers, they could pretend they were gathered for the game. *Dreidel* is a betting game that can be played with peanuts, raisins, or pennies.

## CHANUKAH FOODS

It is traditional to eat foods which are fried in oil. The most familiar *Chanukah* delicacy is latkes, potato pancakes. *Sufganiot*, jelly donuts without the hole, are also popular, particularly in Israel. They, too, are baked in hot oil. *Chanukah gelt*, chocolate coins wrapped in foil, are favorites of the children. About twenty years after the Maccabees' victory, the Jewish people were given permission to mint their own coins. The stamps on these coins were a visible symbol of Jewish independence. The chocolate *gelt* is symbolic of the coins and money which was given as gifts, a custom dating back to the Middle Ages.

## CHANUKAH AT HOME

With the exception of a few coins of *gelt*, gift giving is not a traditional part of celebrating *Chanukah*. Many American Jewish families have adopted this custom, however, probably because the holiday often coincides with the Christmas season. As your family develops its own traditions, remember there are many options other than giving conventional gifts. Designating each night for something special that the family does together is a lovely way of elevating *Chanukah* from a holiday just about presents to a time of great significance. Examples would include movie night, craft night, and game night. Setting aside a night or two to be devoted to others (i.e. visiting a nursing home) will help make the holiday meaningful and memorable! Pj