



WHEN MINDY SAVED HANUKKAH

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A miniature-sized Jewish family living behind the wall of a synagogue must deal with a scary cat if they are to get the candles they need for their Hanukkah menorah.

The story of *Hanukkah* goes back to 165 B.C.E. The Greek King of Syria, Antiochus IV, imposed laws on the Jewish people, forcing them to worship Greek gods and forbidding the practice of Judaism. In the community of Modi'in, a Jewish priest named Mattathias and his five sons rallied a small army to oppose the Greeks. During the war, the Greeks ransacked the Holy Temple. Upon reclaiming the Temple, the Jews found only one small jar of special oil to rekindle the *ner tamid*, the Eternal Light. Miraculously, the small flask of oil lasted eight days, until new oil could be prepared.

LIGHTING HANUKKAH CANDLES

Hanukkah is observed for eight days beginning on the 25th of the Hebrew month of Kislev, which falls sometime between late November and the end of December. On each night of the holiday, we light a special candelabrum with nine candleholders, called a *hanukkiah*. On the first night, one candle is lit from a helper candle—the *shamash*, in Hebrew—with an additional candle 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.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

How brave Mindy was to go alone to the synagogue where she would almost surely encounter the fierce cat, Antiochus. This is a wonderful opening to discuss with your children the fact that bravery involves action in the face of fear. Talk with your children about times when they have overcome worries or fears. You might point out that anyone can become frightened or anxious, but that you and other loving adults are close by to protect and help them.

In this book, children are pictured enjoying a game of dreidel. A *dreidel* is a four-sided spinning top with a different Hebrew letter on each side. The letters (*nun, gimmel, hay, shin*) represent the Hebrew words, *Nes gadol haya sham*, which means: “A great miracle happened there.” Legend relates that during the reign of King Antiochus IV, Jews studied Torah in secret. They kept a spinning top at hand; if discovered by Greek soldiers, the assembled Jews could begin playing dreidel. These days, the game is often played with peanuts, chocolates, or pennies. Instructions for the game are available on the Internet. Pj