



I KNOW AN OLD LADY WHO SWALLOWED A DREIDEL

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Hanukkah is a great time to get together and enjoy delicious foods. But Bubbe got confused and ate all the wrong things!

JEWISH CONCEPTS

It is the second century BCE in the Land of Israel. A small army of Jews has just routed the occupying Greek forces that had tried to do away with their beloved Jewish beliefs and practices. After their overwhelming victory over this enemy far superior in strength and numbers, the Jews arrive at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. They determine to cleanse it and rededicate it to God. They want to light the *menorah*, a golden candelabrum that is meant to be lit continuously, but find only enough pure oil to last for one day. The Jews decide to light it anyway and are astounded to find that the small amount of oil lasts for eight full days! This is the story of the Jewish holiday of Chanukah.

A *dreidel* is the small Chanukah top that causes so much trouble for the grandmother in *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Dreidel*. It reminds us of the miracles in ancient days. Each dreidel displays the Hebrew letters *nun*, *gimmel*, *hey*, and *shin*, standing for “Nes gadol haya sham” – “A great miracle happened there.” In Israel, the word “sham” is changed to “po,” making the phrase “A great miracle happened here.” Throughout the eight-day celebration of Chanukah, families enjoy playing the dreidel game, in which players can win *gelt* (chocolate coins) or other small items such as peanuts or pennies; however, don’t let Grandmother fool you: it isn’t advisable to use gelt to wash down a dreidel!

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

What element do almost all of the Jewish holidays have in common? You guessed it: food! No Jewish celebration would be complete without delicacies appropriate to the holiday. For young children, the smells and tastes of these familiar dishes can be a concrete way to connect with the special days in the Jewish calendar.

I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Dreidel takes us on a whirlwind tour of some of the traditional Chanukah foods, including latkes. These potato pancakes are fried in oil, which recalls the oil of the ancient menorah. Consider incorporating a family latke cook-off into your yearly holiday celebration. Hold a contest to see who can think up the most creative variety of latke or most interesting topping, and then have fun cooking together.

Chanukah is a time of light, warmth, and family togetherness, but there may be some people in your neighborhood in need of a little extra holiday cheer. Your little ones can help assemble baskets of holiday treats to distribute to community members in nursing homes and hospitals, or to those who are without family. Encourage children to create their own Chanukah cards to include. Take time as a family to enjoy spreading the joy of this miraculous time of year to those around you!