



# A HANUKKAH WITH MAZEL

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*Poor Misha! He spends Hanukkah all by his lonesome... until Mazel, a hungry barn cat, strolls into his life. Misha may not have enough money to light Hanukkah candles, but with a little luck – or Mazel! – he can use his art to bring some light to the holiday.*

## JEWISH CONCEPTS

Hanukkah is a time for celebrating the triumph of light over darkness. The lighting of the menorah (candelabrum, also known in Hebrew as a *hanukkiah*) is the central *mitzvah*, or commandment, of the holiday. In *A Hanukkah with Mazel*, this mitzvah is so important to Misha that even though he doesn't have money for candles, he finds a way to "light" the menorah by using his artistic skills.

The menorah is traditionally set up in a place where passersby will see it, such as by the door or in a window, as publicizing the Hanukkah miracle is another mitzvah. After sundown on each of the eight nights, one first lights the *shammash* ("servant" in Hebrew); this is a candle that is set apart on the menorah. Then, blessings are sung or recited, and the *shammash* is used to light the other candles from left to right, the number of candles corresponding to the specific night of the holiday. It is traditional to refrain from doing any work while the candles are burning; it is a special time to sing songs, play games, and enjoy being with family and friends.

Another Hanukkah tradition is to eat foods fried in oil, symbolic of the oil in the ancient Temple menorah that lasted for eight days. *Latkes*, fried potato pancakes, are especially popular, and are often topped with applesauce or sour cream. In this story, Mazel the cat finds them quite delicious too!

## USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

### Make Your Own Menorah

Enjoy this fun Hanukkah project as a family!

1. At a hardware store, select rectangular pieces of tile to use as the base and ½ inch hex nuts to serve as candleholders. (Each menorah will need nine nuts, so be certain the tile you choose is large enough to accommodate all the nuts.) Ask also for splashback tiles, small decorative pieces of tile that come on a mesh sheet.
2. Use a hot glue gun to affix the nuts to the rectangular tile in a straight line. You may want to glue pieces of the splashback tile underneath the nuts as pedestals. Eight of the candles must be the same height, while the ninth, the *shammash*, must be set apart in some way; you can place a number of tiles under it to make it higher, or use extra tiles for the other candles so that the *shammash* is lower, etc.
3. Decorate your menorah using extra splashback tiles, paint, glitter, or other art materials. Make it as beautiful and special as you can; this is a concept called *hiddur mitzvah* – beautifying the mitzvah. By doing so, we show our joy in the commandments!
4. Place candles in the holders. (Boxes of Hanukkah candles can be found in most grocery stores.) You can find the blessings for lighting the menorah in a *siddur* (Jewish prayer book) or online. Light your menorahs together and enjoy the glow!