



IS IT HANUKKAH YET?

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Small children can't always tell when a holiday is near, but there are telltale hints. This story runs through many clues that Hanukkah is nearing – and the excitement builds with each one.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, is considered a minor Jewish holiday when compared to some others, such as Rosh Hashanah and Passover – yet it is a favorite for many. Arriving on the 25th of the Jewish month of Kislev and lasting for eight days and nights, Hanukkah falls during late fall or early winter, and offers welcome joy and brightness to a dark time of year.

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem in the second century BCE. The ancient land of Judea had been under Greek rule, and a small band of Jews known as the Maccabees had risen in rebellion. Amazingly, the Maccabees eventually won the war, but when they returned to the Temple, they found it desecrated and the *ner tamid* (eternal lamp) unlit. There was only enough oil to keep the lamp lighted for one day, but miraculously, the light continued to burn for eight days – the length of time it took to procure more oil.

During Hanukkah, Jews around the globe light the *hanukkiah* (Hanukkah menorah), eat traditional foods cooked in oil, such as crispy *latkes* (potato pancakes) and *sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts), and play *dreidel* (a game that uses a four-sided top with a Hebrew letter on each side). Most importantly, people gather with loved ones and enjoy the miracles of freedom and family.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

For young children, the sensory experiences of a holiday often take on more meaning than its history and larger significance – and anticipating its arrival is definitely part of the fun. In this book, the child pieces together clues that Hanukkah is coming by the appearance of decorations, the scent of cooking latkes, and of course, the anticipation of Hanukkah candles flickering in the hanukkiah.

Include your child in Hanukkah preparations. Young children can help make simple decorations and wrap gifts for loved ones (with a little assistance). Lighting the hanukkiah is not a job for little ones, but children can be encouraged to sing along with the blessings as well as with popular Hanukkah tunes. Teach your child the basic rules of the dreidel game – instructions are easily found online – which can be played with small items such as raisins, sunflower seeds, or wrapped chocolate *gelt* (a Yiddish word meaning money).

Then there's food! Children can help scrub potatoes for latkes (traditionally eaten with applesauce and/or sour cream) – and most will happily eat *sufganiyot* for dessert! Whatever your Hanukkah celebrations, include your children as much as possible. This helps build excitement for the holiday and memories that will last a lifetime.