

6

HANUKKAH— CELEBRATE WITH LIGHTS

Hanukkah, O Hanukkah, come light the menorah.
Let's have a party, we'll all dance the horah.
Gather 'round the table, we'll give you a treat.
Dreidels to play with and latkes to eat.

THIS popular Hanukkah song captures the spirit of this fun winter festival, which occurs between late November and late December. Its eight nights and days are filled with song, stories, games, and foods. Hanukkah is the time to light the *menorah*—a nine-branched candelabrum, to play with *dreidels*—four-sided tops, and to eat *latkes*—fried potato pancakes.

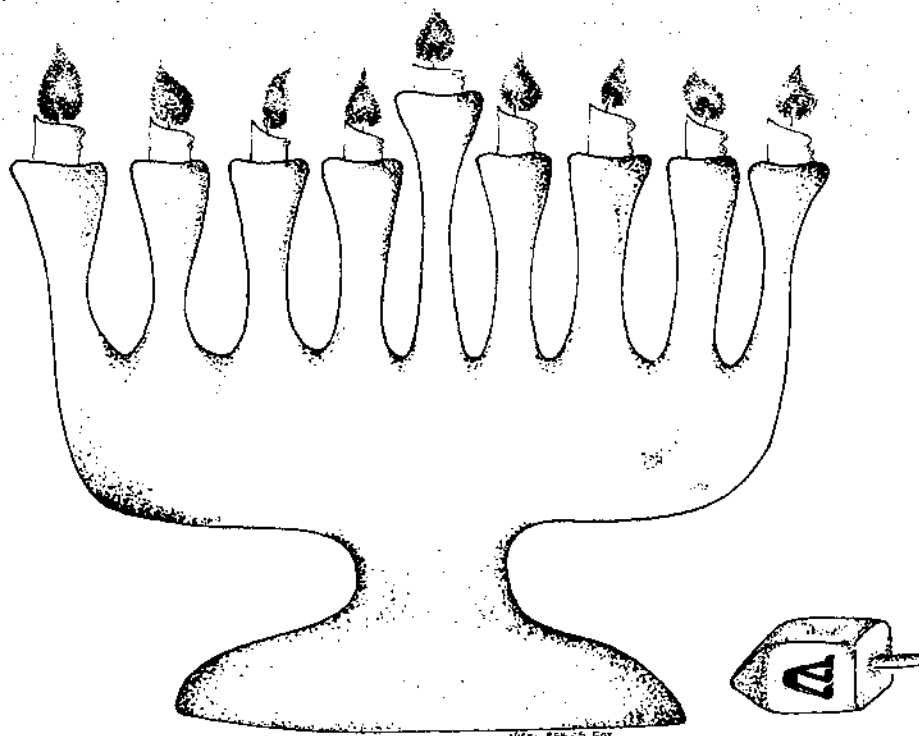
Hanukkah honors an historical event—the struggle for religious freedom. Hanukkah commemorates a time when the ancient homeland of the Jews—now known as Israel—was ruled by the Greeks in the second century before the common era. The Greeks threatened to eliminate the religious faith and customs of the Jewish people.

A small band of Jews resolved to forfeit their lives if necessary to preserve their heritage. Their successful struggle against overwhelming odds determined that the Jewish people and their unique beliefs and practices would survive.

Today Hanukkah—meaning rededication—emphasizes an annual rededication



to Jewish heritage. Jews pledge themselves anew to their beliefs and practices. This is done by lighting the Hanukkah candles or oil lamps and by living with Jewish pride. These actions “publicize the miracle of rededication” and demonstrate the themes of Hanukkah.



THE STORY OF HANUKKAH

In the year 167 B.C.E. (before the common era), the Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes forced all the people under his rule to adopt Greek culture in the land we know today as the State of Israel. Some Jews were intrigued by Greek culture and wanted to assimilate aspects of that external culture into their own lives. These Jews were attracted to Greek life, its gods, its emphasis on beauty and a powerful body.



Other Jews were abhorred by the price of this demand: Among other Jewish practices outlawed, the observance of Shabbat and circumcision of eight-day-old boys were forbidden. In addition, the worship of Greek gods and other atrocities took place in the Temple, the center of Jewish ritual observance, in the holy city of Jerusalem.

One day the Greeks came to Modin, a small hillside village. There they established a Greek religious altar. They ordered Jews to bring a pig as a sacrifice to show obedience to Greek rule. Mattathias, an old Jewish priest, killed a Jew who was about to do the Greeks' bidding.

Mattathias's action sparked guerrilla warfare and he and his five sons led the fight against the Greeks. Before he died, Mattathias passed on the leadership role to his son Judah. The Jewish army was known as the Maccabees, those men who were "strong as a hammer."

Because of Judah's superior military strategies, he cleverly defeated the Greeks. Finally he and his followers freed Jerusalem from Greek rule. There, on the 25th of Kislev, 165 B.C.E., they reclaimed the Temple for Jewish belief and practice.

Legend asserts that the victors wanted to rekindle the eternal light that burned in the Temple, but they were only able to find one unopened flask of oil. Although there was enough oil for only one day, it miraculously lasted for eight days until additional oil could be prepared. This is the popular miracle for which Hanukkah is best known, and the reason the holiday is celebrated for eight miraculous days.

And the real miracle? The real miracle was the military victory of a band of guerrilla warriors with a vision. The real miracle is the strength of the lesser against the seemingly powerful. The real miracle is the triumph of religious freedom.

GREETINGS

The greeting for Hanukkah is "*Hag Sameach*—Happy Holiday."

HOME TRADITIONS

Menorahs

The central symbol for Hanukkah is light. This image is found in the earliest Jewish source for Hanukkah in the Talmud, the codification of Jewish law and customs from the second through sixth centuries, in a discussion asking: "What is Hanukkah?" The

rabbis' response focused on the oil found in the desecrated Temple. Although that vat contained only enough oil to last one day, it lasted eight days.

Why is *this* miracle emphasized? The rabbis wanted to stress the miracle of the oil and its subsequent light as a sign of God's intervention in Jewish history.

Menorahs—or *hanukiot*—are lit for eight days to commemorate that miracle. A menorah is a nine-branched candelabrum: eight candle or oil holders are for the eight nights of the holiday, and the ninth holder is for the *shamash*, the light used to ignite the others.

The menorah can be made from a wide selection of nonflammable materials—glazed ceramics, copper, silver, brass, stone, glass, pewter—and can vary in size and shape. Some artisans set the candle or oil holders in a straight line; others stagger them in height or even place them in a circle.

Sometimes a menorah will highlight the time and place of its origin. To combine his joy at living in freedom in America, Manfred Anson, an immigrant from Germany, designed a brass menorah with miniature Statues of Liberty at each candle holder (part of the Hebrew Union College-Skirball Museum collection in Los Angeles).

Menorahs today have become a fabulous blend of old ritual and new cultural experiences. Israeli David Azulay, of Sephardic origin, fashions his ceramic menorahs with Moorish designs and colors. American artist Sandra Kravitz interprets the ancient Tree of Life theme in a silver menorah.

Menorahs may also be of stark, simple, modernistic lines such as those designed by Rafi Landau, a contemporary Israeli artist, and Ludwig Wolpert, the famous New York silversmith. Other modern menorahs are tall ornate silver hanukiot with large eagles at the top such as were found in Eastern European synagogues in the last century.

Where to Purchase a Menorah?

Menorahs can be bought in Judaica shops found in synagogues and in the community at large. Some department stores carry menorahs distributed by fine pottery firms. If your community offers a Jewish artisans' festival, you will be able to find a selection of menorahs there.

However, if you live in a community far from a large Jewish population, mail order is your answer. One such catalog is *The Source for Everything Jewish: Hamakor Judaica, Inc.*, Mail Order Department, P.O. Box 48836, Niles, Illinois 60648.



Where to Put the Menorah?

The menorah is placed on a windowsill or table facing the street to publicize the two miracles of Hanukkah: the miracle of the vat of oil and the miracle of Jewish survival. However, in dangerous times, one may place the Hanukkah menorah so that it is not visible from the outside. The light from the menorah should not be used to see by; this light is only used for the commemoration of the miracles.

Lighting the Lights

The major ritual for Hanukkah is the lighting of the menorah, which takes place soon after nightfall, or as soon as the household is together. On Friday night, the Hanukkah candles are lit first, followed by the Shabbat candles, as traditionally fire is not created on the Sabbath itself.

Some people prefer an oil-burning menorah. They may feel it is more authentic, while some folks simply like the smell of olive oil burning slowly. Others choose to use candles for ease in use and for their bright, warm colors.



LIGHT THAT MENORAH!

1. *The shamash, or serving candle, is lit first, for it then is used to light the others.*
2. *On the first night of the holiday, the first candle is placed in the far right side of the menorah (as you stand facing it).*
3. *Each candle should reflect the number of nights of the holiday thus far. On each night following the first night, add an additional candle to the left of the previous night's candle. For example, on the second night, add one candle to the left of the first night's candle so two candles*
4. *will glow. On the eighth day, the last candle is placed in the far left cup, and then all eight candles will burn brightly.*
5. *The candles are lit each evening starting from the left side to the right, always lighting the current night's candle first. For example, on the third night of Hanukkah, light candle number three first, then number two, then number one.*
6. *After lighting the other candles, replace the shamash in its holder.*



Why are the candles lit in this precise order? A debate was recorded in the Talmud when two rabbinical schools were asserting their views on the appropriate



pattern for lighting the Hanukkah lights. The school of Rabbi Shammai maintained: “On the first day, eight lights are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced by one each day.” But the school of Rabbi Hillel responded saying: “On the first day one is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased.” And Hillel went on to explain that we increase and enhance the light, for we increase and enhance holiness in the world (*Talmud Babli*, Shabbat, 21a). The latter opinion prevailed.

In many homes the household members take turns lighting the menorah, giving men, women, and children the privilege of lighting. Some people light several menorahs and enjoy the flames as the many menorahs glow brightly.

Two blessings are sung each night as the candles are lit. The blessings emphasize the theme of the miracle that God performed for Jews long ago. Jews today hope that God continues to create miracles for them as well. The *Shehechayanu* prayer is recited on the first night only.

Each night the celebration continues with songs or readings that highlight the meanings of Hanukkah. Additional songs, games, and gifts are often part of the festivities.

The song “Rock of Ages” is a well-known Hanukkah favorite. A fun Hanukkah tape, which includes “Rock of Ages,” “Light One Candle,” and some other favorites is *Chanukah with Cindy*. If you cannot find it locally, write to: Cindy Paley, 14246 Chandler Blvd., Van Nuys, CA 91401.

SYNAGOGUE TRADITIONS

Hanukkah is celebrated with the lighting of candles each evening in the synagogue as in the home. Many temples encourage different groups within the synagogue to join for dinner and programs surrounding the menorah lighting.

In all daily services, *Al HaNissim* is added in the *Amidah*, the silent prayer. *Al HaNissim* highlights the many miracles that God performed for our ancestors and continues for us.

In the morning services the *Hallel* prayer is sung daily and the *Torah* is read. The *Torah* readings are taken from the book of Numbers, focusing on the story of rededication.

On the Shabbat morning during Hanukkah the *Haftarah* reading from Zechariah 2:14–4:7 is included. This reading was chosen because it contains a motto for Hanukkah: “Not by might, not by power, but by spirit alone shall all people live in peace.” Some synagogues may also add dramatic readings from the Book of Maccabees, or even contemporary plays that highlight Hanukkah themes.

INSIGHTS

From Darkness into Light

Hanukkah takes place during the darkest days of the winter season. Like other cultures, Judaism experiences the winter solstice and the darkness, which represents endless time, confusion, and gloom. But in response to the dark of winter, Jews bring light into their lives.

Light adds hope and knowledge to the confusion. Light encourages a forward look, a chance to celebrate that life will be better, that darkness, even despair, can change to a world that enjoys light, a world that has opportunity.

Stand Strong Against the Tide

Although Greek culture was appealing to many Jews, there were a few strong souls who resisted the temptation to acculturate. Those few, those Maccabees, serve as models that we might emulate today.

Standing tall against outside influences can be necessary in family life and in business. The pull of making it big, quickly and easily, maybe even unethically, must be restrained. The ability to be honest in a deceitful world requires Maccabean strength.

Jews Are a Minority in a Majority World

Outside of Israel Jews represent a tiny percentage of their countries' populations. Most Jews choose to live in large urban centers, to feel the support of other Jewish families and to be able to enjoy certain benefits that the large Jewish community experience can provide. However, many Jews live in areas where they are reminded almost daily that they are a minority amidst a majority culture.

As a minority, Jews may sometimes feel that they sit on the fringe of secular life while experiencing different holidays. Significant Jewish times of the year—spring and fall—do not fit into the normal holiday periods. Jews celebrate the Sabbath on Friday night and Saturday, not Sunday. They often speak a Jewish language, depending on their country of origin: Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, Farsi. They often eat with a concern for a unique preparation of food—*kashrut*. They have a special alliance with another nation—Israel.

All these cultural dimensions define Jews as one of the minorities within secular society. Celebration and practice of their traditions assist Jews to develop pride in who they are.

Religious Questioning

But for some adults and children, pride is mixed with uncertainty. For sometimes we want to be like others, we want to join in with the dominant life-style, we want to be accepted.

That is the tip of the ambivalence that some Jews may feel in December as Christmas looms large, powerful, and dramatic. We can feel the excitement as we notice the streets decorated with lights, the store windows designed with warm winter scenes of homes with trees and fireplaces. We are reminded that we Jews live in a Christian country, that we do not experience one of the major Christian religious holy days.

At Christmas, Christians celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the Christian messiah, Jesus. The evergreen tree stands as a religious symbol of the everlasting, ever-present faith in Jesus as their messiah. Some early Christian legends assert that on the night Jesus was born all the trees of the forest bloomed and bore fruit despite the winter snow and ice. The tree is still meant today to symbolize the resurrection and immortality of Jesus.

Santa Claus originated as Saint Nicholas, a fourth-century bishop of Myra, Turkey. He became the patron saint of travelers and sailors when on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He later became a patron saint for children because legend attributes a miracle to him: He saved three homeless boys who had been brutally beaten by a shopkeeper.

Mistletoe and the green Christmas wreath represent the crown of thorns placed on the head of Jesus by Roman soldiers. The little berries represent the drops of his blood.

All these symbols carry immense power because the Christian religious community incorporates them as symbols that are invested with religious meaning. Although Easter is the religious central holiday in the Christian holiday cycle, Christmas is certainly the most culturally popular holiday; it is definitely the major winter festival in the secular calendar.

Sometimes it may be uncomfortable for Jews because we do not mirror the majority holiday. But that reality in and of itself is the message of Hanukkah. We do not have to join the majority. Rather, we assert our freedom to enjoy our own values, customs, and traditions. We respect our own faith, and then we can respect and enjoy others'. We assert the right to be different and to be proud of our differences. We can communicate these realities to our children at all ages and stages.



THERE IS NO SANTA CLAUS

I grew up in a small midwestern town with very few Jews. So I suspect it was with some trepidation that my mother told my younger brother and me at an early age that there was no Santa Claus. She explained that while this was true, we were not to tell the other children and ruin their holiday for them. And we didn't tell.

Each year I would be called upon to bring a menorah to school and tell the story of Hanukkah to my entire class, and to explain why I didn't celebrate Christmas. When we had to sing Christmas carols in school assemblies, I would

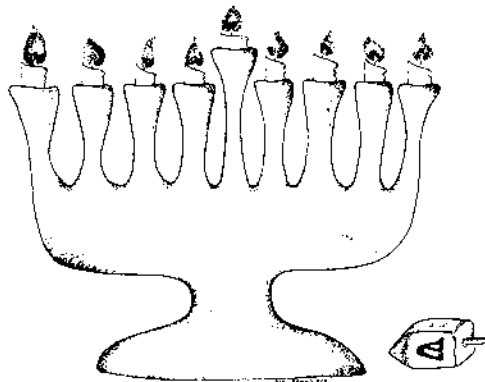
mouth the words, conscious that these were not my songs, my holiday.

Although our house was practically the only house without Christmas decorations and a tree, I never felt that I wanted to participate in Christmas. My parents were able to instill the belief that Christmas was the Christians' holiday and we Jews had our own holidays of which to be proud. And to this day I am grateful for this strong sense of Jewish identity that I learned at a young age.

—P.Z.M.



Hanukkah and Christmas are celebrated around the same time. Other than the fact that they both add light to the winter darkness, there are no similarities. At Hanukkah we Jews bring out our menorahs, our dreidels, our frying pans for latkes. There is no such symbol as a Hanukkah bush or stocking, although certain commercial elements would encourage us to take on these Christian customs.



Perhaps Hanukkah has been given a popularity boost because of its proximity to Christmas. Hanukkah, Yom Kippur, and Pesach are the most widely observed Jewish holidays in the United States, but Hanukkah remains the minor holiday of the three within the Jewish holiday cycle.



HOW DO YOU SPELL THAT HOLIDAY?

You might think that “Hanukkah” is the only way to spell this holiday week. However, look at these variations:

*Chanukah
Channukah
Chanukkah*

*Hanuka
Hanukah
and so on . . .
Hebrew sounds written in English letters will keep us guessing. Is this a game or what?*



ACTIVITIES

Because Hanukkah is celebrated for eight nights and the ritual requirements are simple, the holiday can be enhanced by assigning unique themes and activities to different nights. Here are various possibilities:

- 1. Big neighborhood party:** Decorate, do holiday food “made with oil” (if you are rushed, don’t forget frozen latkes—fried potato pancakes eaten with applesauce or sour cream—and ready-made *sufganiot*—jelly donuts), emphasize the celebration through song, stories, skits, and games.
- 2. Game night:** Play dreidel—the four-sided top whose sides are marked by four letters of the Hebrew alphabet that stand for: “A Great Miracle Happened Here.” Gather together nuts or toothpicks or pennies and divide the ante among two to six players. Each person places one ante in the center of the circle. Take turns spinning the dreidel. If it falls on:
 - a.* the Hebrew letter *nun*, the player gets nothing;
 - b.* the Hebrew letter *gimmel*, the player takes all from the center pot, and now all the players must replenish the center pot with one ante each;



- c. the Hebrew letter *hay*, the player gets half the center pot;
- d. the Hebrew letter *shin*, the player puts in one ante from his/her stash.

The winner is the one who has the most at the end of the game (end at any time that you want).

3. Art projects can be fun for the holiday:

a. Dreidels can be purchased or made. A basic dreidel can be made in this way: Make a 1-inch cube from construction paper. Write one of the four Hebrew letters for the dreidel (see above) on each side of the cube. Use a colorful felt tip pen. Pierce the center of the cube with a short pencil and spin.

One can also make a dreidel from clay. Shape clay into a 1-inch cube. Add a small pyramid shape to the bottom of the cube and a 1" × ¼" stem to the top. Let dry for two days, then paint with tempura colors. Paint the four Hebrew letters, one on each side. Allow two days to dry. Paint with white glue to hold the colors. Let dry two days, and play dreidel.

b. Menorahs can also be made at home. Get one strip of wood about 12" long and 2" deep × 2" wide. Go to hardware store and buy nine ½-inch nuts. Mark 9 places on the wood strip, about 1¼ inches apart. Glue each nut to the wood. These nuts serve as candle holders for the menorah. You can use upside-down bottle caps as well. Either paint the menorah with tempura paints or spray with gold or silver glitter spray paint. Let dry and use for Hanukkah.

Clay is also a good material for menorah making. Roll clay into a long, snakelike shape. Curve one side of the menorah for the shamash, the candle that will light the others. Pierce the clay with a pencil to create candle holders. Let dry completely. After two days, paint with tempura or spray paints. Enjoy!

These can be used to decorate your home or given as gifts. Before they are used, make sure the menorahs are not flammable.

4. Reading nights: Short stories by Isaac Bashevis Singer in the collection *The Power of Light: Eight Stories for Hanukkah* (New York: Avon Books, 1982) could be read one per night. *Eight Tales for Eight Nights* written by storytellers Penina Schram and Steven M. Rosman (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1990) is a great collection of Jewish stories from all over the globe with musical notations for Hanukkah songs.

Another fun book is *The Animated Menorah: Travels on a Space Dreidel* by Ephraim Sidon (London: Scopus Films, 1986). Read a chapter each night and enjoy the claymation illustrations by Rony Oren.

5. Sports: Any athletes in your neighborhood? Create your own Israeli torch relay as it is run annually from Modin, battleground of the Maccabees, to Jerusalem! In your



neighborhood, your relay can start as you light a menorah and begin the evening celebration.

6. Hanukkah photo night: Document the Hanukkah celebrations at your home: give each household member an empty photo album, have each person gather pictures, and make albums. Add new photos each year and document your family history.

7. Have family members each write a letter to a non-Jewish friend explaining the history and importance of Hanukkah. Share your letters with each other and mail!

8. Make a *tzedakah* night, for “charity begins at home.” On one night of Hanukkah, collect the money that might have been used for gifts and decide as a family: Where can we make a difference? What individual or agency could benefit from this gift? Prepare for the night by asking children and adults to learn about their favorite projects and present their information to the family. Vote to decide where you will contribute.

9. Invite a new immigrant family or senior citizens to your home for Hanukkah. Ask them to share their memories and traditions with your family. Share your country’s Jewish customs.

10. On one night of Hanukkah, try to go to a concert or play with another family to celebrate the holiday. You can light candles, sing, have a simple dinner, and then enjoy a little culture together.

11. Collect a piece of Jewish art: Menorah or dreidel collecting can add precious heirlooms.

12. Cooking night: Make latkes or *kugel* from scratch (how many pounds of potatoes?—see Senta’s recipe on page 100) or make sugar cookies and cut out in Hanukkah shapes.

13. Decorations can be made or purchased. Use your creativity and have fun! Make banners from construction paper—cut out menorah and dreidel shapes and paste them onto the banner. Or cut out six-pointed Jewish stars from color felt and string them together with felt dreidel shapes. Hang up in your living room and enjoy the homemade spirit of Hanukkah.

14. So let’s talk about gifts. Hanukkah is a celebration with so many activities that we can hardly include them all, yet children and adults in the United States also associate Hanukkah with gift giving. In previous generations, children received Hanukkah *gelt*, money, from all the relatives. Now some families choose to give gifts on some but not all the evenings. Sometimes the gifts are special and sometimes they are the basics (oh, yes, pajamas, slippers, and new socks . . . Ah, Mom!). Try to balance gifts with activities and *tzedakah* giving.



RECIPES

Hanukkah is one of those holidays that offers opportunities for those of us who are still partial to fried foods. The theme of this holiday: Bathe it in oil. For simplicity and time saving, consider some of the frozen latkes now available. They will do in a pinch, although the recipe included here is superior!

SENTA'S LATKES—GERMAN-STYLE POTATO PANCAKES

| | |
|---|---|
| <i>1 small whole onion, finely chopped</i> | <i>1 tsp. pepper</i> |
| <i>2 cups raw, peeled, grated white potatoes</i> | <i>1 Tbsp. flour (can add a bit more if batter is too thin)</i> |
| <i>1 whole egg (or for a light version, two egg whites)</i> | <i>olive oil as needed</i> |
| <i>1 tsp. salt</i> | |

Wash and peel the potatoes. Grate them coarsely. Mix with chopped onion. Drain as much of the water/juice off the mixture as possible. Add eggs and other ingredients. Mix.

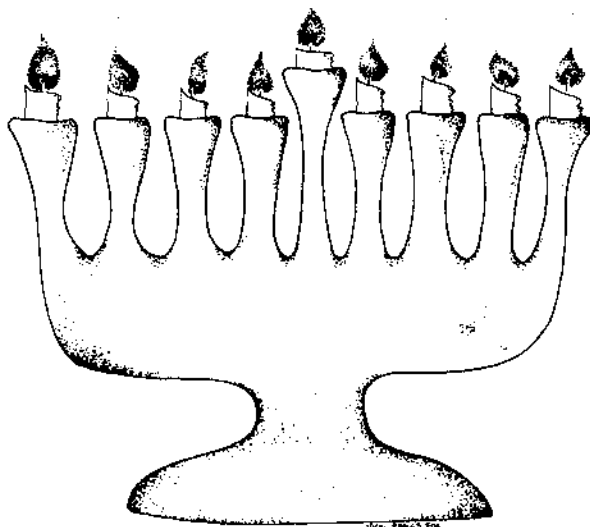
Heat enough olive oil to completely cover the skillet. Drop mixture by large spoonfuls to make 2–3-inch-diameter patties. Brown; turn and brown other side. Serve with sour cream, cottage cheese, or applesauce.

POTATO KUGEL

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <i>6 Tbsp. olive oil</i> | <i>½ cup flour</i> |
| <i>1 onion, chopped fine</i> | <i>½ tsp. baking powder</i> |
| <i>7 raw potatoes, grated and drained</i> | <i>2 tsp. salt</i> |
| <i>3 well-beaten eggs (or 6 egg whites)</i> | <i>½ tsp. pepper</i> |

Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in skillet and cook the onion. Place potatoes, beaten eggs, flour, baking powder, oil, salt, and pepper into bowl and mix well. Add the cooked onions. Stir. Grease a 9" × 13" baking pan and pour mixture in. Bake at 400 degrees for one hour. Serve immediately or freeze and reheat prior to serving.

HANUKKAH BLESSINGS



Introductory meditation to be recited together before candle lighting:

Today we thank God for all the goodness in our lives, for the beauty of nature, for the love we feel for one another, for the Hanukkah tradition.
May our celebration increase the light of freedom in the world.

Candle lighting:

(Put the candles into the menorah from right to left; however, light them from left to right. On the Shabbat of Hanukkah, light the Hanukkah lights first, then those for Shabbat.)

Baruch Ata Adonai Elohaynu Melech Haolam, asher keedshanu b'meetzvotav v'tzeevanu l'hadleek ner shel Hanukkah.

Blessed are You Adonai, Eternal One, Who enables us to welcome Hanukkah by kindling these lights.

Baruch Ata Adonai Elohaynu Melech Haolam, She'ahsav Neeseem l'avotaynu bayameem hahem, baz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You Adonai, Eternal One, Who made miracles for our ancestors, in times and seasons past.



Sheheyanu:

(On the first night of Hanukkah add:)

Baruch Ata Adonai Elohaynu Melech Haolam, sheheyanu, v'keeyomanu
v'higeeyanu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You Adonai, Eternal One, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and
encouraged us to celebrate this joyful festival.

(Continue singing:)

Rock of Ages:

Ma-oz tsur Yeshuati l'cha na'eh l'shabe'ayach;
Tikon bayt t'feelatee, v'sham todah ne'za bayayach.
L'ayt tacheen matbayach, meetzar hamenabay-yach.
Az egmor b'sheer meezmor, Hanukkat ha meezbay-yach.

Rock of Ages, let our song praise your saving power.
You, amid the raging foes, were our sheltering tower.
Furious they assailed us, but your arm availed us,
And your word broke their sword
When our own strength failed us.