JFS Jewish Journal

Engaging Your Jewish Residents

Jewish Family Services
Northeastern New York

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HANUKKAH: The Festival of Lights

Hanukkah: What is it About?

Hanukkah is an eight-day festival that is celebrated every winter, usually in late November or early December. This year, **Hanukkah begins on the evening of Thursday, December 7 and ends on the evening of Friday, December 15.** Hanukkah means dedication, and the holiday celebrates the re-dedication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, which was saved by a family of Jews names the Maccabees, who fought for their freedom and saved the sacred temple.

All About Lights

In the Hanukkah story, the Maccabees saved a holy temple from complete destruction by the Greeks, including a Menorah, or large candelabra. Though they were said to only had enough oil to light the Menorah for 1 day, it is said that it miraculously stayed lit for 8 days. This is why we light a Menorah every night during the 8 days of Hanukkah, starting with one candle on the first night and working up to all candles being lit on the final night. This commemorates the fact that, despite all odds, the Jews survived in their struggle against the Greeks.

How We Celebrate

Besides lighting the Menorah and saying blessings every night, it is customary to play dreidel *(see page 6)*, sing songs, and eat oily foods such as latkes and sufganiyot *(see page 3)*. Compared to the major religious holidays like Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover, Hanukkah is relatively minor – but it's certainly one of the most fun!

How to Celebrate Hanukkah in a Care Facility

Candle Lighting

Candle or electric menorahs are available at synagogue gift shops, and at stores such as Target and Walmart. Plan the candle-lighting ceremony so your Jewish residents can attend. It is appropriate to have candle-lighting every evening of Hanukkah immediately after dark (just before dinner is a good time). Say the blessings *(links on page 6)* and light the candles. You might have a resident (or family) who can do this, especially if you give them the text. Or, use a CD or video with the blessings on it. The menorah should remain in a public area, like a lobby, where everyone can see it.

Electric menorahs are especially nice for this. If you use one, add a light each evening at sundown. In addition, Jewish residents might like to have one (electric or with unlit candles) in their rooms.

Other Activities

Once the candles are lit, there are lots of fun activities that can be done to celebrate the holiday. Spinning a dreidel is a Hanukkah tradition, as is singing one of the many Hanukkah songs. Coloring sheets and links to music and other activities are included on pages 4, 5 & 6.

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How Do You Spell "Hanukkah"?

There's really no wrong way to spell Hanukkah. Because Hebrew uses a different alphabet than English, the English spelling can take on a lot of different forms. Below is a list of just some of the common spellings of the word. For a fun time, ask your residents how they spell the word, and document all the different answers!

Hannukah

Hanukkah

Hanukah

Chanukka

Channuka

Chanukah

Channukah

Hanuka

Bubbe's Corner

You can always count on Bubbe (Yiddish for "grandmother") for her wisdom, stories and Hanukkah traditions. Whether you are a Bubbe or have a Bubbe figure in your life, spend time learning about the Festival of Lights. Be sure to ask your residents about what special things their families do to celebrate, and try to make them feel as at home as possible!

This year, as I light my candles each night, I will say a special prayer for peace for Israel. More than ever, I want to illuminate the lights during this difficult and dark time.

The four Hebrew letters written on driedels are *nun, gimmel, hey, shin, which* stands for *nes gadol haya sham* "a great miracle happened there."

Jelly doughnuts, known as *sufganiyot*, are a popular Hanukkah food – 17.5 million are eaten each Hanukkah in Israel alone!

When I was younger, my parents designated the 5th night of Hanukkah as "gelt" night — where instead of receiving money as a gift for ourselves, we would select a charity to donate it to. Thank you for directing some Hanukkah gelt to JFS to keep our regular visits free and accessible for the whole community.

It takes 44 candles total to light one Menorah for all 8 nights of Hanukkah.

Important Terms for Hanukkah

Hebrew...	It is pronounced...	It means...
Chag urim sameach	Hag or-eem som-ay-akh	Happy festival of lights!
Chanukiyah	Ha-noo-kee-yah	The special Chanukah menorah that has 9 candles, 1 for each night and 1 for the shamash.
Sufganiyot	Soof-gahn ee-oat	Jelly doughnuts
Shamash	Shahm-ash	The tallest candle on the Menorah
Neis Gadol Hayah Sham	Nays Gah-dole ha-yah shom	A great miracle happened there
Sivivon	Se-vee-vohn	Another name for a Dreidel

Traditional Hanukkah Foods

Like most Jewish holidays, Hanukkah comes with an array of traditional foods that symbolize different aspects of the holiday. Since Jews come from all different parts of the world, many residents may have meal traditions that are unique to their family. Below are some of the most common traditional foods and their symbolic meanings:

LATKES

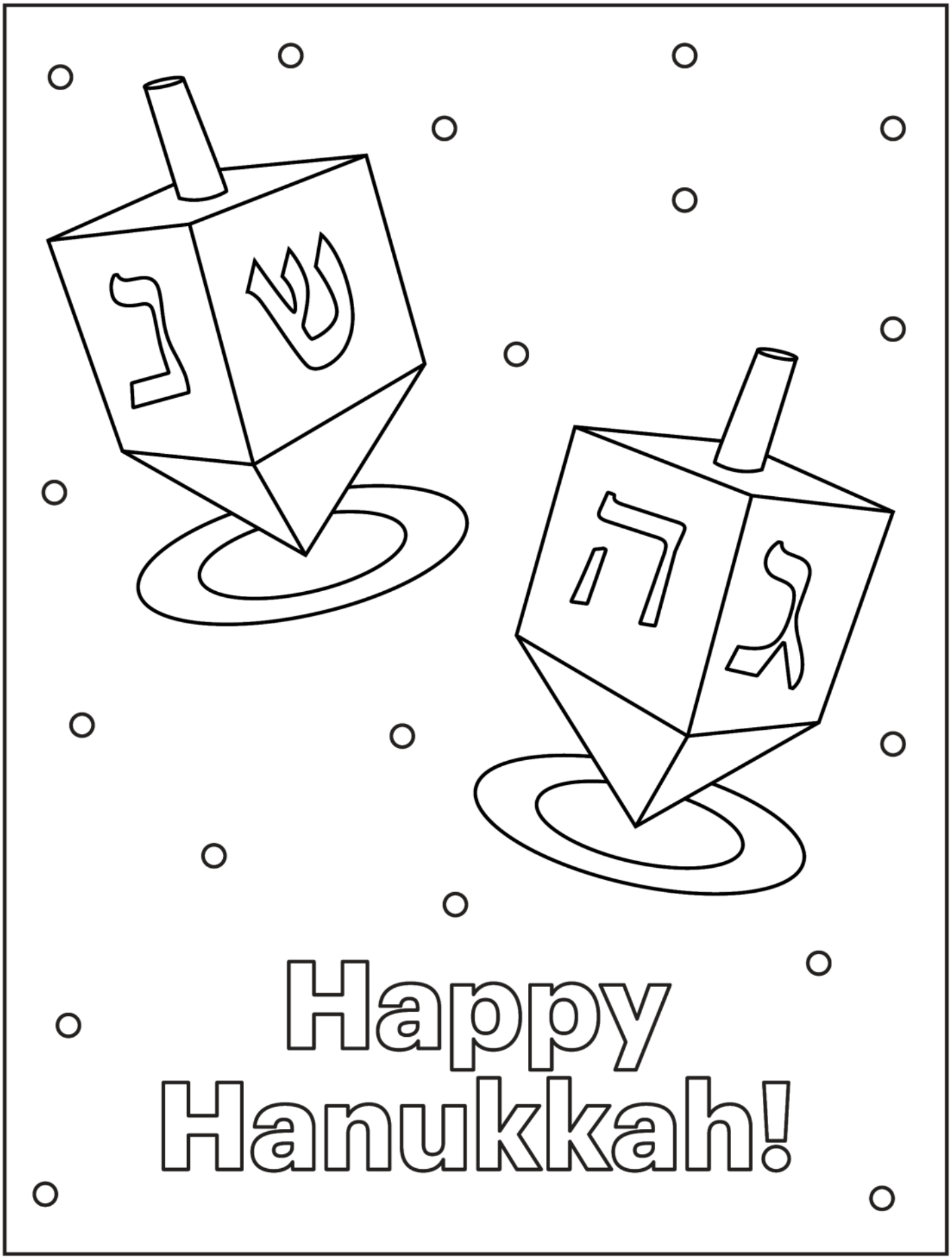
Latkes, also known as potato pancakes, are the most popular and common Hanukkah food. Shredded onion and potato are fried in lots of oil, meant to represent the oil of the Menorah that miraculously lasted for 8 days. They're best served hot with applesauce or sour cream. For a fun variation on the original, try using sweet potato instead!

SUFGANIYOT

Much like latkes, Sufganiyot, or simply jelly-filled doughnuts, are a traditional Hanukkah food because they are usually fried in oil. These sweet treats pair nicely with their savory latke counterpart for a deep-fried Hanukkah meal.

CHOCOLATE GELT

Chocolate coins, known commonly as *Gelt*, weren't always made of chocolate. Originally, real gold coins would be used to bet on games of Dreidel during the week of Hanukkah. By the 20th century, many families began using these chocolate coins instead, and they're now often seen being used as antes for games or just as a quick snack for the chocolate lovers.



From parents.com

Music and Melodies

Like many Jewish holidays, music is an important way that Jews celebrate and keep traditions alive. Here are some Hanukkah songs, both traditional and modern, that can help your residents get into the holiday spirit.

The Candle Lighting Blessing (page 6)

These blessings are sung while lighting the candles during each of the 8 nights of Hanukkah.

Maoz Tzur

This is a song commonly sung right after lighting the candles, while admiring their light.

Maccabeats Parody

The Maccabeats are a popular Jewish acapella group whose **song parody of Dynamite by Taio Cruz** is a popular favorite during the Hanukkah season.

Food and Games

Latkes

While store-bought latkes can really hit the spot, cooking the latkes fresh is fun, easy, and smells great! For a simple latke recipe, check out **this link from My Jewish Learning.**

Make Your Own Menorah

One of the most fun parts of Hanukkah is seeing the different types of Menorahs people use. The only requirements for a Menorah is that it has 9 candle holders, one of which is taller than the rest (this is the Shamash). You can make a Menorah out of almost anything with a little glue and some creativity! **Check out this page** with lots of unique ideas and designs to get you started.

Ocho Kandelikas

Ladino is a language that is a mix of Hebrew and Spanish, traditionally spoken by Sephardic Jews who originated from Spain and Portugal. **This song,** which translates to "Eight Little Candles" is a popular Ladino Hanukkah song.

I Have a Little Dreidel

This fun English song is a classic in American Jewish homes!

Hanukkah, O Hanukkah

Youtube Six 13 (Six 13 is a popular Jewish a cappella group out of New York City)

Light One Candle

This song by folk band Peter, Paul and Mary details the story of the Maccabees which the whole holiday is based on.

How to Play Dreidel

Dreidel is a simple game where players spin a wooden piece, usually for a prize of chocolate Gelt. **Visit this website** to learn how to play!

Sufganiyot

If you're up for a tasty cooking challenge, try making Sufganiyot, or jelly-stuffed doughnuts. **This recipe with easy-to-follow pictures and instructions** will help you cook the perfect Hanukkah treat.

Rabbi Ami getting in the Hanukkah spirit!

Hanukkah Blessings

Candles are added to the *hannukkiyah* (menorah) from right to left and are kindled from left to right. The newest candle is lit first. On the Shabbat of Hanukkah, kindle the Hanukkah lights first and then the Shabbat candles.

Light the *shamash* (the helper candle) first, using it to kindle the rest of the Hanukkah Lights. As you do, say or sing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tsivanu l'hadlik ner shel Hanukkah.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to kindle the Hanukkah lights.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ
וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, she-asah nisim laavoteinu v'imoteinu bayamim hahaeim baz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who performed wonderous deeds for our ancestors in days of old at this season.

For first night only:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהֶחֱיָנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ
וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

Hanerot Halalu

We kindle these lights because of the wondrous deliverance You performed for our ancestors. During these eight days of Hanukkah, these lights are sacred; we are not to use them but only to behold them, so that their glow may rouse us to give thanks for Your wondrous acts of deliverance.

From *Mishkan T'filah*, CCAR Press, New York.

Jewish Holidays Calendar 2023-2024*

HOLIDAY	DATE
Hannukah (8 days)	Thursday, Dec. 7 - Friday, Dec. 5 2023
Tu B'Shevat (1 day)	Wednesday, Jan. 24* – Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024
Purim (1 day)	Saturday, March 23* – Sunday, March 24, 2024
Passover (8 days)	Monday, April 22*- Tuesday, April 30, 2024
Shavuot (2 days)	Tuesday, June 11* – Thursday, June 13, 2024
Rosh Hashanah (2 days)	Wednesday, Oct. 2* – Friday, Oct. 4, 2024
Yom Kippur (1 day)	Friday, Oct. 11* – Saturday, Oct. 12, 2024
Sukkot (7 days)	Wednesday, Oct. 16* – Wednesday, Oct. 23, 2024
Shmini Atzeret (1 day) & Simchat Torah (1 day)	Wednesday, Oct. 23* – Friday, Oct. 25, 2024

**** All holidays begin at sundown***

About JFS

JFS provides support, services and resources for individuals and families of all ages and backgrounds.

Our mission is to enrich the lives of individuals, families, and the community by providing compassionate, collaborative human services, guided by Jewish values.

Our staff has expertise in:

- Helping older adults maintain their safety and independence
- Providing resources and guidance to older adults and their families
- Private transportation to medical appointments and synagogue services
- Counseling and care management (JFS now accepts Medicare.)

Support Our Chaplaincy Program

JFS provides spiritual connection and support for Jewish residents in long-term and elder care in the Capital Region free of charge, unlike most chaplains and programs arranged by facilities.

This publication and the visits and programs offered by our Community Chaplain, Rabbi Ami Monson, are made possible through donations.

Please consider supporting our Dr. Rela Mintz Geffen Jewish Community Chaplaincy Fund so that we can continue to offer this complimentary service:

Online: jfsneny.org/donations
Call: (518) 516-1102

THANK YOU! JFS wishes you warm, wonderful holidays!

Jewish Family Services
Northeastern New York

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