

# **LET THERE BE LIGHTS!**

**A Secular, Cultural, Humanistic  
Celebration of Chanukah**

**by Rabbi Peter H. Schweitzer**



# **Happy Chanukah!**

**Or however you choose to spell it.**

**Or celebrate it.**

**By lighting candles.  
Reading about the history.  
Finding contemporary meaning.  
Singing familiar melodies.  
Exchanging gifts.  
Devouring latkes.  
Spinning dreidls.**

**This booklet gives you the ingredients  
you need to create your own celebration.**

**You can repeat old traditions.  
You can invent new ones.  
You can choose your own way.**

**Best wishes for joyous holiday.**

**And Happy Hanuka.**

**Or however you spell it.**

## THE PARADOX AND MODERN MIRACLE OF CHANUKAH

It may be hard to believe, considering the fanfare it gets, but Chanukah is technically a minor festival. In fact, it is the only Jewish holiday without any historical basis in the Bible and is barely mentioned in the Talmud. Compared to Shabbat, Passover and the High Holidays, the Chanukah lights barely flicker.

Historically, the story of the oil burning eight days had a quaint appeal, but in an age of science and skepticism, miracle tales have fallen into disrepute and lost their lustre. However, with the rise of political nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the military message of the holiday gained popularity. This theme captivated the early Zionists as well. Pioneers reclaiming the land and soldiers of the early Haganah were naturally regarded as Maccabean descendants. Then, faced with the tempting tinsel and bright lights of Christmas, American Jews asserted themselves with Maccabean vigor and elevated Chanukah to a celebration of major import. If there's any doubt about this, ask any child.

So perhaps the real miracle of Chanukah is its own rebirth and renewal. What might have become a historic footnote was given new life. Yet, at the same time, while Chanukah celebrates the Maccabean refusal to succumb to the lure of Hellenism, Chanukah Reborn in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is, paradoxically, saturated with commercialism and materialism. It now is at risk of adopting the very notions that it was meant to crush. Yet if we attempt to contain the excess that our children especially have come to expect we equally risk their own Maccabean uprising.

What, then, can be the message of Chanukah for us today? Surely it is not about resisting modern culture, which we embrace rather whole-heartedly. Nor can it be about asserting our religious identity, which we don't feel is endangered. And certainly it is not about demonstrating military prowess, which isn't a particularly popular position these days.

But Chanukah is about giving warmth to one another through the cold winter. It is about bringing back the sun as the short days of the year grow longer again. It is about the victory of hope over despair, of joy over sorrow. In the end, Chanukah is all about light, which is what the holiday was all about in the very beginning.

## WELCOMING CHANUKAH

Let us celebrate Chanukah,  
a week of brightness, a week of joy.

*A week of freedom,  
a week of celebration.*

Welcome Chanukah,  
a time for memory, a time for hope.

## MACCABEES OF OLD

Maccabees of old did rise,  
To defy the wicked king.  
They stood tall and bravely fought  
Soon they heard freedom's ring.

They brought a message cheering,  
That the time was nearing,  
Which will see, all people free,  
Tyrants disappearing.  
Which will see, all people free,  
Tyrants disappearing.

## OH CHANUKAH, OH CHANUKAH

Oh Chanukah, Oh Chanukah come light the menorah.  
Let's have a party, we'll all dance the hora.  
Gather round the table, we'll give you a treat.  
Dreidels to play with and latkes to eat.  
And while we are playing, the candles are burning low,  
One for each night they shed a sweet light  
To remind us of days long ago.  
One for each night they shed a sweet light  
To remind us of days long ago.

Oy, khanike, oy, khanike a yontef a sheyner.  
A lustiker, a freylekher, nito nokh a zoyner!  
Ale nakht in dreydl shpiln mir, frische heyse latkes esn mir.  
Geshvinder, tsindt, kinder, di khanike-lihktelekh on.  
Zol yeder bazunder, bazingen dem vunder  
Un tantsn freylekh in kon.  
Zol yeder bazunder, bazingen dem vunder  
Un tantsn freylekh in kon.



### **HONORING THE HOLIDAY**

**On Chanukah we commemorate the victory of light over darkness  
and the right of religious freedom and freedom of expression.**

*On Chanukah we treasure the principles and ideas and values  
whose fruits nourish us and sustain us in life.*

**On Chanukah we cherish the light of hope  
that leads us to a vision of a better world.**

*On Chanukah we appreciate our happiness and good fortune,  
that are all the greater when they are shared.*

**On Chanukah we proclaim the day a delight, we rejoice in its joy,  
we treasure our tranquility, and we celebrate our freedom.**

You may continue with the service  
and learn more about the history of Chanukah  
or go directly to Candlelighting on p. 9



## **ANCIENT ORIGINS**

**Long ago, in the land of ancient Israel, as winter approached and the days grew shorter, our ancestors believed that the sun was dying and that the world would soon be plunged into the death of darkness.**

**To prevent this terrifying event, fires were kindled on the hilltops to coax the sun back to life with a sympathetic flame.**

**At the December solstice, a turning point always occurred. The sun seemed to renew itself through the increasing light of day, and people rejoiced in the rejuvenation of the sun and in the cycle of nature.**

**This celebration became a week-long festival of revelry, suspense, and burning of lamps in anticipation of the sun's annual renewal. The celebration was called *Nayrot*, which means "lights," and it exalted the triumph of light and life over despair and darkness.**

# WINTER *Spring Summer* **Fall**

## SEASONS

Lyrics by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer  
Music by Mickie and Abe Mandel

A time for winter, a time for spring  
A time to celebrate, a time to sing  
A time for summer, a time for fall  
A time to enjoy life one and all  
A time to enjoy life one and all

Over and over, round and round  
Seasons fade into seasons found  
Over and over, round and round  
The cycles of nature safe and sound  
The cycles of nature safe and sound

Again and again, it is nature's way  
A time for planting brings time to play  
A time to sow and a time to reap  
A time to awaken, a time to sleep  
A time to awaken, a time to sleep

It started long before we were here  
On and on it goes, year by year  
It matters not the reason why  
We treasure each gift of earth and sky  
We treasure each gift of earth and sky

A time for winter, a time for spring  
A time to celebrate, a time to sing  
A time for summer, a time for fall  
A time to enjoy life one and all  
A time to enjoy life one and all

## A HUMAN DRAMA

Over two thousand years ago, in the third century before the Common Era, the Greek king, Alexander of Macedon, who became known as Alexander the Great, ruled over the lands of the ancient Middle East.

Some Jews were attracted to Greek culture, but others rejected it and felt it could weaken Jewish values. After Alexander the Great died, the Syrian tyrant, Antiochus Epiphanes, came to power. He prohibited the practice of the Jewish religion and wanted everyone in his realm to become Greek.

Even if some Jews were attracted to Greek culture, this rejection of Judaism was intolerable. Jews rose up in rebellion. Led by Mattathias and his son, Judah Maccabee (“the hammer”), the Jews fought off the Greeks and forced them to withdraw from Jerusalem.

Tragically, once the Maccabees were victorious they allowed themselves to be corrupted by power and became tyrants themselves. And, ironically, their immediate descendants adopted the very Hellenistic culture that the original Maccabees had rejected. Of course, times change and people change with the times and there’s no way to have predicted this twist of events.

### MEE Y’MA-LEL

Who can retell the things that befell us?  
Who can count them?  
In every age a hero or sage  
comes to our aid.

Hark! At this time of year  
in days of yore.  
Maccabees the Temple did restore  
And today our people, as we dreamed  
Survived the tyrant, our nation  
was redeemed.

Mee y’ma-lel, g’voo-rote yis-ra-el  
o-tahn mee yim-ney?  
Hen b’chol dor ya-koom ha-gee-bor  
go-el ha-ahm.

Shma! Ba-ya-meem ha-hem  
baz-mahn ha-zeh.  
Ma-ka-bee mo-shee-ah oo-fo-dey  
Oo-yo-mey-nu kol ahm yis-ra-el  
Yeet-ah-ched ya-koom v’yee-ga-el.



## A NEW HOLIDAY

The Maccabees recaptured the Temple in the Fall around October but they waited until the winter solstice festival of *Nayrot* to rededicate the Temple. Their celebration went on for eight days, to make up for the fall holiday of Sukkot, which they had been unable to observe. The new holiday was called Hanukah, or “dedication” and eventually the original connection to the winter solstice was forgotten.



The rabbis who lived several hundred years later were not so comfortable with this story about the Maccabean victory. In fact, it made them nervous. They feared that it might inspire others to rise up against the Roman oppressors of their own day who were all-powerful. They feared that this would only lead to defeat of the Jews.

So the rabbis downplayed the Maccabee’s victory by inventing the legend of the tiny vial of holy oil that miraculously lasted for eight days, the time needed to prepare a fresh supply of oil for the lamp in the Temple. The focus shifted away from a human story of rebellion to one of divine intervention and rescue.



Today, we once again acknowledge the original connection of Hanuka to *Nayrot* and we reclaim the real story of Hanuka that celebrates the Maccabees’ courage to defend their religious and personal identity. Like them, we take responsibility for our own lives and declare that we can shape our Jewish identity in ways that will be meaningful for us today. In fact, this service, with its innovative readings and contemporary Humanistic candle blessings, is an example of how we can link ourselves to our heritage as well as articulate our modern understanding of this holiday.



## THE MESSAGE OF THE MENORAH

Some call it a *hanukkiah*, a modern Hebrew word invented by Eliezer Ben Yehuda in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. But most still call it a *menorah*, based on the classical Hebrew word for candelabrum. Which goes to show that it is hard to get rid of old practices or terms not to mention that Jews don't agree about everything.

In fact, from the very beginning, the Talmud records a debate on how to kindle the Chanukah lights. One side advocated using eight lights the first night, seven the next and so forth, counting down. They said that this made sense since the oil would gradually be running out each day.

The other side, which won the argument, preferred starting with one light and going up from there. They said that we should increase the brightness each day rather than diminish it to really celebrate the joy of the holiday.

Others debate whether to light from right to left or left to right. Or whether to light the newest candle first and then reverse the order. Perhaps none of this matters but what may be important is carrying on these debates from generation to generation. That is part of our Jewish tradition!

And finally, the *Shammes* candle, or lighter candle, stands taller than the rest. It teaches us that from one light, we can make a lot of light. From one person with hope, we can make lot of hope. Let us all be that one candle which helps to light all the rest.



## CHANUKAH BLESSINGS

for a Secular Humanistic Chanukah Celebration

*Song to the traditional melody for lighting the candles*

1

Ba-ruch ha-or ba-oh-lahm  
Ba-ruch ha-or ba-ah-dahm  
Come gather round and light the menorah  
As we say, "L'had-leek ner shel cha-nu-kah."

2

Ba-ruch ha-or ba-oh-lahm  
Ba-ruch ha-or ba-ah-dahm  
We celebrate freedom won a long time ago  
Ba-ya-meem ha-hem baz-mahn ha-zeh.

3

Ba-ruch ha-or ba-oh-lahm  
Ba-ruch ha-or ba-ah-dahm  
We light these candles in our home tonight  
and we hope  
that in the world  
light will shine for all.

*Light the Menorah*



## THE EIGHT LIGHTS OF CHANUKAH

The first light is  
the light of **REASON**.

It is the light of reason that teaches us  
to see the difference between right and wrong.

The second light is  
the light of **SELF-ESTEEM**.

It is the light of self- esteem that inspires us  
to believe in ourselves.

The third light is  
the light of **COURAGE**.

It is the light of courage that gives us  
the strength to stand up for our beliefs.

The fourth light is  
the light of **FREEDOM**.

It is the light of freedom that reminds us  
to take responsibility for our own lives.

The fifth light is  
the light of **LOVE**.

It is the light of love that enables us  
to care for those in need.

The sixth light is  
the light of **Loyalty**.

It is the light of loyalty that helps us keep  
our promises to those who depend on us.

The seventh light is the  
light of **GENEROSITY**.

It is the light of generosity that encourages us  
to give even when we do not receive.

The eighth light is  
the light of **HOPE**.

It is the light of hope that leads us  
to a vision of a better world.

**JEWISH HEROES, LET OUR SONG**   
*To the melody of "Maoz Tsur"*

Jewish heroes, let our song  
Praise our saving power  
Though amidst the raging foe  
We raised our sheltering tower  
Furious they assailed us,  
But our arms availed us  
And our fists broke their swords,  
Our own strength prevailed us.  
And our fists broke their swords,  
Our own strength prevailed us.

Children of the human race  
Whether free or fettered,  
Wake the echoes of your songs  
Where you may be scattered  
Yours the message cheering  
That the time is nearing  
Which will see all people free  
Tyrants disappearing.  
Which will see all people free  
Tyrants disappearing.

**HANUKKAH LINDA**   
*A Ladino Folk Song*

Hanukkah Linda, 'sta aqui  
Ocho candelos para mi (2x)

*Chorus*  
AHI!! Un candelico, Dos candelicos  
Tres candelicos, Quatro candelicos  
Sinju candelicos, Sez candelicos  
Siete candelicos, Ocho canelos para mi

Muchas fiestas por fazer  
Con alegrias y plazer (2x)

*Chorus*

Los pastelicos vu comer  
Con almendricas y la miel (2x)

*Chorus*

A pretty candle is here  
Eight candles for me  
One candle, two candles, etc.  
We eat pastries with almonds and honey

## LIGHT ONE CANDLE

by Peter Yarrow

Light one candle for the Maccabee children.  
Give thanks that their light didn't die.  
Light one candle for the pain they endured,  
when their right to exist was denied.

Light one candle for the terrible sacrifice  
justice and freedom demand.  
Light one candle for the wisdom to know  
when the peacemaker's time is at hand.

### *Chorus*

Don't let the light go out  
It's lasted for so many years.  
Don't let the light go out  
Let it shine through our love  
and our tears

Light one candle for the strength that we need  
to never become our own foe.  
Light one candle for those who are suffering  
the pain we learned so long ago.

Light one candle for all we believe in,  
let anger not tear us apart.  
Light one candle to bind us together  
with peace as the song in our heart.

### *Chorus*

What is the memory that's valued so highly  
that we keep alive in that flame?  
What's the commitment to those who have died  
when we cry out, "They've not died in vain."

We have come this far always believing  
that justice will somehow prevail.  
This is the burden and this the promise  
and this is why we will not fail

### *Chorus*

Don't let the light go out (3x)



## THE SECRET OF THE DREIDL

Some call it a *sevivon*, preferring the Hebrew term. However, most of us stick to *dreidl*, the Yiddish word. But on this everyone agrees: the familiar Chanukah spinning top had nothing to do originally with Chanukah. It was an ancient gambling toy familiar to many cultures and was probably adapted from a German top by Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews during the medieval period. Ironically, while the Maccabees fought cultural assimilation, the *dreidl* game is an excellent example of the very thing they opposed. These days we welcome the exchange of ideas that comes from living in an open society. But we still need to figure out where the limits are to all that our culture offers us. The choices are abundant. They are enough to “dreyen zihn undz der kop” – to make our heads spin around.

### SVIVON

S'vee-von sov, sov, sov  
Cha-nu-kah hoo chag tov  
Cha-nu-kah hoo chag tov  
S'vee-von sov, sov, sov  
Chag seem-cha hoo la-ahm  
Nes ga-dol ha-ya shahm  
Nes ga-dol ha-ya shahm  
Chag seem-cha hoo la-ahm

S'vee-von, turn and turn  
While the lovely candles burn.  
What a wondrous holiday  
Watch us sing and dance and play  
Tell the story full of cheer  
A great event happened there  
It's a holiday of light  
For eight days and eight nights.

### I HAVE A LITTLE DREIDL

I have a little dreidl  
I made it out of clay.  
And when it's dry and ready,  
then dreidl I shall play

*Chorus*  
Oh, dreidl, dreidl, dreidl  
I made it out of clay,  
Oh, dreidl, dreidl, dreidl  
now dreidl I shall play.

It has a lovely body  
with a leg so short and thin  
And when it is all tired,  
it drops and I shall win.

*Chorus*

My dreidl's always playful.  
It loves to dance and spin.  
A happy game of dreidl,  
come play, now let's begin.

*Chorus*

## HOW TO PLAY DREIDL

The dreidl is marked with a Hebrew letter on each of its sides. These letters have a double meaning. On the one hand, each stands for the four words in the Hebrew phrase “Nes Gadol Hayah Sham”, or “A great miracle happened there.” They also represent four Yiddish words that indicate actions to take in the dreidl game.

At the beginning of the game, each player gets a number of tokens, e.g. peanuts, raisins, M&Ms, chocolate Chanukah gelt (coins), pennies. Each player puts in one token to start. Some add an additional token each round or each time the pot is empty. Then players take turns spinning the dreidl and act according to what letter lies on top when the dreidl stops spinning. The game is over when one player has all the tokens.

LETTER	MEANING #1	MEANING FOR THE GAME
נ	Nun Nes (Miracle)	Nisht or none -- Nothing happens.
ג	Gimel Gadol (Great)	Ganz or all – Take the whole pot.
ה	Hay Hayah (Happened)	Halb or half – Take half the pot.
ש	Shin Sham (There)	Shtel or Put in – Add a token to the pot

### Other dreidl games:

Try to flip a dreidl on its head and spin it upside down.

All spin dreidls at once and see whose dreidl spins the longest.







## LET'S EAT!

A Jewish holiday would not be a Jewish holiday without food. Chanukah is no exception. *Latkes*, or potato pancakes, and *sufganiyot*, jelly-filled donuts that are popular in Israel, are both connected to the holiday because they are fried in oil, commemorating the legend of the oil of the menorah that seemed to burn forever.

But neither of these foods are original to Chanukah or even of Jewish origin. *Latkes* could not have been composed of potatoes in ancient times because potatoes are a New World food. They actually didn't arrive in Europe from their native Peru until the 1500s. The word, itself, is of Yiddish origin, and may reflect an Eastern European origin. Interestingly, *latke* may come, in a circuitous way, from the word *elaion*, which is Greek for olive oil. But Ashkenazic Jews traditionally fried their *latkes* in *schmaltz*, or rendered goose or chicken fat, and are only now discovering the health benefits of olive oil. The batter was also prepared by hand-grating the potatoes, which has given way to the food processor. So there you have it: continuity and change – all in a potato dish!

As for the *sufganiyah*, this delectable is derived from the Greek work *sufgan*, which means “puffed and fried.” They originally consisted of two pieces of dough that sandwiched some jam and were then deep-fried, with the jam oozing out during the cooking process. Now they are made by deep-frying a ball of dough first and injecting jelly in afterwards. The modernization process didn't diminish their popularity one bite and perhaps even improved it. We're also told, according to a legend, that the first *sufganiyah* was given to Adam and Eve as a way to console them on their expulsion from Eden. We may question this original myth, but there's no disputing that a good jelly donut can be great comfort food!



*There are dozens of recipes for latkes. Here's a fairly classic version.  
For the more adventurous, see <http://www.jewish-food.org/recipes/latindex.htm>  
for an array of options.*

## **POTATO LATKES**

Gourmet, December 2000

Makes 12 to 16 latkes

### **Ingredients**

1 lb potatoes

1/2 cup finely chopped onion

1 large egg, lightly beaten

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 to 3/4 cup olive oil

Accompaniments: sour cream and applesauce

### **Preparation**

Preheat oven to 250°F.

Peel potatoes and coarsely grate by hand, transferring to a large bowl of cold water as grated. Soak potatoes 1 to 2 minutes after last batch is added to water, then drain well in a colander.

Spread grated potatoes and onion on a kitchen towel and roll up jelly-roll style. Twist towel tightly to wring out as much liquid as possible. Transfer potato mixture to a bowl and stir in egg and salt.

Heat 1/4 cup oil in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking. Working in batches of 4 latkes, spoon 2 tablespoons potato mixture per latke into skillet, spreading into 3-inch rounds with a fork. Reduce heat to moderate and cook until undersides are browned, about 5 minutes. Turn latkes over and cook until undersides are browned, about 5 minutes more. Transfer to paper towels to drain and season with salt. Add more oil to skillet as needed. Keep latkes warm on a wire rack set in a shallow baking pan in oven.

Cooks' notes:

- The starchier the potato the crisper the latke. Baking potatoes are the starchiest.
- Latkes may be made up to 8 hours ahead. Reheat on a rack set over a baking sheet in a 350°F oven, about 5 minutes.
- Grating the potatoes, soaking them briefly in water, and then squeezing out the liquid keeps the batter from turning brown too quickly.

## **SUFGANIYOT (Jelly Donuts)**

based on Joan Nathan's recipe in "The Jewish Holiday Kitchen"

Makes 30 – 35 donuts

### **Ingredients**

2 tablespoons dry yeast  
3-1/2 tablespoons sugar  
3/4 cup lukewarm milk  
2-1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
2 egg yolks  
Pinch of salt  
Pinch of cinnamon  
1-1/2 tablespoons softened margarine  
Plum or strawberry preserves  
Vegetable oil for deep-frying  
Granulated sugar

### **Preparation**

Dissolve the yeast and 2 tablespoons sugar in the milk.

Sift the flour. Place it on a board and make a well in the center. Add the yeast mixture, the egg yolks, salt, cinnamon, and the remaining sugar. Knead well. Add the margarine and knead until the dough is elastic.

Cover and let rise 2 hours.

Sprinkle flour on the board. Roll the dough out thin. Cut out with a glass into rounds about 2 inches in diameter. Cover and let rise 15 minutes more.

Pour 2 inches of oil into a heavy pot and heat to 375 degrees.

Drop the doughnuts in the oil, 4 - 5 at a time, turning when brown. Drain on paper towels.

With a tiny spoon, take some jam and fill the sufganiyot. Insert the spoon in the top of the doughnut, revolve it inside the doughnut, and remove it from the same hole made on entering.

Roll in granulated sugar and serve. You can make larger sufganiyot if you like. Whatever you decide, eat them immediately!



## **CHANUKA GELT or MONEY**

**Chanuka Gelt, or money, in Yiddish, are the chocolate coins wrapped in gold or silver foil that are a mainstay of the holiday. But their origins are steeped in mystery and so they give rise to many interpretations.**

**One theory is that the coins are intended to recall the Maccabees' minting of their own money to mark their victory over the Syrians whose wealth they plundered. Temple images, such as the menorah, were embossed on the coins as reminders of their triumph.**

**According to others sources, it was customary at Chanukah to distribute coins to the poor and to underpaid teachers so that they could partake in the holiday and purchase the necessary oil and wicks for the menorah.**

**From this developed the practice in some families of giving a few coins to the children. Not only were they a welcomed gift, but they were also used to teach them to give a portion of their own money to others less fortunate than themselves.**

**We're also told that in the Sephardic Jewish communities poor children would go door-to-door during the holiday offering to protect Jewish homes from the Evil Eye by burning special grasses in exchange for some coins.**

**But maybe it is all much simpler than all these theories and lessons. Perhaps, in the spirit of apples and honey at Rosh Hashanah, the chocolate coins were given to children to guarantee a positive association to the holiday. They certainly seem to work!**

**Whatever your explanation, enjoy!**

## GIVING AND RECEIVING



The custom of Chanukah gift giving may be the most important feature of the holiday even though it only dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One would think, however, that the Maccabees were fighting not for religious freedom but for the right to exchange gifts freely, so cherished is this practice.

In principle, gift giving is a happy occasion, though often fraught with anxiety trying to figure out the right present. We may decry the commercialism and consumerism associated with the holiday, but this may also be regarded as a sign of our acceptance in the larger society.

However you look at it, holiday gift giving is clearly here to stay. But we have some options on how to approach this annual ritual.

For some, the focus is primarily on the children. Gifts may be organized around different themes. Here are some examples:

*A gift of Chanukah: a child's own menorah, a new dreidl*

*A gift of learning: books, a magazine subscription*

*A gift of warmth: socks, gloves, a sweater*

*A gift of family: a gift from a grandparent or other relative*

*A gift of culture: tickets for a movie or show, a recording of music*

*A gift of adventure: a plan for a special outing*

*A gift of choice: a gift that the child has requested*

*A gift of sharing: helping the child choose toys that s/he is ready to give away*

This is also a time of year when people typically make decisions about which charities they will support. Parents can have a conversation about these choices with their children and involve them in the decisions. In this way, all can participate in the *gift of giving*.

