

# What Is Hanukkah? All the info you need to know about Chanukah

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Chanukah is the Jewish eight-day, wintertime “festival of lights,” celebrated with a nightly menorah lighting, special prayers and fried foods.

The Hebrew word Chanukah means “dedication,” and is thus named because it celebrates the rededication of the Holy Temple (as you’ll read below). Also spelled Hanukkah (or variations of that spelling), the Hebrew word is actually pronounced with a guttural, “kh” sound, kha-nu-kah, not tcha-new-kah.

## What Chanukah Commemorates

In the second century BCE, the Holy Land was ruled by the Seleucids (Syrian-Greeks), who tried to force the people of Israel to accept Greek culture and beliefs instead of mitzvah observance and belief in G-d. Against all odds, a small band of faithful Jews, led by Judah the Maccabee, defeated one of the mightiest armies on earth, drove the Greeks from the land, reclaimed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and rededicated it to the service of G-d.

When they sought to light the Temple's Menorah (the seven-branched candelabrum), they found only a single cruse of olive oil that had escaped contamination by the Greeks. Miraculously, they lit the menorah and the one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days, until new oil could be prepared under conditions of ritual purity.

To commemorate and publicize these miracles, the sages instituted the festival of Chanukah.

## How Chanukah Is Observed

At the heart of the festival is the nightly menorah lighting. The menorah holds nine flames, one of which is the *shamash* (“attendant”), which is used to kindle the other eight lights. On the first night, we light just one flame. On the second night, an additional flame is lit. By the eighth night of Chanukah, all eight lights are kindled.

Special blessings are recited, often to a traditional melody, before the menorah is lit, and traditional songs are sung afterward.

A menorah is lit in every household (or even by each individual within the household) and placed in a doorway or window. The menorah is also lit in synagogues and other public places. In recent years, thousands of jumbo menorahs have cropped up in front of city halls and legislative buildings, and in malls and parks all over the world.

We recite the special Hallel prayer daily, and add V’Al HaNissim in our daily prayers and in the Grace after meals, to offer praise and thanksgiving to G-d for “delivering the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few ... the wicked into the hands of the righteous.”