

# Hanukkah

Hanukkah is an eight-day long Jewish holiday that marks the victory that a Jewish group called the Maccabees won over a Syrian army after it had invaded Jerusalem. On a Gregorian calendar, the exact dates when Hanukkah falls shift each year, although it always falls between late November and early January. In 2017, Hanukkah will begin the evening on December 12, and end on the evening of December 20.

## **History of Hanukkah**

According to the books 1 and 2 Maccabees (which are part of Jewish apocrypha), a Syrian Greek army led by a king named Antiochus invaded Jerusalem in 175 Before Common Era (BCE) and tried to make the Jewish people worship Greek gods and bow down to a statue of himself. The Ten Commandments forbid Jews from worshiping statues or idols, so they refused. A group of Jews called the Maccabees rebelled against the Syrian invasion. After a three-year war, they recaptured Jerusalem. However, they found that their temple had been almost completely destroyed.

The Talmud (a collection of books on Jewish law) recounts that the Jewish people began to clean and rebuild their temple. When they were done they rededicated the temple to God by lighting a lamp called a *menorah*. They only had enough oil to keep the lamp burning for one day, but the *menorah* stayed lit for eight days. Jewish texts regard this as a miracle symbolizing God's protection during a difficult time. Hanukkah literally means "rededication" and is also known as the Festival of Lights.

## **Observance of Hanukkah**

Many Jews celebrate Hanukkah by lighting one candle on a candelabrum called a *hanukiah* each day of Hanukkah. (These candelabrams are commonly referred to as *menorahs*. However, the term "*menorah*" is technically only used to describe the original candelabrum located in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.) On the first night of Hanukkah one candle of the *hanukiah* is lit, on the second night the next candle is lit, on the third night three candles are lit, and so on until all eight candles are lit on the eighth night. *Hanukiahs* have nine branches rather than eight. The ninth branch, which is a different height from the other branches, is called the *shamash*, meaning servant. The candle from that branch is lit first and then used to light the other branches of the *hanukiah*. Two blessings are recited over the candles. On the first night of Hanukkah a third blessing is recited as well. Often, *hanukiahs* are placed in a window or other place where they can be seen by the public, since publicizing the miracle of Hanukkah is a central part of Hanukkah observance.

Traditionally, Jews celebrate Hanukkah by eating fried food such as *latkes* (potato pancakes) and donuts. The oil used in the fried foods is representative of the oil used to light the menorah in the Jewish temple. Other traditions include giving small amounts of money called *gelt* (children are often given chocolate coins instead) and playing *dreidel*, a game played with a top. Usually people play *dreidel* for small tokens such as pennies.

Gift-giving is not traditionally a key component of Hanukkah. However, because Hanukkah generally falls close to Christmas, many people now give gifts during Hanukkah.

## **Scheduling**

Hanukkah is generally not considered one of the most significant Jewish holidays (compared to Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover, and others), and observances of Hanukkah fall during the evening. Though the holiday is typically celebrated outside of standard work hours, it is important to remember that employees may need scheduling accommodations during Hanukkah. Some employees may request days off during Hanukkah to be with their families; others may ask for a modified schedule so that they can leave early during Hanukkah and get home in time to light the *hanukiah* candles and prepare for celebrations. Supervisors should work with employees to accommodate these requests.

## **Greetings for Hanukkah**

If you would like to recognize Hanukkah with your co-workers and friends, saying “Happy Hanukkah” would be appropriate. It is also appropriate to say *Hanukkah Sameach* (sah-MAY-ach), which means Happy Hanukkah in Hebrew, or *Chag Sameach*, which means Happy Holiday in Hebrew.

For more information on other holidays that occur in December, see our

***December Dilemma tip sheet:***

<http://tanenbaum.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/2014-December-Dilemma-Updated.pdf>

and our ***Christmas tip sheet:***

<https://tanenbaum.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/12/Christmas-Tip-Sheet.pdf>

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