

3. What do people do to celebrate?

Celebrations Lighting candles each night. Singing special songs, such as Ma'oz Tzur. Reciting Hallel prayer. Eating foods fried in oil, such as latkes and sufganiyot, and dairy foods. Playing the *dreidel* game, and giving Hanukkah *gelt*

This miracle is commemorated by the lighting of the Hanukkah candles. The candles are placed on the menorah or hanukkiya, a nine-branch candelabrum. The ninth branch of the hanukkiya holds the shamash, or servant light. This branch is lit first and is used to light a new candle on successive nights. The candle lighting is accompanied by the chanting of blessings.

Hanukkah Traditions

Every community has its unique Hanukkah traditions, but there are some traditions that are almost universally practiced. They are: lighting the [hanukkiyah](#), spinning the [dreidel](#) and [eating fried foods](#).

- **Lighting the hanukkiyah:** Every year it is customary to commemorate the miracle of the Hanukkah oil by lighting candles on a hanukkiyah. The hanukkiyah is lit every night for eight nights. Learn more about the hanukkiyah in: [What Is a Hanukkiyah?](#) | [How to Light the Hanukkah Menorah](#) | [Hanukkah Candle Lighting Blessings](#).
- **Spinning the dreidel:** A popular Hanukkah game is spinning the dreidel, which is a four-sided top with Hebrew letters written on each side. Read [The Hanukkah Dreidel](#) to learn more about the dreidel, the meaning of the letters and how to play the game. Gelt, which are chocolate coins covered with tin foil, are part of this game.
- **Eating fried foods:** Because Hanukkah celebrates the miracle of oil, it is traditional to eat fried foods such as latkes and sufganiyot during the holiday. Latkes are pancakes made out of potatoes and onions, which are fried in oil and then served with applesauce. Sufganiyot (singular: sufganiyah) are jelly-filled donuts that are fried and sometimes dusted with confectioners' sugar before eating. Learn more about Hanukkah food traditions: [Hanukkah Food Traditions](#) | [What Is a Latke?](#)

In addition to these customs, there are also many fun ways to celebrate Hanukkah with kids. Check out this article for more about traditional and modern ways to celebrate the holiday: [Hanukkah Traditions for Kids](#)

This time of year, many Americans' thoughts turn to holly, Santa and presents under an evergreen. For some people in the United States, though, this time of year means latkes, menorahs and dreidels.

The Jewish festival of Hanukkah begins tonight with the lighting of the first candle on the menorah. It is the beginning of the eight-day festival of lights.

What is Hanukkah?

In 165 B.C., the Jewish people recaptured the Temple of Jerusalem from the Syrians. The word Hanukkah means dedication in Hebrew. The Jewish people rededicated their Temple because it had been taken over by the Syrians who had destroyed many of the beautiful furnishings.

Each family has its own traditions, Causey says, but most focus on children and the menorah.

Families light one additional candle each evening, using a candle called the shamash, which is placed above or off to the side from the others, to light the candles. On the first night, one candle is lit, on the second two candles and so forth until all of the candles are lit on the final night. Participants light the candles from right to left because Hebrew is read from right to left, Causey explains.

"They take the shamash, light the candles and say a prayer," she says.

Many Jewish parents give their children a present on each night of Hanukkah, while other parents wait until the final night and give one large gift, Causey says.

"The main thing is giving to children," she says. "Many husbands and wives don't exchange presents."

The Jewish soldiers and Judah Maccabaeus, who led them in the resistance after the death of his father, Mattathias, cleaned the temple. They wanted to have a big celebration for the rededication. They looked everywhere for oil to light the menorah, or candelabrum, which by tradition was kept lit at all times, but could find only enough oil to light the menorah for one day.

According to the story, a miracle happened, and the oil lasted for eight days, the time it took to produce more oil.

The story of Hanukkah and the fight for the temple is a true story, says Loretta Causey, director of education at Beth-El Congregation in Fort Worth, Texas, but is not written in the Torah, the Jewish holy book of scriptures.