

## Festive celebrations

# Hanukkah

Across the world, Jewish communities celebrate Hanukkah (or Chanukah) – the Festival of Lights – with candles, food and family time. It is one of the most joyful celebrations in the Jewish calendar, lasting for eight nights.

### Did you know?

- Hanukkah is Hebrew for “dedication.”
- Hanukkah starts on the 25th day of Kislev, the ninth month of the Hebrew calendar. While the exact dates change each year, it will always fall in November or December.
- The largest Jewish populations today can be found in the United States and Israel. France, Canada and the United Kingdom have the next largest populations.

### What’s behind Hanukkah

Hanukkah celebrates an event believed by Jewish people to have happened over 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem. At that time, King Antiochus had banned Jewish worship. A small group of Jews called the Maccabees fought for the right to practise their religion freely, and after three years battling to protect their beliefs they finally won. Returning to their temple, which had been damaged, the Maccabees repaired it and lit the temple’s sacred, ceremonial lamps. Though the army had destroyed all but one day’s worth of oil, the flame miraculously burned for eight days and nights.

## Cultures and customs

The most important and well-known part of Hanukkah is lighting the menorah. The menorah has nine candle holders: eight for each night of Hanukkah and one extra, known as the *shamash* or 'helper candle,' which is used to light the rest. The light from the menorah symbolises hope and resilience, even in difficult times.

Although Hanukkah traditions all originate from the same story, the way it's celebrated around the world can be varied.

- In the United Kingdom, a public menorah lighting takes place in Trafalgar Square every year, as well as in people's homes, with a new flame lit every night.
- In France, celebrations for *Hanoucca* include sharing wine with neighbours and enjoying pastries.
- In the USA, the tradition of giving gifts each night of Hanukkah has become common, while in other parts of the world children receive *gelt* - small coins or chocolate money - as a symbol of generosity and sharing.
- Songs sung during Hanukkah can sound very different around the world. Families might sing in Hebrew, Yiddish, English, Spanish or Arabic, to name a few, reflecting the range of languages of Jewish people everywhere.

## Food, glorious food

Food is an important part of Hanukkah celebrations. Traditional foods such as *latkes* - crispy potato pancakes - and *sufganiyot* - sweet jam-filled doughnuts - are all fried in oil. This calls back to the story of the oil that kept the Maccabees' temple lamp burning.

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