

Hanukkah

What Is Hanukkah?

Hanukkah is a Jewish celebration and is also known as The Festival of Lights and the Feast of Dedication. It is a time of remembrance for when the Greek ruler Antiochus forced the ancient Jews to abandon their religious practices and take up Greek ones in the 2nd century, BC.

Due to their commitment and loyalty, the Jews fought back and won, even though they were vastly outnumbered by the Greeks. The Maccabees managed to recapture the Holy temple in Jerusalem and found only one jar of oil to light their menorah in the temple but it miraculously burned for 8 days.

Today, at Hanukkah, a Hanukkah menorah is burnt for 8 days by Jewish people to remember this miracle and the victory of the Jewish people. It is a very important tradition and you may notice that there are, in fact, 9 candles because the middle candle is the 'shamash', used to light the others. On each evening, one more candle is lit, along with a blessing. A total of 44 candles are burnt on each Hanukkah menorah throughout the whole festival.

The Dreidel

When Jewish students were banned from studying the Torah, they would secretly study it and pretend to be playing a gambling game with the dreidel when questioned by the Greeks. A dreidel has Hebrew letters written on its 4 sides which mean 'A great miracle happened here'. Nowadays, a game of 'Dreidel' is played by spinning it and trying to win a pot of money or sweets.

Hanukkah Food

In memory of the miracle oil, it is tradition to eat oily foods at Hanukkah. These can be latkes, a type of potato pancake, or doughnuts. As many as 17.5 million doughnuts are eaten in Israel at Hanukkah!

Eating dairy foods, especially cheese, is another tradition at Hanukkah. This is because, when the war was fought, a heroine named Judith managed to save her village from being attacked by soldiers by distracting the General Holofernes and feeding them with lots of wine and cheese. They got so drunk that Judith took one of their swords and beheaded him and rescued her village!

Judaism

Hanukkah is actually quite a minor celebration for Jewish people and gift giving is not a tradition. Chocolate coins called gelt are given for children to enjoy.

There are bigger festivals in Judaism, such as Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Hanukkah is often mistaken to be the most important Jewish holiday because it is so close to Christmas.

Hanukkah Questions

1. Who celebrates Hanukkah?

2. What event do Jewish people remember at Hanukkah?

3. Explain the miracle that is said to have happened in the Holy temple.

4. Why did Jewish people first start playing the game 'Dreidel'?

5. What foods are traditionally eaten at Hanukkah?

6. Why are these foods eaten?

7. Is Hanukkah the most important celebration for Jews?

Hanukkah Answers

1. Who celebrates Hanukkah?

Hanukkah is celebrated by Jewish people.

2. What event do Jewish people remember at Hanukkah?

At Hanukkah, Jewish people remember the time when the Maccabee brothers fought against King Antiochus and won.

3. Explain the miracle which is said to have happened in the Holy temple.

There was only a little oil, but it managed to keep the menorah lit for 8 days!

4. Why did Jewish people first start playing the game 'Dreidel'?

Jewish students were banned from reading the Torah so they would study it while pretending to be playing a game instead.

5. What foods are traditionally eaten at Hanukkah?

Doughnuts, as well as dairy foods.

6. Why are these foods eaten?

Oily foods are eaten in memory of the miracle oil. Dairy foods are eaten to remind people of the story of Judith, who saved her village from being attacked by soldiers when she distracted them with cheese.

7. Is Hanukkah the most important celebration for Jews?

There are other festivals that are more important in Judaism than Hanukkah, such as Yom Kippur.