

What is Chanukah?

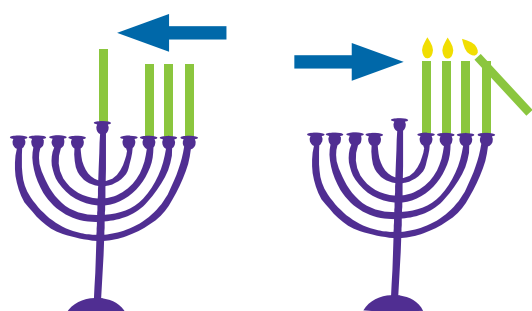
December 4-12, 2026
(First candle: December 14 at sundown)
24 Kislev-2 Tevet, 5786

Chanukah is an eight-day holiday that celebrates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 165 BCE. After the Syrian Greeks marched into Jerusalem, defiled the Temple, and tried to prevent the Jews from observing the Sabbath and studying Torah, a group of zealous fighters called the Maccabees waged a revolt and defeated the Syrian army.

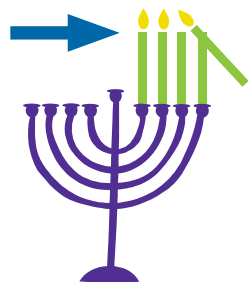
The Maccabees cleaned up the Temple, rekindled the menorah that stood in it, and re-established Jewish practice there. According to legend, the Maccabees found only a small jar of oil, containing one day's worth of oil needed for the menorah's flame. Miraculously, the flame continued to burn for eight full days.

On Chanukah we eat foods fried in oil, like latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (jelly donuts) to remind us of the miracle, and we light candles for eight nights on a 9-branch menorah called a chanukiah.

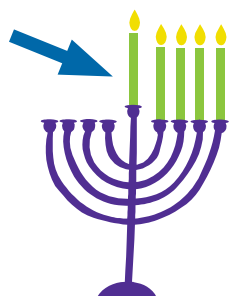
How to light the chanukiah



Candles are placed right to left...



...but lit from left to right (newest first).



The candles are lit with the shamash (a helper candle).



Add a candle for each night until all 8 candles, plus the shamash, are lit on the eighth night.

Display in a window for all to see.

Blessings for kindling the Chanukah lights

First night: blessings 1, 2 & 3

Nights 2-8: blessings 1 & 2

1. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tsivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to kindle the Chanukah lights.

2. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבֹּתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, she-asah nisim la'avoteinu (v'imoteinu) bayamim hahaeim baz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who performed wondrous deeds for our ancestors in days of old at this season.

3. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַחַיָּינוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higianu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this season.

How to Play Dreidel

A popular Chanukah game is **dreidel**, played with a four-sided top, each side with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The letters are *nun*, *gimmel*, *hey* and *shin* representing the phrase "nes gadol haya sham" (a great miracle happened there). • Each player begins with an even amount of small tokens such as pennies or nuts and puts one into the "pot" before starting a game. • Take turns spinning the dreidel. If you land on a *gimmel* you get all of what is in the pot; on a *nun* you get nothing; on a *hey* you get half the pot; and on a *shin* you put one more token in the pot. • Continue playing until one person wins everything.



Merage Jewish Community
Center of Orange County

1 Federation Way
Irvine, CA 92603

949.435.3400
jccoc.org