

Hanukkah Activities and Blessings

Some of you have been celebrating Hanukkah your whole lives. While others may be very new to the festivities or maybe even participating for the first time this year. For the latter, we've put together some basic activities and blessings to help you enjoy the days and to help honor God for the miracles he is constantly making happen in our lives.

Basic Activities

The Dreidel Game –

First you need a dreidel (a spinning top with 4 sides). Usually you use candy or nuts to play this game. In case you don't have those items to play with, we've added points here for you to use. Take turns spinning the dreidel and follow these rules:



N - Nes ... N or nun stands for nisht or nothing. If the dreidel lands on nun, you do nothing. No Points.



G - Gadol ... G or gimel stands for ganz or all. Take everything in the middle. Give yourself 20 Points.



H - Haya ... H or hay stands for halb or half. Take half of what is in the middle plus one if there is an odd number of objects. Give yourself 5 Points.



S - Sham ... S or shin stands for shtetl or put in. Put two objects into the middle. Take Away 2 Points.

The four letters which appear on the four corners of a dreidel allude to the miracle of Hanukkah. They spell out: Nes (N-miracle), Gadol (G-great), Haya (H-happened) and Sham (S-there, meaning in Israel). HAVE FUN!

The Hanukkah Menorah Lighting

The hanukkiah, or Hanukkah menorah, is the centerpiece of the Festival. It can burn anything, but most hold candles. Place the hanukkiah in a visible place. Traditionally, the lights were set outside, just to the left of the doorway. Due to theft and vandalism, however, it became customary to keep them inside the home.

Kindle the lights after sunset, before anyone goes to bed. They should burn for 30 minutes, but may burn longer. Most of the candles sold for Hanukkah burn just about 30 minutes. The hanukkiah should burn out on its own. You will need 44 candles for the duration of the holiday. Getting a few extra, in case some break is a good idea.

THE SHAMMAS (servant candle)

The Shammas is the center candle on the Menorah and should be lit first. Light the shammas each night, then use the shammas to light the other candles. That is, on the first night, light a shammas, plus one candle. On the second night, light a shammas, plus two candles, and so on. Set the candles in the menorah from right to left, and light them from left to right. By the eighth night, all candles will be lit and your home will be full of light and joy!

While the Hanukkah lights burn, tell the stories of Hanukkah, dance and sing, play music, play dreidel, and rejoice before the LORD! This is a happy holiday!

Blessings

In the following blessings, the traditional "commanded us" has been replaced by "allowed us", because Hanukkah is a free-will Feast, like Purim, and is not commanded in scripture.

Light the shammas, then say the following....

Blessed are You, O LORD, our God,
King of the Universe,
Who sanctified us with His commandments
And allowed us to kindle the Hanukkah lights.

Blessed are You, O LORD, our God,
King of the Universe,
Who performed miracles for our ancestors
In days gone by,
At this season of the year.

The following blessing is said on the first night:

Blessed are You, O LORD, our God,
King of the Universe,
Who has kept us in life
And enabled us to reach this day.

After the blessings are said on the first night, read Psalm 30

The following is from the Complete Jewish Bible

A psalm. A song for the dedication of the house. By David:

1 I will exalt you, ADONAI, because you drew me up;
you didn't let my enemies rejoice over me.

2 ADONAI my God, I cried out to you,
and you provided healing for me.

3 ADONAI, you lifted me up from Sh'ol;
you kept me alive when I was sinking into a pit.

4 Sing praise to ADONAI, you faithful of his;
and give thanks on recalling his holiness.

5 For his anger is momentary,
but his favor lasts a lifetime.
Tears may linger for the night,
but with dawn come cries of joy.

6 Once I was prosperous and used to say,
that nothing could ever shake me

7 when you showed me favor, ADONAI,
I was firm as a mighty mountain.
But when you hid your face, I was struck with terror.

8 I called to you, ADONAI;
to ADONAI I pleaded for mercy:

9 "What advantage is there in my death,
in my going down to the pit?
Can the dust praise you?
Can it proclaim your truth?

10 Hear me, ADONAI,
and show me your favor!
ADONAI, be my helper!"

11 You turned my mourning into dancing!
You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

12 so that my well-being can praise you and not be silent;
ADONAI my God, I will thank you forever!

Enjoy! Happy Hanukkah!