



## JFS Jewish Journal

*Engaging Your Jewish Residents*

 **Jewish  
Family  
Services**  
Northeastern New York  
Cultivating Resilience for Generations

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# Hanukkah

# Hanukkah: The Festival of Lights

## Hanukkah: What is it About?

Hanukkah is an eight-day festival that is celebrated every winter, in line with the Jewish lunar calendar month of Kislev. This year, Hanukkah begins on the evening of Sunday, December 14th and ends on the evening of Monday, December 22nd. Hanukkah means dedication, and the holiday celebrates the re-dedication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, which was saved by a family of Jews names the Maccabees, who fought for their freedom and saved the sacred temple.

## All About Lights

In the Hanukkah story, the Maccabees saved a holy temple from complete destruction by the Greeks, including a menorah or large candelabra. Though they were said to only have enough oil to light the menorah for one day, it miraculously stayed lit for eight days which was the time it took to get more oil to replenish the eternal light. This is why we light a menorah every night during the eight days of Hanukkah. This commemorates the fact that, despite all odds, the Jews survived in their struggle against the Greeks.

## JFS is Here & This is How We Help

*JFS provides counseling, promotes independence, aging well, and access to basic needs, mitigates food insecurity and social isolation. Our mission is amplified by volunteers and sustained by donors to ensure support for our community is within reach. You can learn more about JFS and our chaplaincy program on page 8.*



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# How to Celebrate Hanukkah in a Care Facility



## Candle Lighting

Candles are lit each night of Hanukkah, starting with one candle plus the shamash, or “helper” used to light the others, and adding an additional candle until there are a total of nine candles on the eighth night. It is appropriate to light the candles every evening after sundown. Say the blessings (on page 7) while lighting the candles. You might have a resident or family who would enjoy doing this, especially if you give them the text. Or, use a CD or video with the blessings on it.

The menorah should remain in a public area, like the lobby, where everyone can see it. Menorahs are available at synagogue gift shops and stores such as Target and Walmart. Electric menorahs are especially nice for high traffic areas. Additionally, Jewish residents might like to have one in their rooms (electric or unlit candles).

## Other Activities

Once the candles are lit, there are lots of fun activities that can be done to celebrate the holiday. Spinning a dreidel is a Hanukkah tradition, as is singing one of the many Hanukkah songs. A Hanukkah word search and links to music and activities are included on pages 5 & 6.

## How Do You Spell “Hanukkah”?

There’s really no wrong way to spell Hanukkah. Because Hebrew uses a different alphabet than English, the English spelling can take on a lot of different forms. Below is a list of just some of the common spellings of the word. For a fun time, ask your residents how they spell the word, and document all the different answers!

✓ **Hanukkah**

✓ **Channuka**

✓ **Hanuka**

✓ **Hanukah**

✓ **Hannukah**

✓ **Chanukka**

✓ *Chanukah*

✓ **Channukah**



# Bubbe's Corner

You can always count on Bubbe (Yiddish for grandmother) for her wisdom, stories and Hanukkah traditions. Whether you are a Bubbe or have a Bubbe figure in your life, spend time learning about the Festival of Lights. Be sure to ask your residents about what special things their families do to celebrate, and try to make them feel as at home as possible!



Happy Hanukkah! This year, as I light my candles each night, I will say a special prayer for peace for Israel. More than ever, I want to illuminate the lights during this difficult and dark time.

Did you know that the four Hebrew letters written on driedels are nun, gimmel, hey, shin, which stands for *nes gadol haya sham* “a great miracle happened there”?!

Jelly doughnuts, known as *sufganiyot*, are a popular Hanukkah food – 17.5 million are eaten each Hanukkah in Israel alone!

Be sure to have 44 candles to last all of Hanukkah!

Did you know that when I was younger, my parents designated the 5th night of Hanukkah as *gelt* night — where instead of receiving money as a gift for ourselves, we would select a charity to donate it to? Please consider donating Hanukkah *gelt* to JFS to support our Chaplaincy Services.

# Traditional Hanukkah Foods

Like most Jewish holidays, Hanukkah comes with an array of traditional foods that symbolize different aspects of the holiday. Since Jews come from all different parts of the world, many residents may have meal traditions that are unique to their family. Below are some of the most common traditional foods and their symbolic meanings:

## Latkes

*Latkes*, also known as potato pancakes, are the most popular and common Hanukkah food. Shredded potato and onion are fried in lots of oil, meant to represent the oil of the menorah that miraculously lasted for eight days. They're best served hot with applesauce or sour cream. For a fun variation on the original, try using sweet potato instead!



## Sufganiyot

Much like *latkes*, *sufganiyot*, or jelly-filled doughnuts, are a traditional Hanukkah food because they are usually fried in oil. These sweet treats pair nicely with their savory latke counterpart for a deep-fried Hanukkah meal.

## Chocolate Gelt

Chocolate coins, known commonly as *gelt*, weren't always made of chocolate. Originally real gold coins were used to bet on games of Dreidel during the week of Hanukkah. By the 20th century, many families began using chocolate coins instead, and they're now often seen being used as antes for games or just as a quick snack for the chocolate lovers.



Hebrew ...	It is pronounced ...	It means ...
<i>Chag urim sameach</i>	Hag or-eem som-ay-akh	Happy festival of lights!
<i>Chanukiyah</i>	Ha-noo-kee-yah	The special Hanukkah menorah that has nine candles, one for each night and one for the <i>shamash</i> .
<i>Sufganiyot</i>	Soof-gahn ee-oat	Jelly doughnuts
<i>Shamash</i>	Shahm-ash	The tallest candle on the menorah
<i>Neis Gadol Hayah Sham</i>	Nays Gah-dole ha-yah shom	A great miracle happened there
<i>Sivivon</i>	Se-vee-vohn	Another name for a dreidel



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# Music & Melodies

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Like many Jewish holidays, music is an important way that Jews celebrate and keep traditions alive. Here are some Hanukkah songs, both traditional and modern, that can help your residents get into the holiday spirit.

## The Candle Lighting Blessings (page 7)

[These blessings](#) are sung while lighting the candles during each of the eight nights of Hanukkah.

## Maoz Tzur

[This is a song](#) commonly sung right after lighting the candles, while admiring their light.

## Maccabeats Parody

The Maccabeats are a popular Jewish acapella group whose [song parody of Dynamite by Taio Cruz](#) is a popular favorite during the Hanukkah season.

## Ocho Kandelikas

Ladino is a language that is a mix of Hebrew and Spanish, traditionally spoken by Sephardic Jews who originated from Spain and Portugal. [This song](#), which translates to “Eight Little Candles” is a popular Ladino Hanukkah song.

## I Have a Little Dreidel

[This fun English song](#) is a classic in American Jewish homes!

## Hanukkah, O Hanukkah

Six 13, a Jewish acappella group in New York City, has a rousing version of [this popular song on YouTube](#).

## Light One Candle

[This song by folk band Peter, Paul and Mary](#) details the story of the Maccabees on which the whole holiday is based.



# Food & Games

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## Latkes

While store-bought latkes can really hit the spot, cooking the latkes fresh is fun, easy, and smells great! For a simple latke recipe, check out [this link from My Jewish Learning](#).

## Sufganiyot

If you're up for a tasty cooking challenge, try making Sufganiyot, or jelly-stuffed doughnuts. [This recipe with easy-to-follow pictures and instructions](#) will help you cook the perfect Hanukkah treat.

## Make Your Own Menorah

One of the most fun parts of Hanukkah is seeing the different types of menorahs people use. The only requirements for a menorah is that it has nine candle holders, one of which is taller than the rest (this is the Shamash). You can make a menorah out of almost anything with a little glue and some creativity! [Check out this page](#) with lots of unique ideas and designs to get you started.

## How to Play Dreidel

Dreidel is a simple game where players spin a wooden top, usually for a prize of chocolate Gelt. [Visit this website](#) to learn how to play!

# Hanukkah Blessings

Candles are added to the *chanukiyah* (menorah) from right to left and are kindled from left to right. The newest candle is lit first. On the Shabbat of Hanukkah, kindle the Hanukkah lights first and then the Shabbat candles.

Light the *shamash* (the helper candle) first, using it to kindle the rest of the Hanukkah lights. As you do, say or sing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ 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 Hanukkah.*

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

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ  
וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, she-asah nisim laavoteinu v'imoteinu bayamim hahaeim baz'man hazeh.*

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

**For first night only:**

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַחַיָּנוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ  
וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

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

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

## Hanerot Halalu

We kindle these lights because of the wonderful deliverance You performed for our ancestors. During these eight days of Hanukkah, these lights are sacred; we are not to use them but only to behold them, so that their glow may rouse us to give thanks for Your wonderful acts of deliverance.



## Jewish Holidays Calendar 2025 - 2026\*

Holiday	Date
Hannukah (8 days)	Sunday, Dec. 14*, 2025 - Monday, Dec. 22, 2025
Tu B'Shevat (1 day)	Sunday, Feb. 1* – Monday, Feb. 2, 2026
Purim (1 day)	Monday, March 2* – Tuesday, March 3, 2026
Passover (8 days)	Wednesday, April 1*- Thursday, April 9, 2026
Shavuot (2 days)	Thursday, May 21* – Saturday, May 23, 2026
Rosh Hashanah (2 days)	Friday, Sept. 11* – Sunday, Sept. 13, 2026
Yom Kippur (1 day)	Sunday, Sept. 20* – Monday, Sept. 21, 2026
Sukkot (7 days)	Friday, Sept. 25* – Friday, Oct. 2, 2026
Shmini Atzeret (1 day) & Simchat Torah (1 day)	Friday, Oct. 2* – Sunday, Oct. 4, 2026

**\* All holidays begin at sundown**

### About JFS

JFS provides counseling, promotes independence, aging well, and access to basic needs, mitigates food insecurity and social isolation. Our mission is amplified by volunteers and sustained by donors to ensure support for our community is within reach.

### Our staff has expertise in:

- Helping older adults maintain their safety and independence
- Providing resources and guidance to older adults and their families
- Offering private transportation to medical appointments and synagogue services
- Counseling and care management (JFS now accepts Medicare)

### Support Our Chaplaincy Program

JFS provides spiritual connection and support for Jewish residents in long-term and elder care residences in the Capital Region.

**Online:** [jfsnyny.org/donations](https://jfsnyny.org/donations)

**Call:** (518) 516-1102

**Thank you!**



### Connect with Us!

**518-482-8856**

**[jfsnyny.org](https://jfsnyny.org)**

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