

WHY DO WE CELEBRATE CHANUKAH?

No matter how you spell it, Chanukah is the Festival of Lights. This eight-day holiday commemorates the rededication of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in the 2nd century BCE following its defilement by the Syrian Greeks in 164 BCE.

Beginning in 167 BCE, the Jews of Judea rose up in revolt against the oppression of King Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Seleucid Empire. The military leader of the first phase of the revolt was Judah the Maccabee, the eldest son of the priest Mattityahu (Mattathias). In the autumn of 164, Judah and his followers were able to capture the Temple in Jerusalem, which had been turned into a pagan shrine. They cleaned it and rededicated it to Israel's God. This event was observed as an eight-day celebration, which was patterned after Sukkot, the autumn festival of huts. Much later, rabbinic tradition ascribed the length of the festival to a miraculous small amount of oil that burned for eight days.



CHANUKAH CANDLE-LIGHTING BLESSINGS

One candle is added to the menorah each night. The first night, you light only the shammus (the one at a different height) and one Chanukah candle. By the eighth night, you light all of the candles. Candles should be added to the menorah from right to left (like Hebrew writing). The shammus candle is lit first. While holding the shammus candle, recite the following blessings.

Blessing over Candles

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melek ha'olam
Praised are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
asher kidishanu b'mitz'votav v'tzivanu
Who has sanctified us by your commandments and commanded us

לְהַדְלִיק נֵיר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה: (אָמֵן)
I'had'lik neir shel Chanukah. (Amein)
to light the lights of Chanukah. (Amen)



Blessing for Chanukah

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melek ha'olam
Praised are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe

שָׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְן הַזֶּה: (אָמֵן)
she'asah nisim la'avoteinu bayamim haheim baziman hazeh. (Amein)
Who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time.



Shehechyanu (first night only)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melek ha'olam
Praised are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe

שְׁהַחַיָּנוּ וְקִיַּמָּנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה: (אָמֵן)
Shehechyanu v'kiymanu v'hig'anu laz'man hazeh. (Amein)
who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season. (Amen)



After reciting the blessings, use the shammus to light the Chanukah candles from left to right (newest to oldest.)