

Hanukkah: A Tradition of Equity and Inclusion

December 25 – January 3

Please run the entire 8 days in honor of the celebration

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Hanukkah is a profound story of resilience, hope, and the triumph. Often referred to as the "Festival of Lights," is more than just an eight-day celebration marked by the lighting of the [menorah](#). At its core, Hanukkah embodies principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion, offering valuable lessons for contemporary society.

Historically, Hanukkah commemorates the Maccabean Revolt, a time when a small, oppressed Jewish population in Judea fought for religious freedom against the powerful Seleucid Empire. Led by [Mattathias](#) and his son [Judas Maccabeus](#), the Maccabees fought for the right to practice their religion without fear of persecution. This struggle for religious freedom is a fundamental human right, and it underscores the need for equitable treatment of all people, regardless of their faith, ethnicity, or background. This narrative resonates powerfully in today's world, where marginalized communities continue to strive for equality and acceptance.

The concept of "light overcoming darkness," central to Hanukkah, is a metaphor for the power of diversity and inclusion. Just as the menorah's single candle illuminates the other eight, each individual brings unique perspectives, experiences, and talents that enrich the collective whole. A truly inclusive society recognizes and values these differences, creating a space where everyone feels seen, heard, and respected.

Moreover, Hanukkah teaches us about the power of community. The Maccabean Revolt was a collective effort, with individuals from all walks of life uniting for a common cause. This spirit of solidarity is essential for building inclusive communities where people support and uplift one another.

Festival of Lights celebration

Menorah

- The most important of all Hanukkah traditions is the lighting of the [menorah](#) each evening. Also known as the Hanukkah lamp, the menorah recalls the Temple lampstand and is a simple or elaborate candelabra with eight branches plus a holder for the [shammash](#) ("servant") [candle](#) that is used to light the other eight candles. One candle is lit on the first evening, and an additional candle is lit on each subsequent evening until eight candles are burning on the last evening. A blessing is also offered and songs are sung while the candles are lit each night.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hanukkah/Traditions>

Sing Songs

- Hanukkah comes with traditional holiday songs sung around the glowing menorah. These celebrate everything from the glory of God and the ancient Temple of the Jews (*Maaz Tzur*) to the simplicity of a dreidel, as in "Dreidel, dreidel, dreidel/I made it out of clay/And when it's dry and ready/Oh dreidel I shall play."

Yummy Fried Treats

- There's nothing low-fat about Hanukkah—the traditional foods of the holiday are deep-fried, caloric, and delicious. In honor of the miracle of the oil at the center of Hanukkah—the story of the lamp in the Temple burning bright for eight days even though there was only enough fuel for one day—Jewish people eat fried foods like [latkes](#) (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (jelly-filled doughnuts). [12 of Our Favorite New and Traditional Hanukkah Dessert Recipes](#)

Spinning Tops

- It's customary to play with dreidels (spinning tops) during the holiday, even wager with chocolate coins on which side of the top will fall face up. (If you've never played, [here is a quick explainer of the rules.](#)) Legend has it that during the Greek-Syrian dictatorship in ancient Israel, Jewish students got around the ban on reading the Torah by bringing spinning tops to study sessions so their oppressors would think they were playing. The Hebrew characters carved into the four sides of today's dreidels are the first letters of "Ness Gadol Haya Po/Sham," which roughly translates to "Great Miracle Happened Here/There" (depending on whether you're in Israel or not). Now dreidels are the symbol of Hannukah and used for [Hanukkah gift wrap](#) and [Hanukkah table decorations](#).

Gold Coins

- The tradition of handing out gelt (the Yiddish word for "money") can be traced back to [Jews in Medieval Europe](#), who connected the Hebrew word for education, *hinnukh*, with Hanukkah. Parents would give their children gelt to present to their teachers, and in time, they gave their children gelt to praise them for their studies. The practice is also likely a nod to the fact that the only time Jews were historically free to mint their own coins in their own state was after the Maccabean revolt when Jewish kings governed the land around Jerusalem for over a century. The coins distributed during Hanukkah—either real currency or chocolate-covered coins—are thus a symbol of Jewish independence.

<https://www.bhg.com/holidays/hanukkah/traditions/hanukkah-history-traditions/#:~:text=Eight%20candles%20symbolize%20the%20number,reciting%20prayers%20and%20singing%20songs.>

In conclusion, Hanukkah is more than just a religious holiday; it is a powerful symbol of diversity, equity, and inclusion. By examining the historical context and the core values of Hanukkah, we can gain valuable insights into creating a more just and equitable world for all.

Videos:

[2023 National Menorah lighting ceremony in Washington, D.C.](#)

[How to light the Menorah by Rabbi Kauffman](#)

[Oh, Hanukkah, Oh, Hanukkah - with Lyrics](#)