

NCYI Youth Groups Chanukah

What Is Chanukah?

By [Tzvi Freeman](#)

http://www.chabad.org/holidays/chanukah/article_cdo/aid/98951/jewish/What-Is-Chanukah.htm

Did Chanukah happen years ago? Or is it happening now? Was there ever a time when it was not happening? The story of a little candle pushing away the monster of frightening darkness is ever-alive within each of us -- and in the world outside of us.

You might call it the cosmic mega-drama. Watch it happen at the dawn of each day and at every winter solstice, with every breath of life, every cry of a newborn child, every blade of grass that breaks out from under the soil, every flash of genius, every stroke of beauty, every decision to do good in the face of evil, to build where others destroy, to move humanity forward when others pull us toward chaos. All those and more are Chanukah.



(c) 1999 Sarah Kranz

Some History

You would have thought the Jewish people and the ancient Greeks would get along. After all, they had so much in common. Both valued wisdom and beauty. Many Greek philosophers even acknowledged a single, great Mind behind all the cosmos, similar to Jewish monotheism.

Well, they did manage somewhat -- at first. The Jews tolerated Greek rule from the time of Alexander of Macedonia. Many Jews studied Hellenist philosophy and King Ptolemy had the Jewish Torah translated into Greek. But when King Antiochus attempted to force Hellenism down our throats, we rebelled.

Antiochus forbade ritual circumcision. Mothers openly circumcised their infant boys in defiance. Antiochus forbade the keeping of the Sabbath. Jews were forced to leave Jerusalem so they could keep the day of rest holy. Antiochus forbade the study of Torah as a sacred text. Jews found ways to teach classes of children and adults in secret. When the Greeks raised up idols in the cities and towns and demanded that the Jews worship them, all-out war ensued.

It was the first time in history that a people had fought not for their country or their lives, but for their beliefs and their right to religious freedoms.

Problem was, the Syrian-Greek army was the most powerful in the world. Their soldiers marched in a compact formation of overlapping shields and long spears, almost invincible in those times. They had advanced weapons, were highly trained and even brought elephants to the battlefield. The Jewish resistance, on the other hand, began with a handful of brothers of the priestly class, calling themselves the Maccabees.

There were many acts of courage, but the Maccabees firmly believed that their victory came from Above. Eventually, they received a sign that it was so: When they took back Jerusalem and the Temple, they searched and found a single flask of undefiled olive oil -- just what was needed to light the sacred menorah. Although the flask held only enough for a single day, the light of the menorah miraculously burned for eight complete days, providing just enough time to prepare new oil. To the Jewish people, this was like a nod from Above, that, yes, He was with us all along.

Chanukah Insights:

Miracles

Without miracles, we might come to believe that the laws of physics define reality. Once we witness the inexplicable, we see that there is a higher reality. And then we look back at physics and say, "This too is a miracle." The miracle of a small flask of oil burning for eight days was this sort of miracle.

Then there are those small miracles that occur every day. Those acts of synchronicity we call 'coincidence' because, in them, G-d prefers to remain anonymous. But when we open our eyes and hearts, we see there is truly no place void of this wondrous, unlimited G-d. These were the sort of miracles the Maccabees saw in their battles against the mighty Greek army.

The Power of the Individual

Chanukah was a victory of few over many. Each Maccabee was a hero, essential to the victory.

One could think that, in those days, when the population of the world was so much smaller, a single individual would have more power to change the world. In fact, just the opposite is true. Technology and information has put enormous power in the hands of whoever wants it.

Just over fifty years ago, one madman came to the verge of destroying the world. His failure to develop atomic weapons on time is still inexplicable -- it can only be attributed to the great mercies of the One Above who takes care of His world and promised it would always stand. Today we have seen that not even an army is needed, nor warheads or

missiles -- but only an obsessive will to destroy.

Such is the power of darkness.

A thousand times over is the power of light, of any one of us to transform the entire world to good. A small child kissing the mezuzah on the door of her house, an act of kindness asking nothing in return, a sacrifice of convenience to benefit another--each of these things are as bursts of light in the nighttime sky. True, they make less noise. Rarely are they reported in the daily news. But while darkness passes as the shadows of clouds on a windy day, this light endures, accumulating until it leaves no room for evil to remain.

The Mind and Beyond

Today's Western society is built on the foundations of these two cultures: the Jewish and the Greek. Both treasured the human mind. The Greeks reached the pinnacle of intellect at their time. But the experience of Mount Sinai had taught the Jew that there is something greater than the human mind. There is a G-d, indescribable and inexplicable. And, therefore, a world could not be built on human reason alone.

The idea annoyed the Greeks to no end. While they appreciated the wisdom of the Torah, they demanded that the Jews abandon the notion that it was something Divine.

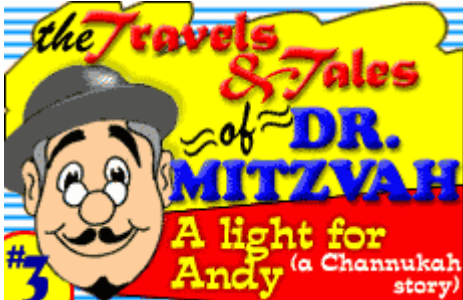
Ethics, to an ancient Greek, meant that which is right in the eyes of society. To a Jew, it means that which is right in the eyes of G-d. The difference is crucial: Ethics built solely on the convenience of the time can produce a society where human beings are treated as numbers in a computer or where the central value is the accumulation of wealth. At its extreme, it can produce a Stalinist Russia or a Nazi Germany.

A healthy mind is one that recognizes that there will always be wonder, because G-d is beyond the human mind. And a healthy society is a balanced one, whose soil nurtures human accomplishment but whose bedrock is the ethical standard of an Eternal Being.

Last Word

Some people are waiting for a final, apocalyptic war. But the final war is not fought on battlefields, nor at sea, nor in the skies above. Neither is it a war between leaders or nations. The final war is fought in the heart of each human being, with the armies of his or her deeds in this world. The final war is the battle of Chanukah and the miracle of light.

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Dr. Mitzvah delivers some light.

by Yaffa Ganz

It was over a week since anyone had seen Dr. Mitzvah. His patients were looking for him. His mail was piling up and his phone did not stop ringing. All Mrs. Goldengreen would say was that the Doctor was busy and could not be disturbed.

"I wonder where he is or what he's doing," said Sarah. "It's not like Dr. Mitzvah to go into hiding!"

"He's not hiding," answered Joey. "He's probably doing something important."

Joey Singer said he saw Dr. Mitzvah going into the Masterfeld Mansion outside Cedarville.



Y. Attias © aish.edu

"What can he be doing there?" asked Seffy. "The Masterfelds have their own doctors. They never call Dr. Mitzvah."

"Let's wait here for him. He has to come home sooner or later," said David.

Andrew Masterfeld should have been in class with Seffy and Sarah and Joel and David. But Andy was blind and he studied at home. He had private teachers, special tutors, his own pony and a private gymnasium. And now he had a new problem. Mr. Masterfeld called Dr. Mitzvah.

"I passed your office the other day and saw your sign. It says you are a Doctor of Mostly Everything. I don't think that you can cure my boy's eyes, but perhaps you could help us. You see, Andy learned that it is a mitzva to see the light of the Chanuka candles. He insists that he is going to see them. He doesn't want Chanuka presents, he doesn't want parties. All he wants is to see the Chanuka lights. He says he will have his own private Chanuka miracle.

"He's a good boy, Dr. Mitzvah, but so stubborn! He won't listen to anyone. Is there some way you can help him? Perhaps you can explain to him that the lights aren't so important. We can celebrate the holiday without the lights. He will be so disappointed. Can you help us?"

Dr. Mitzvah listened carefully. "But the lights are important," he said. "Without the lights there is no Chanuka! Let me think a bit."

That very same day Dr. Mitzvah went to work. He bought pipes and screws and bolts. He bought gold paint and brushes and metal valves. He locked himself up in his workshop and didn't answer the phone or visit his patients unless it was an emergency.



The day before Chanuka he went to the Masterfeld Mansion carrying a heavy package. When he returned, he saw Joey, David, Seffy and Sarah sitting on the bench in his yard.

"How wonderful!" he cried. "You are just the people I need! Can you help me carry some packages to the Masterfeld Mansion? I couldn't find a taxi and they are too heavy for me to take all at once."

"I'll call my father and ask if he can drive us there," said Seffy. "I'm sure he won't mind."

Seffy's father soon pulled up in front of Dr. Mitzvah's house and eight heavy packages were loaded into the big trunk of his car. Dr. Mitzvah sat in the front and the children piled into the back. At the Masterfeld Mansion servants came out to take the packages into the house.

"Can we come in too?" asked Sarah.

"Well now, do you usually come to visit Andy?" asked Dr. Mitzvah.

The children were very quiet.

"Not usually," said Sarah softly.

"It would be nice if you did, you know," answered Dr. Mitzvah. "He would definitely appreciate some company. Well, come on in and maybe it will be the beginning of many more visits!"

The children said hello to Andy and sat down to watch as Dr. Mitzvah opened the packages. They were full of long gold-colored tubes with lots of smaller parts, all waiting to be assembled. There were forty-one pieces in all.

"Wow!" said Seffy. "What are you going to do with all these tubes?"

"I know," cried Sally. "He's going to build a Chanuka Menorah!"

"That's absolutely correct, Sally!" said a smiling Dr. Mitzvah.

"I can't wait to see it," said Andy. He was smiling too.

The children looked at each other. They didn't say anything at all.

"Let's get to work," said Dr. Mitzvah.

He took out a big drawing and they began to put the pieces together. It was like building a big three-dimensional puzzle. When they were finished, all forty-one pieces were tightly connected. The Menorah stood three feet high and four feet wide. Andy felt it carefully from one end to the other.

"That's a pretty big menorah," he said. A little smile curved around his lips.

"Yes indeed. That's because Chanuka is the story of a pretty big miracle," said Dr. Mitzvah. "When the Hellenistic Greek-Syrians captured the Land of Israel, most people thought the Jews had to become just like the Greeks. They were sure that whatever the Greeks did was good and right, and following the Torah of the Jews was wrong and bad. After all, the mighty

Greeks were the most civilized people in the world!



"Many of the Jews agreed, but many others, like the Maccabim, refused to follow the Greeks. They were a stubborn people who stayed loyal to God and His Torah. They refused to turn into Greeks. They even fought the mighty Greek-Syrian armies. God helped them in their battles and they were able to chase the Greeks out of Jerusalem. Then a miracle happened. The oil they found to relight the Menorah in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was enough for only one day, but it burned for eight entire days until new oil could be pressed and brought to Jerusalem. So you see, sometimes it pays to be stubborn."

"Like me," said Andy with a big smile.

"Like you and the Jewish People!" said Joey.

"But how will Andy see the lights?" whispered Sally to Dr. Mitzvah.

"Wait until Chanuka and you'll find out," whispered Dr. Mitzvah.

On the last evening of Chanuka, the children were invited to a big Chanuka gathering at the Masterfeld Mansion. The Menorah stood in the middle of the room on a low table. Mr. Masterfeld lit eight thick, tall candles – just the right size for such a big menorah. He said the blessings and everyone answered Amen.

Suddenly, Andy stepped forward, his arms stretched out before him. He walked up to the Menorah and held his hands to the light. The warmth of the candles reached his face and the light shone in his eyes that could not see.

"You know," he said, "I feel as though I really can see the Chanuka lights. I can feel them on my face and imagine them in my mind. I even hear them flickering. They flicker, but they will never go out. Maybe someday I'll even see them with my eyes, like you do."

"If we're stubborn and we believe, no matter what anyone says, God helps us. He turns darkness into light and makes miracles happen, even today!"

"Amen," whispered Dr. Mitzvah.



JUST PUBLISHED: THE TRAVELS AND TALES OF DR. EMANUEL J. MITZVA (Doctor of Mostly Everything). Available from [Feldheim Publishers](#).

Chanukah Songs

Sing along with these classic Chanukah tunes!

[The lyrics are supplied here. For the tunes, please click on the links to [aish.com](#)]

Click on the song titles to sing along with Aish alumnus Brad Schachter.

Chanukah, Oh Chanukah
Maoz Tzur
I Have A Little Dreidel
Sivivon, Sov, Sov, Sov

Chanukah Chanukah

CHANUKAH, OH CHANUKAH



Oh Chanukah, Oh Chanukah, come light the Menorah
Let's have a party, we'll all dance the hora
Gather round the table, we'll all have a treat
Sivivon to play with, and latkes to eat.

And while we are playing
The candles are burning bright
One for each night, they shed a sweet light
To remind us of days long ago.
One for each night, they shed a sweet light
To remind us of days long ago.

MAOZ TZUR



Maoz tzur yeshua-si
Lecha na-eh li-sha-beyach
Tikone bais ti-fee-lasi
Vi-sham todah ni-za-beyach.

Li-ase ta-chin mat-beyach
Mee-tzar ham-na-beyach
Az eg-more vi-sheer meez-mor
Chanukas ha-meez-beyach
Az eg-more vi-sheer meez-mor
Chanukas ha-meez-beyach.

(Translation)

O Rock of my salvation, with delight we praise You.
Restore the Temple where we will bring offerings.
When You will eliminate our enemies,
Then I shall sing at the rededication.

I HAVE A LITTLE DREIDEL



I have a little dreidel
I made it out of clay
And when it's dry and ready
Then dreidel I shall play!

Oh dreidel, dreidel, dreidel
I made it out of clay

And when it's dry and ready
Then dreidel I shall play!

It has a lovely body
With legs so short and thin
And when my dreidel's tired
It drops and then I win!

(Chorus)

My dreidel's always playful
It loves to dance and spin
A happy game of dreidel
Come play now, let's begin!

(Chorus)

SIVIVON, SOV, SOV, SOV, SOV



Sivivon, sov, sov, sov
Chanukah, hu chag tov
Chanukah, hu chag tov Sivivon, sov, sov, sov!

Chag simcha hu la-am
Nes gadol haya sham
Nes gadol haya sham
Chag simcha hu la-am.

(Translation)

Dreidel, spin, spin, spin.
Chanukah is a great holiday.
It is a celebration for our nation.
A great miracle happened there.

CHANUKAH, CHANUKAH



Chanukah, Chanukah
Chag yafeh kol kach
Ohr chaviv, mi-saviv
Gil li-yeled rach.

Chanukah, Chanukah
Sivivon, sov, sov
Sov, sov, sov! Sov, sov, sov!
Ma nayim vi-tov.

(Translation)

Chanukah is a great holiday.
Surrounded with lovely light.
Fun for little children.
Dreidel, spin, spin, spin.
How wonderful

* * * * *

Chanukah Questions & Answers

By [Chani Rosengarten](#)

Available from the following website:

<http://chinuch.org>



Name: _____



The Chanukah Story

Over 2000 years ago, when the Beis Hamikdash (_____
_____) was still standing in the land of _____, the Greeks
were the most powerful nation in the entire world. The first Greek ruler was
called _____. When he first entered
Eretz Yisroel he saw the Jewish nation led by _____
_____ coming to greet him. As soon as the great king Alexander
saw Shimon HaTzaddik, he jumped off his horse and started bowing down.

Briefly explain why Alexander bowed down to Shimon HaTzaddik.



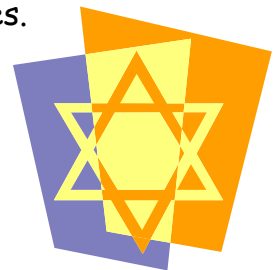
When Alexander was in charge the Jews lived very peacefully. They were able to keep all the Mitzvos and serve Hashem in the Beis Hamikdash. One day Alexander brought a portrait of himself to the Beis Hamikdash and asked Shimon HaTzaddik to hang it up for a decoration. Rabbi Shimon explained that although all Jews like and respect King Alexander his picture cannot be hung in the Beis Hamikdash for it was considered an _____.

What did Shimon HaTzaddik promise to do for Alexander instead?

For many years the Jews lived in comfort. However, after a while, a new Greek king rose to rule over the entire world. His name was King _____. He liked to call himself _____. But, behind his back everyone called him _____, for that's what Antiochus was.

Unlike some previous kings Antiochus did not like the Jews. Just the opposite, he _____ them and made three evil decrees.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



In addition to these laws, Antiochus entered the Beis Hamikdash and put an _____ inside.

Many brave Jews were not afraid of Antiochus. They did not obey his ridiculous rules and continued to perform all the _____. An example of brave some brave Jews were _____ and her _____.



Briefly retell the story:

There were some Jews who were scared and converted to the Greek religion. These Jews changed the way they _____ and _____ they also change their Jewish _____ to Greek.

During this time there was a very special Jewish family who were called the _____. They lived in the city of _____. Matisyahu was the father of this family. He had five sons one was called: _____, he was very strong. Before Matisyahu died he told Yehuda that he should lead the Jewish nation when they go out to war against the Greeks. Although the Greeks were

_____ than the Jews, Hashem made a miracle and the Jewish army _____ the war.

Yehuda Hamacabi had a sister named _____, who also experienced a great miracle.

Who did Yehudis manage to kill, and how did she kill him?

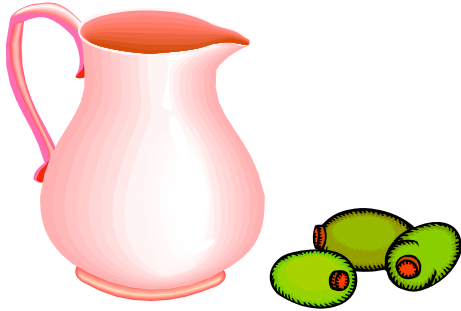
After the Jews won over the Greeks they were ready to go back to the _____ _____. When they got there they found the place was a big _____. The Jews wanted to light the _____, but there was a big problem!

What was the matter?

What two miracles happened?

1. _____
2. _____

Because of this miraculous story we celebrate Chanukah on the _____ of the Jewish month of _____(usually takes place sometime in December) for that is the date that the Jews won over the Greeks.



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Oils Well That Ends Well

by Rabbi David Orlofsky

Lessons Learned from Chanukah Oil

<http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/1333>

Well. It's Chanuka again. The time of year when we gather together to light our little menorahs, eat *latkes* and jelly donuts dripping with oil and get presents. For most people the first two don't have too much meaning, but getting presents - now that's a religious experience. Because it has served as one of the most effective methods to stem the rising tide of assimilation. We tell our kids: "Be Jewish and you'll get presents for eight days."

And yet I can't help but feel that there must be more of a message for our lives to Chanuka. Don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying you shouldn't get me anything.

The Talmud asks the famous question "What is Chanuka?" It then goes on to explain the miraculous victory of a tenacious band of religious zealots over the overwhelming force of the Greek empire. The Jews then returned to the Temple and rededicated it, miraculously discovering one small bottle of pure oil with which to light the menorah in the Temple for one day. But the oil burned for eight days. And so, to celebrate the miracle we instituted the eight days of Chanuka. We light the menorah and eat food cooked in oil.

But the question is, what did we have against the Greeks in the first place? They wanted to bring us the light of Greek civilization and culture. Their drama, sports, education and philosophy. So what was so terrible about Plato? Well for one thing it's almost impossible to get out of the carpet, but more than that, we Jews had our own philosophy. We weren't a pagan people lucky to get someone to teach us how to throw a discus, we are a holy people reaching for spiritual heights through G-dliness. We want to bring the light of G-d into a world of darkness, and all the light of Greek civilization can't compete with that.

So we eat a lot of oil. Now some people think that's because we wanted to make sure we don't have great physiques like the Greeks, but actually it's because oil is like us Jews. It floats on top of everything else. It doesn't mix well. It burns brightly and can bring light into a world of darkness. Maybe the Greeks had a message of Western Civilization that was a step up if you were an Edomite, but for us Jews it was a step down to a world devoid of holiness and true meaning.



So every year we light those little candles and although they might not light up the world yet, they have the power to chase away some of the shadows. We Jews are a people with an outlook that spans thousands of years. Over the centuries the Greeks have moved on, but we Jews are still around bringing a message of transcendental spiritual fulfillment to a world in darkness.

Happy Chanuka!

* * * * *

Yom Tov Games

Chanuka

Dreidel-Spinning Contest



Props:

-Dreidels

Activity: After gaining entry by answering a question about Chanuka, every kid gets a chance to spin their dreidel in a series of rounds. Whoever's lasts the longest, second to longest and third of the round gets a certain number of points. Rounds can include specifications such as upside down, lefty, dropping it from high up, two at a time, using your palms instead of fingers, etc. Of course, be sure to discuss the story behind playing dreidel.

Oil Search



Props:

-Oil jug

Discussion: After the Chanukah story, the Maccabees wanted to relight the Menorah. But there was one problem: they had no oil. none, zero. The Greeks had come in and destroyed every single pitcher of oil. So what did the Macabees do? Did they say "Oh well" and go home? No way! they looked anyway, they didn't give up! And you know what? They did ended up finding a jug of oil!

Activity: Hide something in the room, preferably an oil jug or something Chanuka related. Have the kids pretend they are Maccabees, and not to give up the search however long it takes.

Courtesy of parshaactivities.com

Color in

This picture of Mattisyahu Cohen Gadol:

- A. Yellow
- B. Blue
- C. Red
- D. Green
- E. Orange
- F. Brown

