

Hanukkah is a Jewish festival that is celebrated for eight days, usually in December. It is also called the Festival of Lights. Find out why and learn about what people do to celebrate this special holiday.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. a candle
2. oil
3. a doughnut
4. a knot
5. a spinning top
6. a pretzel
7. a temple
8. a pancake

Definition

- a. a toy that turns round fast on a point when you twist it
- b. a small, round cake, often with jam inside or shaped like a ring
- c. a building used to worship a god or gods
- d. a stick of wax with a string that is burned to give light
- e. a tie or fixed twist in string, rope or a long, flexible object
- f. a thin round cake cooked in a flat pan
- g. thick liquid made from vegetables or animals, often used in cooking
- h. a salty bread, often made in the shape of a knot

Hanukkah

Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights, is a Jewish celebration. Its date changes from year to year, but it always takes place either in November or December. It lasts for eight days and is celebrated by Jews around the world.

The *menorah*

The most important part of Hanukkah is the lighting of the *menorah* (a special candleholder used in Jewish ceremonies). For Hanukkah, there is a special menorah with nine candles. Eight of the candles represent the eight days of the festival. The ninth candle is used to light the other eight. On the first day, only one candle is lit, on the second day, two candles, and so on, until all the candles are lit on the last day. The candles are lit at sunset and should burn for at least half an hour. They are usually put at a door or a window so that people can see them from outside.

The history behind the festival

The festival celebrates when a group of Jews won back a temple from the Greeks in the second century BC. They made a new *menorah* to replace the one that had been broken. But when they went to light it, they could only find one small bowl of the special oil they needed. There was only enough oil to last one night but they knew it would take them eight days to prepare more. They lit the lamps with the oil on that first night, thinking it would burn for just one night. But the oil lasted for another seven nights and this event gave birth to Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights.

Special Hanukkah food

Oil is an important part of the Hanukkah celebrations and all kinds of food made with oil are eaten on the eight days. In central and eastern Europe they make *latke*, fried potato pancakes, that they eat with apple sauce or sour cream. The favourite treat in Israel is *sufganiyot* (doughnuts filled with strawberry jam). Other popular festival foods include apple cakes and pretzels (bread made in the shape of a knot).

Celebrating with family and friends

Family and friends are very important during the festival. It's traditional to invite people to your home to have dinner and to play games together. The most traditional game is played with a *dreidel*, a wooden spinning top with four sides. There are four Hebrew letters on the four sides and, depending on which letter your top lands on, you win or lose. The game is usually played with nuts and dried fruit and sweets.

Hanukkah gifts

Lots of families give presents during the festival, especially to children. These are often games that the whole family can play together or books and other small gifts. It is also a tradition to give money to children (Hanukkah *gelt*) and to encourage them to donate some of their money to good causes.

Tasks

Task 1

Match the descriptions to the words.

Words

- a *dreidel*
- *latke*
- *sufganiyot*
- Hanukkah *gelt*
- a *menorah*

Descriptions

- fried pancakes made with potatoes
- doughnuts filled with jam
- a candleholder for nine candles
- a wooden toy that is used to play a traditional game
- money that is given to children during the festival

Task 2

Complete the sentences with the words.

get

lasts

light

play

put

with

- The festival of lights eight days.
- On the first day they only one candle.
- The candles are often near a window so people can see them.
- Children sometimes gifts of games, books or money.
- The traditional foods are often made oil.
- Families get together to eat dinner and games.

Discussion

Is there a similar festival in your country or culture?

Answers

Preparation task

1. d
2. g
3. b
4. e
5. a
6. h
7. c
8. f

Task 1

1. d
2. a
3. b
4. e
5. c

Task 2

1. lasts
2. light
3. put
4. get
5. with
6. play