

Hanukkah, the Holiday of Lights – the festival celebrating the freedom of religion ב"ה

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On top of the **Hanukkiyah**, the 9-branched Hanukkah candlestick, made by Jerusalem pupils, it says:
Jerusalem the light of the world

The Jewish Holiday Hanukkah (Holiday of Lights) begins this year on December 16th, 2014 in the evening. The Hanukkah Holiday is not only a Jewish Holiday but also a **universal celebration** of the freedom of religion. All men should be able to pursue his religious belief. This matters to all people everywhere. The Jewish people starts celebrating this holiday by publicly lighting the first candle of the Hanukkiyah, the 9-arms candlestick. In many cities worldwide public ceremonies of the candle lighting take place. Jews and non-Jews join together in these ceremonies¹.

US Presidents George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Harry S. Truman. UK PM T. Tony Blair



US President H.S. Truman, Israel PM D. Ben Gurion and A. Eban (then Israel's Ambassador to the USA and to the UN) with a Chanukkiyah.

¹ For example: On Dec. 30th, 2005 a public ceremony of interreligious get together took place on the central Palace Square, Schloss Platz, in Stuttgart, the capital city of the German federal state Baden Württemberg. On this occasion, the Prime Minister Mr. Guenther Oettinger and the mayor of Stuttgart Dr. Wolfgang Schuster joined Rabbi Shneur Trebnik in lighting the Hanukkah candles on a 6-meter high Hanukkiyah. The City fire fighters lifted them with a professional hydraulic stage high to reach the candles. Mr. Ari Lipinski MBA, director of the Jewish community of the state of Württemberg (IRGW) at that time opened the event ceremony elaborating on the universal spirit of the freedom of religion as a common denominator of all people. He referred to the fact that at the same time worldwide similar public candle lighting ceremonies take place. Mrs. Barbara Traub M.A. warmly thanked PM G. Oettinger and Mayor Dr. W. Schuster and explicitly the big audience on the central public place who joined the first common and public interreligious ceremony of lighting the Hanukkah candles commemorating the Jewish struggle for religious freedom. This ceremony takes place since then every year.

The following photos are derived from the Website www.alemanniajudaica.de/chanukka_stuttgart_2005.htm . My thanks to the Denkendorfer Kreis.



From left to right: left photo: director [Ari Lipinski](#), centre photo: Rabbi Shneur Trebnik with PM Guenther Oettinger. Right photo: f.l.t.r.: [Ari Lipinski](#), IRGW-Cantor Arie Mozes, IRGW-Speaker Mrs. Barbara Traub MA, MP of German federate state BW G. Oettinger, Stuttgart Mayor Dr. W. Schuster.



Photo f. l. t. r.: A. Lipinski, Cantor Arie Mozes, IRGW Board-speaker Barbara Traub, PM G. Oettinger and Stuttgart Mayor Dr. W. Schuster. Event: public Hanukkah candle lighting, Stuttgart, Schloßplatz on Dec. 30th, 2005

In the following article, the background and the meaning of terms relating to the Hanukkah Holiday will be explained. For example: Hanukkah חנוכה, Hanukkiah חנוכיה, Menorah מנורה, Maccabees מכבים, Hasmoneans

חשמונאים, the Hanukkah miracle חנוכה נס, the oil קד השמן טגן, Sewiwon (dreidel) סביבון, Sufgania (donut) סופגניה, Leviva (potato pancakes) לביבה, the “Maoz Zur” מעוז צור prayer song, etc. .

The history of Hanukkah: After the Macedonian – Greek dynasty of the Seleucids had conquered Judea (Palaestina) in the year 200 b.c., the new rulers strived to increase their influence. In the year 167 b. C. the Hasmonean Revolt (מרד החשמונאים) started. It is also known as the Maccabee Revolt. The Jews resisted the Greeks because keeping the freedom of religion was at stake, since this liberty was cancelled by the Greek law. For the people of Israel religion is closely interwoven with the national identity.

The Hanukkah Holiday of Lights is not a holiday based on Torah (the books of Moses) commandments. The instructions how to conduct the holiday and how to proceed with it came after the event. The Maccabean Revolt which started in 167 b. C. is historically well documented and archaeologically well known. One central source for the historical information about the events of the Hasmonean upheaval are the books of the Maccabees (1 and 2). They were written originally in Hebrew in the land of Israel (in Judea) obviously shortly after the events had occurred. The books were translated later into Greek. Most translations of these books relay on the Greek version. The books of the Maccabees, though considered very valuable, are not included in the 24 books of the Jewish Bible (Old Testament). They belong to the books called “HaSefarim Ha Chizoniyim” הספרים החיצוניים, the “External Books”. The various Christian Churches have different approaches to the theological status of the Apocrypha. So, some Bible translation versions do include the books of Maccabees, whereas some other versions may not list them within the Bible book. Even though the term Apocrypha is defined in different ways, the books of the Maccabees are considered important across lines of denominations.

In order to describe the multiple aspects of the Hanukkah Holiday I offer the following structure:

- 1. Hanukkah the Festival of Lights, explanation of the name.**
- 2. The historical background of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights.**
- 3. Special characteristics and prayers of the Hanukkah holiday.**
- 4. Commandments and customs relating to the Hanukkah holiday:**
 - 4.1 Lighting candles with the Hanukkiah, the Hanukkah candlestick.**
 - 4.2 Prayers (Maoz Zur), songs and Torah readings for Hanukkah.**
 - 4.3 Traditional food (such as sufganiot and levivot) during the Hanukkah time.**
 - 4.4 Further traditions like the Dreidel game (Sewiwon)**
- 5. Glossary for further terminology:**
 - 5.1 About the Hasmonean family**

1. Hanukkah the Festival of Lights, explanation of the name.

The Jewish Holiday of Lights is called in Hebrew with the biblical word Hanukkah. Hanukkah was in the Torah¹ (the 5 books of Moses) the inauguration of the altar which served for offering the sacrifices in the Tabernacle during the desert time (and later in the Jerusalem Temple). As a reference, one can read in Leviticus (Vayikra), Chapter 7, Verses 37-38. Further biblical references we find under: Ezekiel, Ch. 43, v. 26-27, Ezra, Ch. 6, V. 16, 2. Chronical, ch.7, v. 5. In 1. Maccabee Book, Ch. 4, v. 42-46. The inauguration of the new altar of the Temple is explicitly mentioned. In first Maccabee Book, Ch. 4, v. 51, v. 54 it says: "and they inaugurated the altar" ... "And they celebrated the inauguration of the altar 8 days". Even more detailed one can read 1. Maccabee Book, Ch. 4, v. 52-59.⁵² On the twenty-fifth of the ninth month, Chislev, in the year 148 they rose at dawn⁵³ and offered a lawful sacrifice on the new altar of burnt offering which they had made.⁵⁴ The altar was dedicated, to the sound of hymns, zithers, lyres and cymbals, at the same time of year and on the same day on which the gentiles had originally profaned it.⁵⁵ The whole people fell prostrate in adoration and then praised Heaven who had granted them success.⁵⁶ For eight days they celebrated the dedication of the altar, joyfully offering burnt offerings, communion and thanksgiving sacrifices.⁵⁷ They ornamented the front of the Temple with crowns and bosses of gold, renovated the gates and storerooms, providing the latter with doors.⁵⁸ There was no end to the rejoicing among the people, since the disgrace inflicted by the gentiles had been effaced.⁵⁹ Judas, with his brothers and the whole assembly of Israel, made it a law that the days of the dedication of the altar should be celebrated yearly at the proper season, for eight days beginning on the twenty-fifth of the month of Chislev, with rejoicing and gladness.

¹ The word "Torah" means in Hebrew „teaching“ and / or guidance and instruction.



An Israeli stamp for Hanukkah, with the state of Israel Emblem, the Menorah, the 7-branched Temple-Candlestick with 2 Olive branches, the symbol of peace.

From the text of the Maccabean Books the regulations were derived, according to which the Hanukkah Holiday of Lights starts on the 25th day of the 3rd month, called Chislev. Further instructions of how to proceed with the holiday were formulated in detail by the Rabbis in the era which ended after the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem (in the year 70 by Titus). The regulations concerning Hanukkah are discussed in six different treatises of the Mishna. The Mishna is the written summary of the most important orally learned and collected discussions and judgements of the leading Rabbis until the year 200. At that time Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, president of the Sanhedrin concluded the binding final collection of the commentaries and decisions named the Mishna. Actually, Mishna means in

Hebrew the repetitive learning. According to the tradition the decisions expressed in the Mishna were in essence forwarded from Moses to Joshua who forwarded them to the elders who later on transferred this knowledge to the Rabbis. It is important to understand that the Jewish concept recognizes the oral law called the Mishna as binding as the written Torah. After the year 200 the Rabbis continued to study and to discuss the Mishna commentaries and decisions until the middle Ages. The formal collection of these further studies is collected in the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. (Talmud means the study.) In Aramaic, originally the Rabbis distinguished between the Mishna and the Talmud by calling the latter Gemara. Gemara means in Aramaic the final part following a first one. Nowadays most people call also the Jerusalem Talmud as Gemara. In addition to Talmud discussions und decisions specially regarded decisions concerning the Hanukkah Holidays were formulated by leading Rabbis like the **Rambam (Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon, Maimonides** 1135 – 1204) in his famous book “Mishne Torah”. Also, the leading Rabbi Joseph Caro (1488 – 1575) outlined in his highly respected book “Shulchan Aruch” the binding guidelines for the Hanukkah Holidays.



The most well-known custom concerning Hanukkah is the tradition of celebrating Hanukkah for 8 days. Let us see the way it is done and the background for this: According to the story of the Creation in the first chapter of the book of Genesis a day started in the evening before. (We read: “Evening came and morning came”). Therefor Jewish holidays begin in the evening before the holiday. So, the Hanukkah Holiday celebration begins in the evening before the first day by lighting the first candle in the special Hanukkah 9 branched candlestick called the “**Hanukkiah**”. For 8 days, this evening ceremony takes place. Each evening one more candle is lit. This way the Hanukkah Holiday is concluded in the 8th day, after 8 candles were lit in the evening before. One may ask, why the Hanukkiah has 9 arms for 9 candles, whereas the celebration takes place only for 8 days. And more basically one may ask, why the Holiday should last for 8 days. First, we reply relating to the technical description of the Hanukkiah. Since the Holiday takes place for 8 days therefore 8 candles are considered holy. Each of the 8 candles is lit by one ‘serving candle’ which is called the Shamash שמש (the servant). As a result, one needs one more arm on the Hanukkiah (candlestick) in order to put the Shamash-candle. Therefore, the Hanukkah candle tree, the Chanukkiah, is 9 branched.

One may mention at this point that because the Hanukkah candles serve a holy purpose their light should not serve for practical illumination. The light of the Hanukkah candles should be seen but should not be degraded to serve an additional purpose. The light of the Hanukkah candles is a direct reminder of the light of the 7 branched Menorah of the Temple.

The Torah forbids to lit fire during the Shabbat. Therefore, the Hanukkah candles are lit on a Friday afternoon shortly before the two Shabbat candles are lit. Consequently, the Hanukkah candles are lit on a Saturday evening only after the Shabbat officially ended. Since the Hanukkah Holiday is not a command from the Torah, the Hanukkah days are ordinary working days. Even the lighting of the Hanukkah candles is not a commandment from the Torah, the instruction by the priests of the family of the Maccabees to do it is perceived as binding as a commandment from God. Only in Israel schools take an 8-day vacation. But all shops and businesses are open.

Now we reach the core concept and reasoning for having the Hanukkah Holiday. The Jewish revolt, which was initiated by the Hasmonean family of Matiyahu and his 5 sons, culminated in 168 b. C. with Yehudah (Judah) haMaccabee liberating Jerusalem from the Greek troupes.

The Hanukkah Miracle of the oil jug:



When Judah the Maccabee liberated Jerusalem from the Greek conquest in 164 b.c. he, of course, devoted special attention to the cleaning of the Jewish Temple on the Mount Moriah. This had to be done comprehensively because the Greeks intentionally, massively desecrated the Temple. One of the central symbols standing in the Temple was the seven-branch candle tree called the Menorah. Since God is eternal, the light in the Menorah in the Temple should not cease to illuminate. Light is obviously the very best expression mankind knows, with which the thought of eternity can be expressed. We practically do not know anything in the universe which is older than light, and can obviously last as long as we can think of. Therefore the Menorah light was of crucial religious importance. The Greeks understood this importance. Therefore they deliberately destroyed all the oil jugs which were carefully stored in the Temple area.

Of course, at that time the holy Temple-Menorah was not “fuelled by oil from Saudi Arabia” :-). Since the time of Noah, the olive tree became the symbol for peace and the covenant between God and his creation. This is the reason why the holy light in the holy Temple-Menorah had to be made from olives. In order to comply with the strict kosher regulations concerning the Temple activities there was a clear procedure of how to manufacture the kosher olive oil to be used in the Temple-Menorah. This procedure takes 8 days. **The miracle of Hanukkah** was, that the troops of Judah Maccabee found in the Temple only one single little olive oil jug. Normally such a little jug would suffice for only 24 hours (1 day) of the Menorah light. It meant, that one day after the re-inauguration the Menorah light would burn out. It would cause grief and sadness. Miraculously the little oil jug fuelled the Temple-Menorah light for 8 days. So, there was enough time to produce properly the kosher olive oil for the Temple-Menorah. There was no interruption of the Temple light.

This miracle illustrates higher help the Jews received in reward for their relentless effort to fulfil the Thora commandments.

Lighting the Temple-Menorah light in Jerusalem became therefore a universal symbol for religious enlightenment and for the freedom of religion.

A historical background for the Hanukkah Festival of Lights

In the second century b.c. the land of Israel with its Jewish population was under the rule of Greek Hellenistic kings, who had their center in Syria. The Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, which was built by the Jewish King Solomon, the son of King David, in 960 b.c. was destroyed first by King Nebuchadnezzar II (634 b.c. – 562 b.c.). Nebuchadnezzar not only conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Jewish Temple, but also expelled the Jewish King Tzidkiyahu (who ruled 596 b.c. – 586 b.c.), the son of King Joshiyahu, along with ca. 10,000 people who were the elite of the country. That was the beginning of the historically important Babylonian Exile of the Jewish people. Later on, the Babylonians expelled also masses of the Jewish middleclass to Babylon. After the Babylonian empire was taken over by the Persian King Cyrus (590 b.c. – 530 b.c.) things changed for the Jews. King Cyrus, who was well known for his religious tolerance, not only allowed the Jews 40 years after their expulsion from Jerusalem and Judea to return, but also to rebuild their Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

More than 42,000 came with Zerubavel (Zerubbabel) sometime between 538-520 b.c.. The Temple was thoroughly cleaned, reconstructed and re-inaugurated in the year of 516 b.c.. (One may read about it in the for example in the Bible books of Ezra and Hagai) In the second century b.c. the Greek king Antiochus IV (215 – 164 b.c., known as Epiphanes) came to power in Syria. He ruled from 175 to 164 b.c.. The area of religious freedom and tolerance which the Jews enjoyed in Judea came to an end. King Antiochus IV was not satisfied just by ruling and squeezing the taxes. He was ambitious to force

all nations of his empire to accept the Greek Gods and to give up their own religions. He enforced cruelly his standardisation of the Greek religion by law since 168 b.c.. When he heard that the Jews in Judea paid their taxes but would not obey the laws enforcing giving up their religion he sent a few armies in order to achieve his goal. He collected expert information about the strange Jewish religion which the Jews were not ready to give up. He found out that reading and learning the Thora, keeping the Shabbat Holiday and keeping the kosher food regulations were extremely important to the Jews. Mean as he was, he then released laws forbidding explicitly these Jewish activities.

He hoped to break the Jewish spirit. He sent new armies reinforcing the first ones who failed to make the Jews give up their faith in their god, for whom, strangely enough, they did not even have any nice sculpture... His troops conquered Jerusalem and desecrated the Temple. His troops came to Jewish towns and villages and publicly forced Jewish citizens to eat pork since the Greeks knew that it meant for the Jews a big sin.

When the Greek troops came to the little village Modiin in the hills west of Jerusalem they followed the same procedure of provocation. They picked one Jew out of the crowd and threatened to kill him, if he would not eat pork in front of all people gathered in the central place of town.



When this Jew was about to obey the Greeks, the Jewish priest Matityahu went zealously up the stage and killed him. Yehuda (Judah) the son of Matityahu then called the famous quote from the Thora (Exodus, chap. 15, Vers 11) “Mi kamocho ba Elim, Adonai” (“Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the Gods”). He is said to have also called “Mi laAdonai, elai” (Who is on God`s side, join me). The Jewish tradition tells that this action practically ignited the Jewish national revolt against the Greeks. Since the Jewish population all over the land of Israel suffered from the cruel provocations and the religious subjugation of the Hellenistic invaders from Syria it required only this spark to set the nation on fire. People eagerly and enthusiastically joined the Jewish resistance forces under the leadership of the Priest family of Matityahu and his five sons.

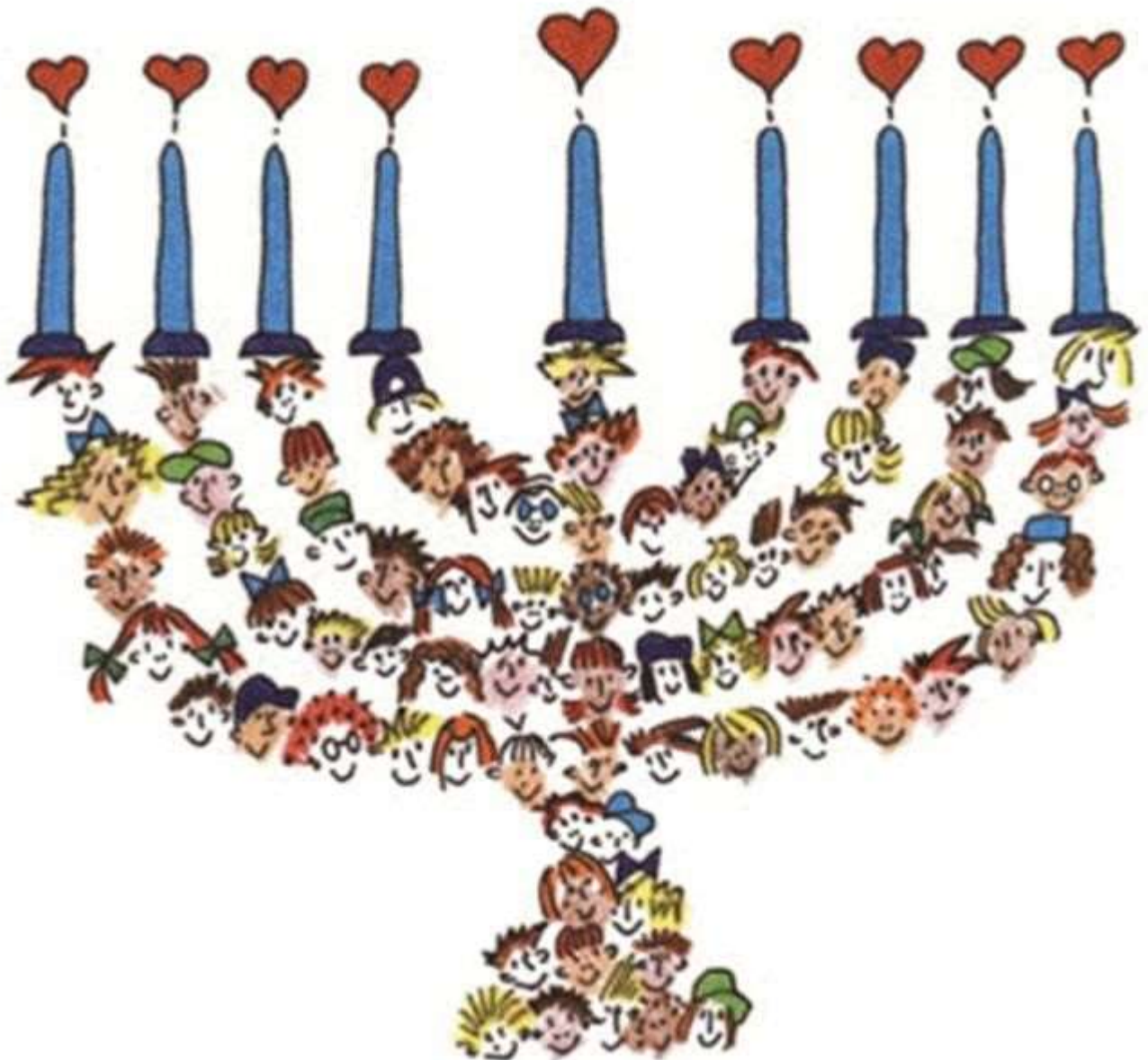
Judah (Yehuda) son of Matityahu soon developed to a charismatic and highly creative military leader. He commanded the Jewish revolt troops. His motivated troops called him Judah Ha Maccabee. At first they derived the word Maccabee from the initials of his biblical sentence (**Mi kamocho ba Elim, Adonai**). The Hebrew word for the LORD begins with the Hebrew letter Jud. Therefore the spelling of the initials makes the word Maccabee. In English, it became customary to write Maccabee with double “e” at the end, in order to pronounce the proper sound. The Maccabean troops of the Hasmonean Family found out during the battles that Judah had an extraordinary forceful blow with his arm and sword. They picked the Hebrew word **מַקֵּבֶת** “Makevet” for an ‘impact hammer’. From the word “Makevet” they also called Judah the Maccabee, meaning ‘Judah the impact hammer’. For the sound of the English letter “K” there are two Hebrew letters, Kof and Kaf, which fit the word Maccabee. With “Kaf” the word refers to the Thora verse. With “Kof” the word Maccabee refers to the hammer.

Judah Maccabee developed innovative Guerrilla combat tactics. He so succeeded to beat a number of very experienced Greek generals, for example in the valley of Bet Choron and Emaus. In the battle of Emaus Judah Maccabee miraculously managed to beat with only 6.000 men on his side the professional army of 40.000 armoured soldiers and ca. 7.000 riders of the cavallerie. This catapulted Judah the Maccabee to the status of a national hero of strategic competence.

Consistently with the original goal of re-establishing religious freedom for the Jewish people, Judah Maccabee focused on liberating Jerusalem, securing the roads to Jerusalem and cleaning the Jewish Temple from the Greek idols and all the remains from the desecrating actions of the Greeks on the Temple Mount.

Then occurred the miracle of the jug of the olive oil, which sufficed for 8 days even thou the little jug actually could provide only for one day. Since then, now for 2.178 years the Jews start on the 25th of the month of Kislev to lit the first Hanukkah Lights, and adding one more light each evening. (Some use olive oil with wicks, some use candles.) This is done for 8 days, as described above.

Hanukkah
expresses
since over 2000 years the universal values of
Liberty and Religious Freedom



2. Chanukka-Bräuche:

- **Chanukka-Kerzen Zünden:** wie oben beschrieben, zündet man am ChanukkaLeuchter 8 Tage lang jeweils eine Kerze mehr. Viele pflegen, die erste Kerze an der rechten Seite des Chanukka-Leuchters zu zünden. Auf diese Weise mehren sich täglich die gezündeten Kerzen von rechts nach links entsprechend der hebräischen Schreibrichtung.

Am ersten Abend werden vor dem Zünden der Chanukka-Kerzen an der Chanukkia drei kurze Gebetverse ausgesprochen. Im ersten Gebetsvers heißt es: Segnend sei der Ewige, unser Gott, König der Welt, der uns durch seine Gebote geheiligt hat, und geboten hat, die Chanukka-Kerzen zu zünden.² Im zweiten Vers heißt es: Segnend sei der Ewige, unser Gott, der unseren Vätern Wunder bescherte, an jenen Tagen, zu dieser Zeit. Der dritte Vers wird nur am ersten Abend bei der Zündung der ersten Chanukka-Kerze gesprochen. Dieser Satz wird jeweils dann gesprochen, wenn ein Anfang einer anderen Festlichkeit stattfindet. Der Vers lautet: Segnend sei der Ewige, unser Gott, König der Welt, der uns bis jetzt belebte und erhalten hat, und uns ermöglichte, bis zu diesem Zeitpunkt zu gelangen. Am Ende von jedem Vers sagt der Vater der Familie bzw. der jeweilige Zünder der Kerzen, gemeinsam mit den Anwesenden, Amen. Viele Familien haben unterschiedliche Traditionen, die sie aus ihren Herkunftsländern bzw. aus den Herkunftsländern ihrer Vorfahren mitgebracht haben. U.a. lassen viele Familien, ihre Kinder Kerzen an eigene Chanukkiot (hebr. Pluralform von Chanukkia) zünden. Je mehr



Licht an dem Abend leuchtet, umso besser. Anschließend singt man Chanukka-Lieder, vor allem das **Maoz Zur מעוז צור** Lobund-Preis-Gebet. Dabei bedankt man sich dafür, dass Gott die Festung der Erlösung sei. Er hat den Wiederaufbau des Gebetshauses ermöglicht. Ihm gebührt Lob.

- Um die Erinnerung an das Wunder vom Öl-Kännchen kulinarisch zu unterstreichen, ist es eine beliebte Tradition, zu Chanukka die in Öl zubereiteten **Sufganijot** סופגניות (singular: sufganija) zu essen. Das hebräische Wort bedeutet, dass das Gebäck reichlich Öl „aufgesaugt“ hat. Beliebt ist natürlich die Sufganijot auch mit Marmelade, Schokolade oder weitere süße Elemente zu füllen. Kalorienarm und besonders diätetisch kann es kaum werden...

Foto: Ben Ari. Copyrights: Ari Lipinski.

Ebenso zum Thema geeignet sind **Lewiwot**, die sogenannten Latkes (Kartoffelpuffer). Da die Lewiwot in Öl gebraten werden, erfüllen sie den Sinn. Das hebräische Wort Lewiwot (Lewiwa in singular) kommt von Lew (Herz).

Das Wort **Chanukka חנוכה** bedeutet **eine Einweihung**. Als Fest-Bezeichnung lässt sich der Name Chanukka auch anders erklären: auf Hebräisch kann das Wort in zwei Worte geteilt werden, so dass es Chanu ko **חנו כה** lautet. Es bedeutet: So bzw. dort lagerten sie. Also: nach der Befreiung Jerusalems lagerten sie. Hinzu kommt, dass der Zahlenwert von כה = 25 ist. Das ist das Datum 25.

² Obwohl das Zünden der Chanukka-Kerzen nicht in der Thora vorgeschrieben wurde, sieht man die Anweisung durch die Priesterfamilie der Makkabäer als eine göttliche Vorschrift an.

Im Monat Kislew. Und die Summe der Ziffer von 25 = 2+5 = 7 . Dies erinnert an den 7-armigen Leuchter, den man am 25. Kislew einweihte.

- **Chanukia** חנוכיה (Plural: Chanukijot): Der 9-armige Chanukka-Leuchter erinnert an das Wunder des kleinen Ölkännchens, das 8 Tage lang für das Licht im Tempel ausreichte, bis man neues Öl aus Oliven zubereiten konnte. So ist das heilige Licht im Tempel nicht nach der Einweihung erloschen.



Der Sewiwon (Dreidel): סביבון Das typische **Chanukka-Spielzeug**. Es stehen auf dem Sewiwon die ersten hebräischen Buchstaben der Worte: **נס גדול היה פה** „**Ein Großes Wunder fand Hier statt.**“ (Im Ausland steht „dort“ anstatt „hier“.) Wer den Sewiwon durch die Drehung auf den Buchstaben G (für Groß bzw. Gadol auf Hebräisch) nach oben bringt, gewinnt das Spiel. Bekanntlich kann man den Dreidel sowohl auf die untere Spitze als auch umgekehrt auf den dünnen Griff drehen lassen.

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