

# The Holiday of Hanukkah

Hanukkah is one of the most popular and fun Jewish holidays.

Where does the menorah, one of the holiday's most famous symbols, come from?

## 1 When do we celebrate Hanukkah?

Hanukkah, or in Hebrew חנוכה, is celebrated in two Hebrew months, from 25 Kislev - 2 Tevet | כ"ה כסלו - ב' טבת



What symbol would you choose for the Jewish People?

## 2 Why do we celebrate Hanukkah?

A long time ago, in the second century BCE, Israel—called Judea back then—was ruled by a Greek-Syrian king named Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He didn't want Jews to celebrate their holidays or perform their commandments, mitzvot.

He also turned the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem into a place for Greek worship.

A small group of Jewish fighters—the Maccabees, led by Judah Maccabee—rose up to defend their faith. After many tough battles, they won back Jerusalem and the Temple! On 25 Kislev, 164 BCE, the Maccabees had cleaned and repaired the Temple and wanted to use it once again. The Menorah (מְנוֹרָה)—a golden lamp with seven branches—was an important part of Temple life. **It was supposed to be lit every evening with specially prepared, pure olive oil, and its light showed that the Temple was “alive” again and that worship had restarted.**

The Maccabees found just one small, sealed jar of pure oil—enough for a single day—to fuel the Menorah. Miraculously, the light kept burning for eight days until new pure oil could be prepared. Today we remember this by lighting a hanukkiyah, חנוכיה, with eight branches for eight nights. That's right—the hanukkiyah is a little different from the menorah that was lit in the Temple!

## A Famous Symbol of Judaism



### The Menorah on the Coin of the Hasmonean Mattathias

Antigonos, 37 BCE | Photo by Ardon Bar-Hama

The menorah has become one of the most famous signs of the Jewish people. It was used long before the Star of David as a symbol of the Jewish people in and outside of Israel.



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## The Maccabees Defeat the Seleucid Greeks



**Weapons, an arrowhead, and a sling bullet with the Greek word for "victory" inscribed on it** | Israel Antiquities Authority

Weapons of the Seleucid Greeks like the ones shown here have been found in Israel in the locations of battles between the Seleucid Greeks and the Maccabees. What's funny is that this bullet has the Greek word for victory, Nikh (Nike) on it, but in the end the Maccabees were victorious!



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## A Symbol of Judaism All Over the World



**The Arch of Titus, Rome** | Photo by Ardon Bar-Hama

After the miracles of Hanukkah, the Menorah remained a symbol of the Jewish Temple and the Jewish People. It was recognized by nations all over the world as a symbol of Judaism, and here you can see it on a Roman artwork from 71 CE. This artwork, the Arch of Titus, shows Romans stealing Temple objects such as the Menorah when they destroyed the Jewish Temple many years after the Hanukkah story took place.

## A Symbol of Judaism Until Today



**Mold-made oil lamps out of clay with seven branched menorah, 4th-5th Centuries CE.**

Tower of David Museum/Photo AnaRina Kreisman

In Israel, even once the Temple was destroyed, Jews continued to use the Menorah as a symbol, especially on oil lamps such as these.



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Today the symbol of the State of Israel is the Temple Menorah with two olive branches on each side and the word Israel in Hebrew.



For more information on Hanukkah, go to <https://www.israelintheirland.com/articles/hanukkah>, and scan here to find more artifacts from the Israel in Their Land website.

