



EIGHT WINTER NIGHTS

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Short poems describe food, fun, traditions and togetherness associated with Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights.

The holiday of *Hanukkah** (from a Hebrew word meaning dedication) is actually a minor Jewish festival that dates back to 165 B.C.E. In rural Modi'in a Jewish priest rallied a small army to resist the Greeks, who had forbidden the practice of Judaism. The Jewish rebels lived in hiding in the Judean hills. When Mattathias, their leader, died his son Judah assumed leadership of the small army; because of his strength he was known as Judah Maccabee, from the Hebrew word *macav* (hammer). *Hanukkah* celebrates reinstatement of Jewish worship in Jerusalem and the victory of right over might and light over darkness.

LIGHTING CANDLES

An important *Hanukkah* tradition is lighting a nine-branched menorah, or the *hanukkiah*. On the first night of *Hanukkah*, one candle is lit from a helper candle, the *shammes*. An additional candle is added each night. Candles are placed in the *hanukkiah* from right to left, but are lit from left to right.

In many families each child has his/her own *hanukkiah*. These can be ones your family received as gifts or created by your children. For young children, consider a paper or clay version with separate brightly-colored flames that can be added each evening. A great alterna-

tive is made by creating a painting or hand-tracing where eight little fingers form the *hanukkiah* and a thumbprint creates the *shammes*.

Eight Winter Nights focuses on the family, whether lighting candles, telling stories, dancing, or playing games together. Presents are part of the celebration, but they aren't given "top billing." Though *Hanukkah* falls in close proximity to Christmas, Jewish children can learn from an early age that while our holidays may include receiving presents, the greatest gift is sharing life with family and friends and using what we've been given to help others.

CELEBRATING FREEDOM AND LIGHT

Hanukkah reminds us to embrace our own freedom and to recognize freedom's importance for all people everywhere. On the shortest, darkest days of the year, the lights of the *hanukkiah* help us see the blessings in our lives. With the singing and laughter that are part of this holiday, it's a good time to remember to "make a joyful noise" in thanks for all we've been given.

* The transliterated word *Hanukkah* can be spelled in many different ways—including *Chanukah*, *Channukah*, *Chanuka*, etc. Pj