

Jewish ERGs Chanukah

What is Chanukah?

Chanukah is the Jewish festival of lights! The holiday lasts 8-days and is a time to be thankful and spread light, focusing on celebrations and fun community activities. The word “Chanukah” (Hebrew: חֲנֻכָּה) itself means “dedication”. It’s called this to commemorate the historic re-dedication of the Jewish Temple (find out more below) and symbolize the Jewish people’s continuity.

Chanukah is not explicitly listed within the Torah because it commemorates an event that happened in the second century BCE:

The land of Israel had been taken by the Seleucids (Syrian-Greeks) and the temple in Jerusalem had been ransacked. (The temple was the centre of Jewish life at the time, and still is today!) A small band of fighters, called the Maccabees, fought the Seleucids, and reclaimed the land and the temple.

One of the key symbols of the temple was the Ner Tamid – (“eternal light” – a candelabra made of oil lamps) that was kept burning at all times. The ransacking had extinguished this light, and Judah Maccabee, the leader of the Maccabees and high priest at the time, wanted to relight it to signify the return of the Jews to the land.

The Jews could only find enough oil to light it for one day. Judah lit the candelabra, and sent his sons to search for more oil. The search lasted 8 days. It’s said that a miracle occurred – the oil that was just enough for one day carried on burning for all 8, until they found more oil!

When is Hannukah?

Hannukah starts on the 25th day of the month Kislev of the Hebrew Calendar. In 2025, Chanukah starts on the evening of December 14th and lasts until December 22nd.

How is Hanuka celebrated?

We light candles for 8 nights on a special candelabra modelled on the ‘Ner Tamid’ (Eternal light) which sat in the temple. The Candelabra is called a ‘Chanukiah’ or ‘Menorah’. Along with lighting the candles, we sing songs, play games with a spinning top, called a dreidel, and eat oily foods, to remind us of the oil used in the temple. Latkes (Deep fried potato patties) and Sufganiot (Doughnuts) are firm favourites!



Hanuka is also often a time where kids (and adults) get presents! Many people like to give small presents on each night, rather than one big one. Families get together, and synagogues run events that are often like mini-funfairs.

It’s also a time to remember those less fortunate. Giving charity is a big part of the celebrations. This tradition of giving money has also fed into the children being given “chanukah gelt”, usually foil covered chocolate pennies!

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The holiday is very much a public event, with the instruction to light the chanukah candles in the window at the front of your house, so everyone can see. However, with rising antisemitism around the world, many Jews will unfortunately choose to celebrate in a less overt way.

Will my Jewish colleagues be available over the festival?

Yes! Jewish colleagues can work during the festival.

What greeting can I give my Jewish colleagues?

During channukah, you can say “Chag Sameach” which literally means “Happy Festival”.

Wait! Hold up! How do you spell Chanukah?

You might be thinking “why have I seen Hannukah spelt so many different ways... and how am I supposed to spell it?” ...

Well, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, there are 24 different spellings of Hanuka!

(This is because the word “Chanuka” is a Hebrew word - חנוכה - which doesn’t use the Latin alphabet so can be translated in many different ways!

Where can I learn more?

For more information on Chanukkah, see the links listed below:

- [Wikipedia - Hanukkah](#)
- [What is Hannukah - Chabad](#)
- [A Rugrats Chanukah - Paramount+](#)
- [Adam Sandler - Chanukah Song \(A modern classic!\)](#)

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