Hanukkah, like **ALL** of our Jewish holidays, can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people. And in our day and age, the energy, joy and even angst of this holiday may be greater than with most Jewish holidays. Please know that there is no right way to celebrate it—whether you celebrate Hanukkah, Hanukkah and Christmas, or combine the two. The core message of Hanukkah is that we give expression to who we are honestly and boldly.

This guide is a jumping off point. It is designed to provide you and your family an opportunity to learn about the holiday and explore ways to make the holiday richer and more meaningful for you. It is a springboard that we hope enables you to enjoy traditions you already know and find or create new ones that reflect who you and your family are. And just as families grow and change, we imagine that your own traditions and modes of celebration will change as well. The Hanukkah of your youth will speak to you differently than the Hanukkah you celebrate as an adult. The way you create Hanukkah with young children will change as the children grow older. Do not feel trapped or constrained in doing what you’ve always done. Growth, change and innovation are part of the spirit of Hanukkah as well.

Our ancestors fought for the freedom to give expression to who they were. While we no longer need to fight – we should give expression to who we are – not repeating the past but creating our own authentic voice. Hanukkah is a holiday that values light in a season when the days are short, warm when the nights are cold, hope when there seemed to be only despair. Those are feelings and values that speak across the generations.

Today is our turn to make this holiday one which gives expression to who we are and what we believe. Of course, fun rituals and good food make any holiday even more special.

Our ancestors who fought for religious freedom in their age took a bold stand. In the face of conflict, they stood up for who they were. Today, we need a bold Judaism as well. Thus, there is no need to feel timid as you create your celebrations and traditions for Hanukkah. Just be true to whom you are!

We hope this guide provides you with the resources and inspiration to fashion a meaningful and enriching Hanukkah.

Robert B. Barr, Rabbi and Iah Pillsbury, Rabbinic Intern
Unlike other Jewish holidays, Hanukkah transforms an historical event into a legendary religious celebration. From 168–165 BCE the Jews of Judea were engaged in a war with Ptolomeic Syria that resulted in a recapturing and rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem. Hanukkah marks a pause in a civil war between factions of the Jewish people as well as with foreign invaders. The popular legend of oil lasting for 8 days that should have only lasted one day has no basis in history, but is a Talmudic invention created several centuries after the historical events that relate to Hanukkah. Because of the war, the upcoming holiday of Sukkot that required a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, could not be celebrated in 165 BCE. Because of this, Hanukkah may very well have represented a delayed Sukkot (which also lasts 8 days). The multiple books of Maccabees tell different, conflicting stories about Hanukkah, and it is unclear how exactly we ended up with the holiday we love to this day.

THE DECEMBER DILEMMA

Some folks call the challenge of how to celebrate Hanukkah and/or Christmas the December Dilemma. Hidden in that phrase is the notion that a child’s identity will be determined solely by whether a family celebrates one or another of these winter holidays. But we all know that identity is much more complex than that; there are many elements and moments that come together that make a person who she is. How you choose to celebrate Hanukkah and/or Christmas and/or the blending of the two is just one part of a much larger narrative. Think about what you do throughout the year, what holidays you choose to celebrate and what holidays you don’t celebrate. The clearer you are about your own religious values, the more successful you will be at helping your children develop their religious and cultural identities. And the clearer you can be with your children about your holiday expectations, the more likely your family is to have a fulfilling and enjoyable holiday experience.

Click here for more tools for creating your own traditions.

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1 Most western dates are divided between BC (before Christ) and AD (Ano Domina, or after Christ). Jewish historians tend to use BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) to designate the same periods of time.

2 The Talmud is a collection of rabbinic interpretations on the Mishna (an earlier rabbinic work) written and codified between the 6th Century CE and the 11th Century.

3 Sukkot is a fall harvest holiday that required a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem during ancient times, but is celebrated by building a Sukkah, or temporary fort-like dwelling place in modern times. Sukkot is traditionally celebrated for eight days.

4 Rabbi Jan Katzew
What is the history of the "story" of Hanukkah?

The Israelites were trapped between two large empires with Greek Syria to the North and Ptolemaic Egypt to the South. For a while they managed to play both sides of the political field. In 198 BCE, Judea was conquered by the Syrian King Antiochus the Great. Antiochus the Great did not last long as Emperor, but he was succeeded by his younger brother Antiochus IV who was determined to turn his vast and diverse empire into one nationality with one national religious identity—and so the process of state driven cultural assimilation began!

At first many Israelites enjoyed the new additions to their lives like Greek theater, Greek fashion, and new Greek sports. But as the state sanctioned assimilation became more and more intense, the Jews began to feel more and more restricted and less and less happy about it. Slowly but surely, they were no longer allowed to do the things that made them feel Jewish. And then, after a new high Priest had been appointed in Jerusalem, Antiochus declared himself Epiphanes which means God manifest—as in he claimed to be a living breathing representation of God. This did not sit well with the Jews who believed that no person could be a living incarnation of any god. And so, in 168 BCE, the Jews of Judea put their foot down and refused to stop behaving and looking like Greeks and went to war with Antiochus to preserve their Jewish identities. The Maccabees, who would eventually become the Hasmoneans, lead a military revolt and despite overwhelming odds, somehow managed to defeat the Syrians. During the war, in an attempt to quash Jewish national feelings, the Syrian army desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem, doing their best to make it unfit for Temple worship ever again. But when the Israelites returned to the Temple after beating the Syrians, they refused to accept destruction or defeat, but chose to rebuild and rededicate the Temple instead. Sometimes when really bad things happen we can choose whether to start over from scratch or to try and rebuild what was destroyed.

The Maccabees cleaned up the Temple, rededicated it and went on their merry way. But in time, the rabbis weren’t satisfied, so they created a myth of oil lasting eight days when everyone expected it to last only one day. By creating this myth, the rabbis were able to emphasize God’s miraculous nature as well as the fact that God was on the Maccabees’ side, helping them win all along. And it’s true, it can feel miraculous when something we need lasts much longer than we expect it to. It might not actually BE a miracle, but it can still be pretty exciting and unexpected. It can also feel miraculous when we succeed in a way that we didn’t think was possible, as the

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Maccabees did, but just because something feels miraculous doesn’t mean that a lot of hard human work didn’t go into it first.

**Where does this story come from?**

The legend of Hanukkah does not appear in the Jewish Bible, but can be found in the apocryphal book of Maccabees. This means that the story of Hanukkah was not written down until AFTER the Jewish Bible was codified and the canon “sealed”, but before the same process happened with the Christian Bible.

**Did the Maccabean Revolution of Hanukkah really happen?**

Hanukkah is one of those holidays where it is hard to tell fact from fiction. Archeology and historical research show us that Antiochus the IV was in fact emperor of Ptolemic Syria and was defeated by Israelite rebels, but it is unclear just how resounding a victory that was.

**How did Hanukkah become a holiday?**

It is really unclear how Hanukkah became the holiday that it is today. We don’t know why exactly the rabbis of the Talmud decided to turn the military victory into a religious holiday, but that choice did help Judaism continue to effectively compete against pagan solstice celebrations. It is likely that the pagan tradition of lighting fires to encourage the sun not to die worked its way into the celebration of Hanukkah as the lighting of candles. The evolution and development of a holiday is long and complex. It frequently brings in pre-existing elements or rituals and reinterprets them.

**Has Hanukkah always been an important holiday?**

No. Hanukkah used to be a very minor holiday, and in fact only became as important as it is in the United States, when Christmas became a really important national holiday. Many people credit American department stores like Macys’ for creating both the Christmas and the Hanukkah that we celebrate today.

**Is there a right way to light a Menorah?**

No! In fact there is a debate in the Talmud between two great rabbinic sages and their schools of thought. Rav Hillel argues that one should start out with one light on the first night and then two on the second and so on—so the light of the holiday is always increasing. Rav Shamai however, argues that one should start with all of the candles lit and then decrease a light every night. It is unclear why Rav Shamai argues this, so his rabbinic colleagues provide a variety of explanations—we start with eight lights because it reminds us of the world to come, or eight because it corresponds to the number of bulls sacrificed at the Temple. So feel free to create your own family tradition around how to light your menorah.

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6 *Shabbat* 21b (a tractate of the Talmud)
Did You Know...?

• Hanukkah is the ONLY Jewish holiday that isn’t even hinted about in the Tanakh (The Jewish Bible including the Five Books of Moses, Writings, and Prophets).
• Hanukkah gets its own Book called Maccabees in the Apocrypha\(^7\) Christian Bible.
• American Jews often give gifts as part of their Hanukkah celebrations whereas Israeli Jews tend to give gifts during Passover instead of Hannukah.
• There is more than one way to correctly spell Hanukkah, Hannukah, Channukkah, Chanukah, and many more—because different people transliterate the Hebrew into English differently.

\(^7\) Apocryphal books of scripture are biblical books that never made it into the actual cannon of the Bible. They deal with the same biblical characters, have similar themes, and were written around or before the stories that did make it into the canonized Bible. Catholics, Protestants, and Jews all have different books they consider apocryphal and part of the canon.


Hanukkah Symbols, Terms, and Deliciousness

**Latkes:** Fried potato pancakes that are often eaten with apple sauce and sour cream. It is because latkes are fried in oil that they are associated with Hanukkah.

**Maccabees:** The warrior rebels lead by Judah Maccabee who defeated the Syrians despite their limited numbers, weapons, and resources.

**Dreidel:** Wooden or plastic top that is used to play a game of chance involving chocolate gelt (candy in the shape of coins). See page 18 for the super delicious rules.

**Hanukkiah:** A nine-branched candelabrum invented to commemorate each night of the festival of Hanukkah.

**Menorah:** Technically an eight-branched candelabrum (including one longer branch called the Shamesh or helper branch) used in the 2nd Temple to mark the days of the week. In modern times, what is technically a Hanukkiah (which comes from the word Hanukkah) is usually referred to as a Menorah in most circles. So for purposes of clarity and acknowledging common usages, we have decided to refer to the candelabra we light on Hanukkah as a Menorah throughout the rest of this resource guide.

**Shamesh:** The helper candle that you light first and then use to light the rest of the candles on the Menorah. This is why menorahs often have one candle that is placed higher or separate from the rest.

**Sufganyot:** Fried jelly donuts are a traditional Hanukkah food. In Israel, bakeries sell crazy varieties of jelly donuts during Hanukkah, ranging from the expected strawberry to the outlandish popcorn or pistachio. As with latkes, Sufganyot are fried in oil.
Hanukkah Themes:

**Light:** Each night of Hanukkah we add another candle to the Menorah, creating more and more light in a world that is getting physically darker and more wintry (if you live in the Northern Hemisphere) every day. Both Hanukkah and Christmas are appropriated winter solstice festivals that celebrate the human struggle against darkness and despair and our eventual triumph over it.

**Oil:** One of the miracles of the Legend of Hanukkah is that a small amount of oil burned for eight days instead of for the expected one. In ancient times oil was both a necessity and a sign of wealth and prosperity. Everyone needed oil to light their houses and cook their meals, but how much you had of it made a huge difference.

**Choice:** The Jews of Judea with the Maccabees at their head, chose when enough was enough and they could no longer put up with the restrictions of foreign rule. And then when the Temple was left standing after all the destruction and violence, the Israelites chose to clean up and rededicate—transforming destruction into something else entirely. Even the way we spell Hanukkah is a choice—there is no one right way to do it in English.

**Chance:** When the Israelites decided to rebel against the Syrians, they had to embrace the very real chance that they could lose and lose badly. But the leaders of the Maccabees decided that it was better to take a chance on a better, free-er future, than to simply accept the very painful and suffocating status quo.

**Identity:** The Jews of Judea made the choice to rise up against foreign oppression when they felt their identities had become too restricted—when they could no longer be themselves. Today how we choose to celebrate Hanukkah is reflective of our identities as well.
Discussion Generating Activities:

Sometimes it can feel uncomfortable to start big conversations with our friends and family. Here are a few activities that are designed to help get you started.

1. Building and Destroying Forts: Use a bunch of pillows and sheets to build a fort. Then ask a friend or family member to take as much of the fort down as they can, without destroying the fort itself. Do you both agree at what point the fort is totally destroyed? How do each of you decide that the fort is actually destroyed? Now rebuild the fort. How is the new version different from the fort that was destroyed? How is it still the same? Which fort do you like better? Why?

2. Splatter Paint: Splatter paint is a great way to explore the fine line between destruction and creation while getting messy and having lots of fun.
   ~ Directions: Place a piece of paper or canvas (preferably watercolor paper of something thick) on newspaper or something else that can get paint on it. Now mix either watercolor or tempera or acrylic paint with water until your paint brush is dripping. Now flick away!
   ~ Something to think about: How does randomness become beautiful? At what point does it stop being beautiful and start to be too much? Can you think of anything else that makes your life more beautiful in small doses, but makes things feel chaotic when there is too much of it?

3. Candle Perspective Trick:
   ~ Materials: Jicama or un-ripe banana, almond sliver, olive oil, candle stick holder.
   ~ Directions: Peel and cut the jicama in a candle shape. If you have an apple core-er that will work excellently, but a regular kitchen knife will work fine too. Then soak a sliver of almond (or other oily nut) in olive oil for a few hours or overnight. Cut a groove in the candle shaped piece of fruit and stick the almond in it to act as a wick. Then place the Fruit candle you made into a candle stick holder. (this will make the fruit look more like a regular wax candle) Then light the candle by lighting the almond sliver and show it to someone in your family. After they see it lit, blow the candle out and take a bite. Then ask them what they saw and how you did it. Can your family member figure out the trick?
   ~ Something to think about: There are many times, every day, where we assume we see things, but don’t actually stop to examine what we are REALLY seeing. Our brains like to fill in the blanks between things we don’t understand so we end up leaping to conclusions without even realizing it. What do you assume you know about the other members of your family? Have everyone in your family make a list of assumptions and then compare them. Were the assumptions true? What made you think something was true or not true about your family before you asked?
Discussion Questions

1. What is one luxury in your life that would be the hardest to live without for eight days?
   a. Why would it be hard to live without it? Is there anything you could try to replace it with?

2. What makes you Jewish? Is there an activity that makes you feel especially Jewish?
   a. If you were no longer allowed to do that activity, would you still consider yourself Jewish?

3. How do you know when to walk away from a bad situation and when to try and repair it? What factors into making the decision?

4. What’s the point of giving gifts? How does it feel to receive the perfect gift? What about a gift that you don’t really like? How does gift giving create community? When does it become a detriment to community and intimacy?
Families Celebrating Hanukkah and Christmas (or looking to create their own, new traditions):

While both Hanukkah and Christmas each come from their own distinctive cultural and religious frameworks, they also have a lot in common. Both became popular gift giving holidays in the United States in the 1950’s when big, department stores like Macy’s and Nordstroms began marketing Christmas and Hanukkah as the number one gift giving time of the year.

Both holidays have pagan roots and both holidays celebrate the hope of renewal and the possibility for future success. Historically, both Christianity and Judaism struggled to compete with popular Winter Solstice celebrations. In the darkest, coldest, hungriest part of winter, people needed a ritual to “bring back” the light of the sun and the fertility of the earth.

Even though these holidays have so much in common, choosing which to celebrate or how to celebrate each, can be a tricky and sometimes emotional process. Navigating Hanukkah and Christmas can create tension in a marriage and sometimes between families (ie in-laws). But no matter what anyone might say, THERE ARE NO RIGHT WAYS TO BE JEWISH. There are NO rules to how your family chooses to celebrate Hanukkah or Christmas, but here are some things to think about and help you create the most meaningful traditions possible.

Questions to think about (and remember, there are NO wrong answers):

These are questions designed to be discussed between partners to clarify issues surrounding holiday celebrations. Sometimes we hold onto beliefs and assumptions without even realizing it, much less articulating it to our partners. Taking the time to clarify your thoughts and explore what is meaningful to each of you, can go a long way in helping you as an individual, a couple, and a family determine how you want to celebrate the holidays. The goal here is not to convince each other of the answers to the questions — but rather for each partner to hear the other and understand and learn about their perspective and beliefs. And then with this understanding, you can work together to craft an approach to celebrating the holidays that is authentic to who you are as individuals, as a couple, and as a family.

1. Is a Christmas Tree a religious symbol? Why, or why not?
2. Is a menorah a religious symbol? Why, or why not?
3. Is Santa a religious figure? Why, or why not?

4. Is giving and receiving gifts a religious act? Why, or Why not? Is it important? What is important about it?

5. Is it important to celebrate Hanukkah and Christmas as separate holidays? Why or why not?

7. What parts of Hanukkah or Christmas are you emotionally tied to? Why? How does that manifest in the way you celebrate?

8. When you think of Christmas what image do you see? When you think of Hanukkah, what image do you see?

9. Why celebrate any holiday? What does celebrating holidays add to your family? Are there any downsides to celebrating holidays? If so, what are they?

**Mapping traditions you already celebrate:**

1. What do you love about Christmas? What do you love about Hanukkah? Make a list of all the things that you like about each of them. Then compare your lists. Do they have anything in common?
   - Now compare your list to other people in your family, do you share any favorite traditions or aspects of the holidays? If so, compile a new list of everyone’s favorite traditions and aspects.

2. What do you dislike about Christmas? What do you dislike about Hanukkah? What makes you uncomfortable about the holidays? Make a list of all the things you don’t like and then compare the lists. Do they have anything in common?
   - Now compare your list to other people in your family, do you share any things you don’t like about either holiday? If so, compile a new list of traditions or situations your family would like to avoid in the future.

3. Create a Book of Family Traditions:

   **Materials:** Binder, markers, colored paper, fun things to decorate the binder and pages

   **Directions:** As a family, look at all of the lists everyone has made, and narrow them down into what is most important to your family and make an activity page for each tradition. The less concrete things you love about each holiday such as—I love the emphasis on
goodwill and “the Christmas Spirit”—can also be transformed into a tradition by asking, what activity would help us feel that way? In response to enjoying the “Christmas Spirit” perhaps your family would like to volunteer at a soup kitchen or go caroling at a retirement home… or something entirely different. Perhaps you love that Hanukkah is a time when we are reminded of our core values and the importance of standing up for what we believe in. Then your family might enjoy writing letters to Congress about an important issue, or raising money for charity, or volunteering with the homeless… or something else entirely!

Whatever traditions you decide to celebrate as a family, make a page for your binder, describing the tradition and its goals, and decorate to your hearts content. This book of traditions can grow and change as your family grows and changes, making additions and subtractions as you see fit.
Interacting with Darkness:

Darkness can be scary and overwhelming. It’s hard to see the world clearly in the dark, so it’s easy to make up scary stories in our heads about monsters lurking under the bed or evil people who are out to get us. But the truth is, there is also a lot of beauty and wonder in the dark, just like there is in sunshine. When we embrace the dark of the night and the things that scare us, they become a little bit less scary. Here are a few activities designed to help you and those you love interact with darkness, learn about it, and befriend it.

1. Outside—Go outside with a parent or adult when the sun is starting to set. Just sit on your front steps, or somewhere comfortable and watch all the colors change as the day turns into night. What can you see in the dark that you couldn’t see in the daytime? Does the air feel different? Sound different? Smell different?

2. Inside your house or room—Sit in a room at night with a friend or family member. Then turn off all the lights in the room one by one until it is as dark as possible. Can you still see any light? Close all the curtains, unplug the electronics and see if you can make the room as dark as possible. Then sit down and let yourself experience the darkness.

   a. What does it feel like? How long does it take for your eyes to adjust?

   b. Is the darkness scary? What if you hold your friend or family member’s hand? How is the darkness different when you are with someone and when you are alone?

   c. After you’ve let yourself really feel the darkness, plug in everything you unplugged, one by one, and turn on all the lights, one by one.

      i. Does each light seem brighter now?

      ii. Is the light in your room different now after you spent time in the Dark?
3. At Bedtime: Curl up with all your stuffed animals and have a parent turn off all the lights. Now make up a legend with your stuffed animals about where all the light went and how it will come back.

**Something to think about:** How does making up a story about the dark change how your dark room feels? Do you feel like you have more control over the dark after telling the legend you created?

**Invisible ink:**

**Materials:** Half a lemon, Water, Spoon, Bowl, Cotton swab/bud, White paper, Lamp or other light bulb

**Instructions:**

1. Squeeze some lemon juice into the bowl and add a few drops of water.
2. Mix the water and lemon juice with the spoon.
3. Dip the cotton bud into the mixture and write a message onto the white paper.
4. Wait for the juice to dry so your message becomes completely invisible.
5. When you are ready to read your secret message or show it to someone else, simply heat the paper by holding it close to a light bulb. Be sure to have an adult to help you.

**Something to Think About:** When you wrote your message on the blank piece of paper, it was visible for a while and then disappeared. Could you see the exact moment it disappeared? Once it had disappeared, did the “blank” piece of paper seem different than other blank pieces of paper?

Often times, things we don’t understand feel miraculous until we understand the science behind them. [Sciencekds.co.nz](http://Sciencekds.co.nz) explains what is happening scientifically by saying, “Lemon juice is an organic substance that oxidizes and turns brown when heated. Diluting the lemon juice in water makes it very hard to notice when you apply it to the paper, no one will be aware of its presence until it is heated and the secret message is revealed. Other substances which work in the same way...
include orange juice, honey, milk, onion juice, vinegar and wine. Invisible ink can also be made using chemical reactions or by viewing certain liquids under ultraviolet (UV) light.

activity taken from: http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/experiments/invisibleink.html

Sparking Candy:

Materials: dark room, wintergreen life saver

Directions: Stand in a dark room with a friend and watch each other bite into wintergreen lifesavers. (or use pliers to break the candy if you’re not supposed to bite hard candy)

Something to think about: In another age some may think that the sparking candy was magic or a miracle. But we know because of science that the light is a natural consequence of the candy breaking. What other things that our ancestors didn’t understand and thought were miracles, do we now understand today? To learn why the candy sparks check out: http://www.discoverykids.com/activities/light-up-lifesavers/

Glow in the Dark Bath

Materials: glow sticks (8-10 total for a super glowy bath, found at most dollar stores), bath tub and hot water, bubble bath soap if you enjoy bubbles

Directions: Run a bubble bath or regular bath as you normally would. Then turn off the lights, crack the glow sticks (so they start glowing, but not so any of the liquid comes out), and put them in the bath with you.

Things to think about: How does the water look different in the dark? Does your bath feel different because it looks so different to what it usually looks like?

Does your body feel different in a glowy bath? Does it look different?

If you had no idea that glow sticks were a scientific invention, would you think this bath was miraculous? Create a legend about the miraculous glowing bath and how the glow stick got its glow and share it with a family member, friend, or animal that you love.
Bottled Miracles/Miraculous Menorahs

Materials: 8 or 9 mason jars (use eight or nine jars if you want to make a whole menorah, but just one jar is all you need to enjoy the fun), nine glow sticks (or as many glow sticks as you have jars), glitter, scissors, and an adult.

Directions: Crack a glow stick so it starts glowing and then ask an adult to cut off the tip of the glow stick and carefully pour the glowing liquid into an empty jar. Then add the glitter, close the lid of the jar tightly, and shake.

Make one each night of Hanukkah to end up with a miraculous Menorah by the end of the 8 days! Just remember that there is one more candle on a Menorah than there are days of Hanukkah, because one candle is the Shamash or helper candle, that is used to light the rest. Since glow sticks don’t require any extra lighting, it is up to you and your family if you want to end up with 9 lights in your miraculous menorah or 8. There’s no one right way to celebrate anything. Especially anything Jewish! Experiment by using different colored glow sticks, different kinds of glitter, or even mixing multiple colors and styles together.

Things to Think About: As you look at your miracle in a bottle, it’s easy to see how something can seem magical and miraculous. Just because we don’t understand how something works, doesn’t mean that we can’t one day study and learn and eventually come to understand it.

Think about all the materials you used to make this Bottled “Miracle.” Did any of the materials feel miraculous or magical or special when they were by themselves? Why or why not? When did they become special?

Can you still pick out each individual material that you used to create this glowing beauty? How are they changed because they are next to each other?

Now turn on the lights and take another look at your Menorah. Does it seem any less miraculous now that it’s not surrounded by darkness?

Why celebrate any holiday? What does celebrating holidays add to your family? Are there any downsides to celebrating holidays? If so, what are they?
The Lopsided Dreidel:

Once upon a time, in a little drawer, tucked safe out of sight, there lived a little, lopsided dreidel, named Merry. In the same drawer, there lived, a big dreidel named Shmuli and a small dreidel named David, a wooden dreidel named Rivka and a plastic dreidel named Sarah, all brightly colored with neat, square sides. And then there was Merry. Lumpy and dingy so that it was hard to tell what color she was, Merry was not the kind of dreidel you saw in a shop window. She was not the kind of dreidel you would take home to your family. Or at least that’s what the other dreidels always said. She was the wrong shape. She was the wrong color. She had the wrong name. She was wrong, wrong, wrong. And all the other dreidels made sure she knew it.

And slowly, as day passed day, the little lopsided dreidel named Merry began to believe the comments the other dreidels were saying about her. And the more she tried to pretend that she was just like the other dreidels the harder it became to spin.

At first it was just a wobble—a slight faltering before she regained her balance. But then the wobble became bigger and bigger, until one day, Merry realized that she couldn’t spin at all.

"What good is a dreidel that can’t even spin?” Merry wailed. "No one will ever want to play with me now!” And so Merry cried and cried and cried. She began to feel as if all was lost, that she would never be loved, no matter what she did or how hard she tried. Even when she was with the other dreidels she felt all alone—like an outsider. She’d been keeping her feelings bottled up so tight, pushed down way deep inside of her, that even though it hurt, somehow, crying felt like a relief. As she cried, Merry slowly began to move. Slowly at first, without even realizing it, she began to turn and to hum and then to sing. As her tears dried into song, she began to turn faster and faster until soon she was spinning from one end of the drawer to the other. She zoomed around her neighbors in complicated loop-de-loops and whoops of laughter drenched song.

Merry was not following any of the rules or trying to be like anybody else. She did not have the proper form nor the correct technique. Her joy was contagious and pretty soon, all the other dreidels in the drawer—the big one named Shmuli and the little one named David, the wooden one named Rivka and the plastic one named Sarah—were all spinning and laughing with her, inventing new patterns they had never known were possible.
The Legend of Hanukkah:

Once upon a time, long long ago, there lived a greedy king who ruled over a vast empire that stretched from one end of the civilized world to the other. But this king was not content to rule over great lands and many different kinds of people. He wanted everyone he ruled to look the same, to dress the same, to eat the same things, and believe in the same gods. He even wanted them to believe that HE was god. But the Jews of Judea would have none of it.

So one man named Judah the Maccabee began talking to his fellow Jews and convinced them to revolt against the greedy king. Now the King’s armies were large and strong, but the Maccabees (the Jewish army) were determined and resourceful. Against all odds, the Maccabees managed to beat the greedy king and reclaim their Temple.

When the Maccabees walked into the Temple they were sad and angry to see just how dirty their Temple was. During the war, the king’s soldiers had torn down all the wall hangings, stolen the beautiful decorations, and done everything they could think of to make the Temple as gross as possible. But the Maccabees refused to be discouraged and began to clean up the Temple. They went looking for oil to light the Menorah, but there was only enough oil for one day, and much more than one day’s worth of cleaning left to do. This was very upsetting but the soldiers-turned-cleaning-people decided to make do with what they had and when the temple was cleaned, they celebrated for eight days. Thus, the festival of Hanukkah was born.⁸

⁸ Adapted from the legend of Hanukkah as it appears in the book of Maccabees.
THE DREIDEL GAME

Playing dreidel is very simple, though many variations exist.

Each player begins with a few pennies, nuts or delicious Hanukkah chocolate Gelt. Then, prior to each spin, the players must throw one penny into the pot. The letter which appears when the dreidel falls determines how much the player has won or lost. If the letter "nun" - נ - appears, the player wins nothing and the pot continues to increase. If the letter "gimel" - ג - appears, the player takes the entire pot. If the "hey" - ה - appears, the player takes only half the pot. If a "shin" - ש - appears, the player must put two more pennies into the pot. The object of the game is to win the most pennies or nuts.
Match the Hanukkah tradition with its country of origin:

There are many different ways to celebrate Hanukkah just like there are many different ways to celebrate every Jewish holiday. Every place in the world has its own special traditions, just like every family has its own way of celebrating common traditions. Can you guess which holiday tradition originates in Salonika, Greece? Aden, Yemen? Or the Sephardic world?

Make your own matching game using your family’s traditions!

(answer: Girls who are angry reconcile- Salonika, Greece; 7th night women- Sephardic; wear blue: Aden, Yemen)

9 Adapted from materials created by Professor Matthew Kraus
10 Sephardic Jews are Jews who come from Spain, Africa, the Middle East, and the Arab world.
Color Me
Maze Fun
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