



Temple Beth Torah

***Adult Education Program***

**Hanukkah: Beyond Eight Days of Oil –  
An Ancient but Very Contemporary Holiday**

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1. Eight Days of Light: A Simple but Complex Story
  - a. From minor to major holiday
  - b. America and the popularization of Hanukkah
  - c. Maccabees and Miracle of the Oil
  - d. Traditional story can obscure deeper meanings of holiday
  - e. A multilayered holiday - deeply worth examining its origins and development
  - f. So, how do we unlock the deeper meanings of Hanukkah?
2. Maccabees: From Rebels to Kings
  - a. Alexander and Hellenism: transformation of the ancient world
  - b. Ptolemies vs. Seleucids and the battle for the Hellenic world
  - c. Judea no longer isolated: integration with the Hellenistic world
  - d. Jewish reformers and the embrace of Hellenistic culture
  - e. Revolt of the religious Jews
  - f. From religious rebellion to war for independence
  - g. Maccabees victorious
  - h. Hasmonean rule: a century of Jewish self-definition
3. A Civil War Between Jews?
  - a. Hellenism as a universal culture
  - b. Rewards of embracing Hellenism
  - c. Resistance and its consequences
  - d. Jason and Menelaus – the first “reform Jews”
  - e. Jew vs. Jew
  - f. Making of martyrdom
  - g. A struggle for compromise: battle against going too far
  - h. Jews, Egypt, and Hellenism – diametric responses and consequences
4. Evolution of a Holiday

- a. Initial declaration of holiday by Hasmoneans – described in Maccabees I and II
  - b. A second Sukkot festival
  - c. Oil and lights NOT part of original celebration
  - d. A syncretic holiday binding together old and new
  - e. Interweaving of religion and politics in same holiday
  - f. Elaboration of traditions surrounding holiday in Middle Ages
  - g. Customs and practices of Hanukkah have generated debate for centuries
5. Hanukkah and the Making of American Judaism
    - a. Initial uses of Hanukkah in America
    - b. Maccabees as model fighters
    - c. Post-WWII America and the enthusiastic embrace of Hanukkah
    - d. Response to the overwhelming presence of Christmas
    - e. Hanukkah as American holiday
  6. Hanukkah Today: Celebrations, Meanings, Boundaries
    - a. A holiday celebrated largely at home
    - b. Affirmation and identity in the land of Christmas
    - c. Hanukkah can unify and divide – experiences of Jews by Choice and interfaith families
    - d. Social meaning of Hanukkah
    - e. Jewish parents and Jewish children – l’dor v’dor
    - f. A holiday about boundaries – from ancient times to today

## Summary and Conclusions

- While Hanukkah is considered a minor Jewish holiday – not one with a great aura of sanctity – one of most popular ones, especially among American Jews
- Hanukkah story typically told as a tale of good and evil – good Maccabees defeat evil Syrian Greeks and defend Jews against efforts to outlaw practice of Judaism
- Yet a more complex reading of the story is possible
- A civil war among Jews - beyond battle between Jews and Seleucids, Hanukkah also reflects a battle between Jews and Jews
- One of key accomplishments of Maccabees was to demonstrate a path to selectively engage the assimilationist pressures of Hellenization
- Maccabees did not follow an all-or-none path in regards to Hellenization – opposed critical elements of change (belief in monotheism) – adopted cultural changes that did not challenge core of Judaism
- Hanukkah commemorates struggle Jews have felt from antiquity to today in living as a minority among larger more powerful cultures – ongoing pressure to assimilate
- In observing Hanukkah, we commemorate the effort of Jews to maintain boundaries – to flex with modernity when acceptable, but still to hold onto core Jewish identity

## Lyrics

### "The Chanukah Song," Adam Sandler

Okay

This is a song that uh

There's a lot of Christmas songs out there and uh  
not too many Hanukkah songs

So uh

I wrote a song for all those nice little Jewish kids  
who don't get to hear any Hanukkah songs

Here we go

Put on your yarmulke

Here comes Hanukkah

So much funukah

To celebrate Hanukkah

Hanukkah is the festival of lights

Instead of one day of presents, we have eight crazy nights

When you feel like the only kid in town without a Christmas tree

Here's a list of people who are Jewish just like you and me

David Lee Roth lights the menorah

So do James Caan, Kirk Douglas, and the late Dinah Shore-ah

Guess who eats together at the Carnegie Deli

Bowser from Sha Na Na and Arthur Fonzerelli

Paul Newman's half Jewish, Goldie Hawn's half too

Put them together, what a fine lookin' Jew

You don't need "Deck The Halls" or "Jingle Bell Rock"

'Cause you can spin a dreidel with Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock- both Jewish

Put on your yarmulke

It's time for Hanukkah

The owner of the Seattle Supersonicahs

Celebrates Hanukkah

O.J. Simpson, not a Jew

But guess who is? Hall of famer Rod Carew- he converted

We got Ann Landers and her sister Dear Abby

Harrison Ford's a quarter Jewish- not too shabby

Some people think that Ebenezer Scrooge is  
Well he's not, but guess who is  
All three Stooges  
So many Jews are in showbiz  
Tom Cruise isn't, but I heard his agent is

Tell your friend Veronica  
It's time to celebrate Hanukkah  
I hope I get a harmonica  
Oh this lovely, lovely Hanukkah  
So drink your gin and tonica  
And smoke your marijuanikahhlf you really, really wannakah  
Have a happy, happy, happy, happy Hanukkah  
Happy Hanukkah

Songwriters: Adam Sandler, Lewis Morton, Ian Maxtone-Graham  
The Chanukah Song lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, 1994

#### **“Light One Candle,” Peter Paul, and Mary**

Light one candle for the Maccabee children  
Give thanks that their light didn't die!  
Light one candle for the pain they endured  
When their right to exist was denied!  
Light one candle for the terrible sacrifice  
Justice and freedom demand!  
And light one candle for the wisdom to know  
When the peacemaker's time is at hand!

Don't let the light go out!  
It's lasted for so many years!  
Don't let the light go out!  
Let it shine through our love and our tears.

Light one candle for the strength we all need  
To never become our own foe!  
And light one candle for those who are suff'ring  
Pain we learned so long ago!  
Light one candle for all we believe in,  
Let anger not tear us apart!  
And light one candle to bind us together  
With peace as the song in our heart!

Don't let the light go out!  
It's lasted for so many years!  
Don't let the light go out!

Let it shine through our love and our tears.

What is the memory that's valued so highly  
That we keep it alive in that flame?  
What's the commitment to those who have died  
When we cry out they've not died in vain,  
We have come this far, always believing  
That justice will somehow prevail!  
This is the burning. This is the promise,  
This why we will not fail!

Don't let the light go out!  
It's lasted for so many years!  
Don't let the light go out!  
Let it shine through our love and our tears.

Don't let the light go out!  
Don't let the light go out!  
Don't let the light go out!

Songwriter: Peter Yarrow  
Light One Candle lyrics © Warner Chappell Music, Inc., 1982

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#### **Next Classes:**

- ***From 1960s Women's Liberation Movement to Jewish Feminism***
  - Temple Beth Torah, Ventura, Adult Education Program
  - Four Lectures
    - Women Revolt – Rise of Feminism in 1950s America
    - From Women's ***Rights*** to Women's ***Liberation***
    - Jewish Women. Unite: Jewish Women Stand Up and Speak Out
    - Jewish Feminism: Momentous Changes, Lasting Legacy
  - January-February, 2022, specific date TBD
- ***The History Wars: Today's Controversies Over the Teaching of American History***
  - California Lutheran University- FAB Program
  - April 4 – May 9, 2022
- ***The American Dream: The History and Future of an Idea***
  - California State University, Channel Islands – OLLI Program
  - Spring I, 2022
  - *Proposed – awaiting dates*