



Contributed by Cantor Barbra Lieberstein

HANUKKAH:

A CELEBRATION OF RESILIENCE, FAITH, AND MIRACLES THROUGH THE AGES

Hanukkah, known as the Festival of Lights, is directly translated as “Rededication.” Through our religious education, we learned that the Maccabees fought the Syrian Greeks who destroyed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. In 164 BCE (before the common era), the Maccabees recaptured the Temple, cleaned it out, and rededicated it. There is also the story that they found only enough olive oil to light the menorah in the Temple for one day. Miraculously, it lasted for eight days.



An interesting fact about Hanukkah is that it was actually a substitute celebration for the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, which takes place in the fall, shortly after the holiday of Yom Kippur. Sukkot is an agricultural holiday that’s celebrated for eight days. In ancient times, farmers would make a pilgrimage to the Holy Temple to give thanks to God for the crops they harvested. They also prayed for rain as they hoped to bring an abundance of produce and grain for the following year. Additionally, there were torchlight processions where people poured buckets of water onto the altar to symbolize the rain. Historically, Sukkot symbolizes the temporary shelters the Israelites lived in during their journey from Egypt to Israel.



When the Maccabees captured the Temple, they realized that Sukkot could not be celebrated a few months prior due to the Syrian Greek’s control of the territory. So they instituted a substitution for Sukkot during the Jewish month of Kislev (when Hanukkah takes place). For the following Hanukkah, they borrowed some of the customs of Sukkot like celebrating for eight days, reciting psalms, and lights throughout every home. For at least 40 years, this holiday was called, “Sukkot in Kislev.” By the first century, the name of the holiday was changed to Hanukkah.

Today, there are many traditions for celebrating Hanukkah. We recite blessings of gratitude for the miracles God created when lighting the Menorah on each of the eight nights. The correct word for Menorah is actually Chanukiah. The menorah is a seven branched candelabrum found in the ancient Temple. The Chanukiah has eight vessels and an additional holder for the Shamash or helper candle that lights the other candles.

Many families play the game of dreidel. The dreidel is a spinning top that contains the Hebrew letters Nun, Gimmel, Hay, and Shin. The letters are an acronym for the phrase, “A great miracle



Recipe for Zucchini and Cheese Latkes from The Gourmet Jewish Cook

by Judy Zeidler

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|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 6 medium zucchinis, grated | fresh mint leave |
| 3 eggs | 1 cup shredded mozzarella |
| 5 scallions thinly sliced | Vegetable oil |
| ½ cup chopped parsley, no stems | 1 to 1 ½ cups flour |
| 2 TBSP chopped | Salt |
| | Freshly ground black pepper |

In a large bowl, combine the zucchini, eggs, scallions, parsley, mint, cheese, and 1 TBSP of oil. Add the flour, a small amount at a time, mixing thoroughly after each addition. Use just enough to make it thick. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

In a large heavy skillet, heat ¼ inch of oil. With a tablespoon, spoon the zucchini mixture into the hot oil and flatten with the back of a wet spoon. Cook on both sides until golden brown. Drain on paper towels.



happened there.” In Israel, the letter Shin changes to the letter Peh, so the phrase recited becomes, “a great miracle happened here.”

It’s also a tradition to eat fried foods including latkes and Sufganiyot (jelly doughnuts). Many people exchange gifts, however donating to organizations in need has also become a tradition.

When I worked in synagogues, the choir and I would perform yearly Hanukkah Shabbat services. We would sing songs about God’s miracles, the dreidel, the Hanukkah lights, and the brave Maccabees.

When my children were in elementary school, I used to volunteer with the other Jewish parents and teach the students about Hanukkah. I would read a story, teach a song, and give them latkes with jelly doughnuts.

For a few years, we invited other families in town to celebrate the holiday. We set up tables with arts and crafts: creating edible dreidels, coloring Hanukkah cookies with edible markers, and Hanukkah coloring pages. We also lit the Chanukiah.

Today, as our children are over 18, we celebrate Hanukkah at our vacation home in Florida with extended family. Hanukkah is about resilience, faith, miracles, cultural identity, and spending time with family.

Cantor Barbra Lieberstein, a 25-year resident of Ramsey, was ordained as a cantor at The Academy for Jewish Religion in 1998. She has served several Reform and Reconstructionist pulpits in Long Island and New Jersey. Currently, Cantor Barbra owns her own independent Jewish lifecycle service, Cantor Barbra Lieberstein’s Jewish Lifecycles. She officiates at Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, Jewish weddings, baby namings, funerals, and unveilings, for mostly unaffiliated families. She is married to Scott Fergang and has 3 children, Sara, Josh, and Jordana, and a cat, Theo.



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