

## **Hanukkah....A Time for Re-dedication**

Most people identify Hanukkah celebrations with being Jewish. And with eight days of lighting an extra-long menorah (chanukkiah), eating extra oily potatoes (latkes), playing a game using Hebrew letters (Dreidel), it's no wonder.

But don't let its Jewish symbols fool you. Hanukkah is the perfect celebration for anyone who's ever wished for good to overcome evil, a minority of principled people to triumph over a powerful, oppressive empire, a restoration of crushed cultural traditions, a chance to clear out the bad memories and start anew, and recommit to living by their values and beliefs.

This annual festival, also sometimes referred to as The Festival of Lights, dates back to 165 BCE when the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (the only Jewish Temple in the world to this day) was defiled by the Syrian King Antiochus, who removed the Temple treasures and forbade the Jews to celebrate their holy days. He further desecrated the Temple by making pagan sacrifices and dedicating the altar to the worship of Zeus.

A small group of Hasmoneans led by Judas Maccabee mounted an attack on the Syrians, and drove them out. The altar to Zeus was destroyed, a new Holy Altar was erected, and the Temple was re-dedicated to the God of Israel. The word Hanukkah means dedication. Due to the fighting, the Israelites were unable to celebrate Sukkot that year (an 8-day holy festival). So after the battle was won, they established the 8-day festival of Hanukkah to commemorate the victory of regaining the temple. It celebrates the restoration of worship in the Temple and the re-dedication of the Holy Altar.

The extra-long menorah contains eight candles – one for each night -- plus a ninth for lighting the others. The oily potatoes are to celebrate the oil that lit the menorah in the temple. The game of Dreidel is reminiscent of the games played to hide the reading of the Hebrew Bible, which was forbidden.

We can learn a lot from our Jewish friends. This annual tradition and the spirit of Hanukkah would benefit all of us. During the hustle and bustle of this year's Christmas preparations, take a day to "re-dedicate your temple" – put away symbols of past pain, and renew your commitment to overcoming evil with good and living by your values. What the heck, take 8 days!