Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday celebrated for eight days and nights. It starts on the twenty-fifth of the Jewish month of Kislev, which coincides with late November-late December on the secular calendar. In Hebrew, the word "hanukkah" means "dedication." The name reminds us that this holiday commemorates the re-dedication of the holy Temple in Jerusalem following the Jewish victory over the Syrian-Greeks in 165 B.C.E.

Jewish troops were determined to purify the Temple by burning ritual oil in the Temple’s menorah for eight days. But to their dismay, they discovered that there was only one day's worth of oil left in the Temple. They lit the menorah anyway and to their surprise, the small amount of oil lasted the full eight days. This is the miracle of the Hanukkah oil that is celebrated every year when Jews light a special menorah known as a hanukkiyah for eight days. One candle is lit on the first night of Hanukkah, two on the second, and so on, until eight candles are lit.

Hanukkah falls on the twenty-fifth day of the Jewish month of Kislev. Since the Jewish calendar is lunar based, every year the first day of Hanukkah falls on a different day—usually sometime between late November and late December.

Every community has its unique Hanukkah traditions, but there are some traditions that are almost universally practiced. They are: lighting the hanukkiyah, spinning the dreidel and eating fried foods.

- **Lighting the hanukkiyah**: Every year it is customary to commemorate the miracle of the Hanukkah oil by lighting candles on a hanukkiyah. The hanukkiyah is lit every night for eight nights.
- **Spinning the dreidel**: A popular Hanukkah game is spinning the dreidel, which is a four-sided top with Hebrew letters written on each side. Gelt, which are chocolate coins covered with tin foil, are part of this game.
- **Eating fried foods**: Because Hanukkah celebrates the miracle of oil, it is traditional to eat fried foods such as latkes and sufganiyot during the holiday. Latkes are pancakes made out of potatoes and onions, which are fried in oil and then served with applesauce. Sufganiyot (singular: sufganiyah) are jelly-filled donuts that are fried and sometimes dusted with confectioners’ sugar before eating.