

*“...who makes miracles  
in those days  
at this time.”*

*from Chanukah  
candle lighting blessings*

## CLAL- The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership

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Working with established and emerging volunteer leaders, rabbis and other religious leaders, professionals, scholars, and opinion makers, CLAL has earned a reputation for compelling programs embodying the principles of openness and diversity. Joining with a network of leaders and experts from diverse fields, CLAL offers new perspectives on contemporary issues, reaching an influential body of leaders, thinkers, and practitioners. CLAL's internship and professional education programs connect modern experience with ancient texts and traditions. CLAL's publications and materials offer thought-provoking ideas, tools, and techniques to enhance people, communities, and institutions. In all of CLAL's work, it strives to build vibrant Jewish life that is spiritually engaged in the intellectual and ethical challenges of the world-at-large.

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# Mai Chanukah?

# What is Chanukah?

What makes this holiday second  
only to Passover in its popularity  
among American Jews?

We know the story: A single cruse  
of pure oil miraculously lasted for  
eight days. But this story first  
appears in a rabbinic discussion  
that occurs hundreds of years after  
the event itself. So if it wasn't that  
miracle which the Maccabees were  
celebrating, what miracle was it?



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**D**ESPITE impossible odds against the fierce and well-trained Syrian-Greek army, Matathias and his sons Judah, Jonathan and Simon were able to rout their enemies from Jerusalem and eventually to restore Jewish sovereignty over the land. A centuries' long era of renewed Jewish cultural, spiritual and political power commenced. This indeed was a miracle.

Once the troops secured the Temple compound, they purified the altar and prepared for a rededication celebration. Their best model was Solomon's original eight-day ceremony celebrated around the time of the holiday of Sukkot. Perhaps this time was chosen because Sukkot, following the powerful cleansing rituals of Yom Kippur, was always thought of as a joyous time of renewal and rededication, a time when people genuinely trusted in their abilities to make miracles of renewal happen.

**S**O PERHAPS what we should celebrate this Chanukah is the power **of every culture, of every family, of every person**

to renew their own cultural, spiritual, and political powers, to assert their unique abilities and capabilities in the midst of the many powerful homogenizing forces around us.

**C**HANUKAH is a time for reconnecting to our own authenticity, and for celebrating our cultural, familial and individual uniqueness. According to Hasidic thought, the Chanukah candles are search lights for what is precious in each one of us that can shine out toward the world.

**A**S YOU LIGHT your own candles this Chanukah, take a moment to consider these three questions which parallel the three blessings recited the first night of the holiday:

- 1 What is it within you, within your family, your community, our nation and our people, that you value most?
- 2 What is the contribution that you have within you to make?
- 3 To what are you ready to rededicate yourself?

If you can find the opportunity, sit with the Chanukah candles late at night in an otherwise dark room and think of them as search lights into your heart.

**T**HIS CHANUKAH, rededicate yourself to your own unique inner light, to your essence and to what is truly most important to you.

