

8 Chanukah values
to illuminate your holiday

PJ Library

The Jewish Federation
OF GREATER WASHINGTON



Deepen your family's Chanukah experience, beyond the gelt and glitz and gifts. These eight values are derived from the story of Chanukah, with pieces for learning, asking, doing and reading. Choose to explore as many values as you'd like. You can go in order, or skip around as desired, but we recommend ending with Rededication.

Note to parents: we recommend reading the night's value through first to be familiar with it and decide if there are parts where you'd change the words to suit your child's developmental level. We have offered a variety of questions—please choose the ones that would best work for your family's discussion.

For each of these 8 Values of Chanukah, we offer:

- 1) **Learn:** Description of the holiday value
- 2) **Ask:** Questions to discuss as a family (for a "fireside chat")
- 3) **Do:** Activities to do together
- 4) **Read:** PJ Library book suggestions

8 Chanukah Values

Light (ohr)	How can you be the light and bring warmth to the season?
Courage (Ometz Lev)	Do you have the courage to stand up for what's right?
Israel (Eretz Israel)	The dreidel says, "a great miracle happened there." How can you use that to deepen your connection to Israel?
Community (Kehillah)	How may we balance uniqueness and inclusivity?
Miracles (Nes)	What are the miracles in your life?
Education (Chinukh)	Why is knowledge enlightening and empowering?
Conservation (Shomrei Adamah)	How can we make the oil last?
Rededication (Chanukah)	How can we rededicate ourselves to these values all year long?



Light (ohr)

Learn:

The word light can be a metaphor describing joy, knowledge, or general well-being. The most treasured book of Jewish wisdom, the Torah, calls on Jews to be "a light to the nation." On Chanukah, this concept comes alive! For eight nights, Jews gather with family and friends to light the Chanukah menorah.

"It is considered a *mitzvah* (a sacred act) to share that light with others. Some people place their menorah on the window sill, and others, especially in Israel, use a special box to display the menorah outside. Doing so literally "brightens up" some of the darkest days of the winter. The practice reminds us that our actions can add light to the world!" (from the [Jewish Social Service Agency \(JSSA\)](#))

Ask:

- Chanukah comes at the darkest time of year. How can we counteract the darkness?
- What activities are the lights in your life?
- How can you brighten some of the darkness in your life?
- Who brings light into your life?

Do:

- Collect outgrown and gently used warm winter items to donate to a homeless shelter
- Counteract the darkness and the cold by gathering with neighbors, calling or writing a relative you haven't talked to in a while, or connecting with an old friend.
- Make connections to other holidays that celebrate light, including Diwali (India), Kwanzaa (America), the Moon Festival (China), Christmas (Christianity) and Lou Krathong (Thailand). Why is light a universal human value? [Learn more.](#)
- You've got to Ack-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive. [Listen to this fun version together.](#)
- Learn about *tzedakah* (justice or righteousness) with this Shaboom episode, "[Get with the Giving.](#)"

- [Learn how to light and bless the Chanukah candles.](#)
- *Our family's ideas:*

Read:

- [Gathering Sparks](#) by Howard Schwartz, illustrated by Kristina Swarner
- [Light](#) by Jane Breskin Zalben
- [Chanukah Lights Everywhere](#) by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Melissa Iwai
- [First Rain](#) by Charlotte Herman, illustrated by Kathryn Mitter
- [Shanghai Sukkah](#) by Heidi Smith Hyde, illustrated Jing Jing Tsong

Courage (Ometz Lev)

Learn:

While the Talmud relates a tale of miraculous oil, the Book of Maccabees focuses on the importance of Chanukah as a military victory. The armies of King Antiochus and the Syrian Greeks were larger, but Judah Maccabee and his fellow fighters used their knowledge of the terrain to separate the larger army into smaller bands and then defeat them. The Talmudic sages ordained that everyone should kindle lights each night of Chanukah to spread the word of the miraculous victory of “the few over the many.”

Ask:

- What would you do if you saw...a person being attacked (verbally or physically)? ...someone stealing? ...someone saying something mean about a person who wasn't there?
- What makes you unique or different? How do you use your distinct qualities? How do you illuminate your strengths every day? What makes [family member at the table] unique or different?
- To whom would you bestow the Maccabee Award for courage?
- How do you stand up for your beliefs? What ways do you demonstrate your displeasure at a law or social situation?
- What qualities do you strive to strengthen and improve about yourself?

Do:

- Write a Letter-to-the-Editor or a letter to an elected representative on an issue you are passionate about.
- Practice (role-play) how you'd respond to an injustice if you witnessed it.
- Learn about Ometz Lev with “[Hero Heart](#),” a Shaboom! episode from BimBam.
- Have an age-appropriate discussion about bullying and peer pressure. For guides, visit [Teaching Tolerance](#) or [StopBullying.gov](#).
- *Our family's ideas:*

Read:

- [All the Lights in the Night](#) by Arthur A. Levine, illustrated by James Ransome
- [Brave Girl](#) by Michelle Markel, illustrated by Melissa Sweet
- [Hanukkah at Valley Forge](#) by Stephen Krensky, illustrated by Greg Harlin
- [Molly's Pilgrim](#) by Barbara Cohen, illustrated by Daniel Duffy
- [Judah Who Always Said "No!": A Hanukkah Story](#) by Harriet K. Feder, illus. by Katherine Janus Kahn

Israel (Eretz Israel)

Learn:

When we read the “nun-gimel-hay-shin” of the dreidel, the letters stand for an acrostic, “Nes Gadol Haya Sham”—a great miracle happened there. The “there” in this case is Israel. The events of the Chanukah story happened in Israel, in modern-day Modi’in and Jerusalem. One symbol of Israel is the olive tree, a symbol of peace in many cultures. The State of Israel has a menorah and olive leaves on their emblem to symbolize peace (think of the story of Noah and the dove who brought back an olive branch after the flood) and the light produced by the olive oil for the menorah in the Temple. “The amazing olive tree can reach the age of 2,000, regenerate after fire, and produce oil for cooking, lighting, and even anointing kings.” ([Jerusalem Post](#))

Ask:

- Have you ever been to Israel? What did you like best? What was unexpected about it?
- If you haven't been to Israel, would you want to go? What would you want to make sure you did/saw there?
- How did they get oil from olives in Temple times? [Read about it](#), or [watch and learn](#).

Do:

- Brainstorm uses for and recipes with olives, olive oil, olive trees
- Make an Israeli salad with an olive oil and lemon dressing. Try a recipe on [Federation's Jewish Food Experience](#) (JFE).
- Eat *sufganyot*, fried doughnuts that are traditional in Israel. You can find them locally at the [Kosher Pastry Oven](#) and other stores, or you can make your own using a [JFE recipe](#).
- Learn about modern Israel through [Federation's Imagine Israel](#) initiative, with blog posts, podcasts and more.
- *Our family's ideas:*

Read:

- [Jodie's First Dig](#) by Anna Levine, illustrated by Ksenia Topaz
- [And Shira Imagined](#) by Giora Carmi
- [Everybody Says Shalom](#) by Leslie Kimmelman, illustrated by Talitha Shipman

Community (Kehillah)

Learn:

The scholar Hillel said, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am for myself alone, what am I? If not now, when?” (Ethics of the Fathers, 1:14) Hillel and Shammai, another sage who lived at the same time, are famous for “agreeing to disagree.” They often disagreed about various points of Torah or Jewish practice, but they remained respectful in their discourse.

The Book of Maccabees—the “origin story” of Chanukah—includes a troubling record of civil strife between segments of the Jewish population that led up to the fighting. Those who favored some measure of assimilating Hellenistic (Greek) lifestyles were bitterly opposed by those who zealously defended Jewish culture and beliefs against foreign influence. The strife escalated into civil war, which led to the intervention of the Syrian-Greek army and then the loss of autonomy. While the Maccabees restored political and religious autonomy to Judaea through their revolt, it is interesting to wonder what would have happened if the disagreements had not become violent.

Ask:

- Ask Hillel's questions to the members of your family—"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am for myself alone, what am I? If not now, when?"
- Who is someone you disagree with occasionally but with whom you are still friends?
- In what instance have you extended an olive branch or a gesture of peace?
- Who is in our community? Who is not? Why or why not?

Do:

- Be with the community to celebrate Chanukah. You can join a community Chanukah candle lighting, for instance. [Find one here.](#)
- Invite others over to celebrate Chanukah. Don't just include the people you usually invite—include neighbors, non-Jewish friends, colleagues and others to share the light and joy of the holiday with more people.
- Learn a Chanukah song to sing together. One option is learning "Chanukah Oh Chanukah" in English and the original Yiddish. [Watch the BimBam video with lyrics.](#)
- Light the menorah with far-flung relatives or friends via Skype so that everyone can connect, even if it's virtual.
- *Our family's ideas:*

Read:

- [Bone Button Borscht](#) by Aubrey Davis, illustrated by Dusan Petricic
- [Chik Chak Shabbat](#) by Mara Rockliff, illustrated by Krysten Brooker
- [Snow in Jerusalem](#) by Deborah da Costa, illus. by Cornelius Van Wright & Ying-Hwa Hu
- [The Trees of the Dancing Goats](#) by Patricia Polacco

Miracles (Nes)

Learn:

The popular "origins" legend for Chanukah relates how a small supply of oil miraculously lasted for eight days. Alternatively, the special prayer inserted during Chanukah, *Al Hanissim* (for the miracles), highlights the "miraculous" deliverance we were granted by God and by courageous individuals: "You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few..." This is placed next to the daily thanksgiving prayer which says, "We thank You for Your *miracles which daily attend us*, and for Your wondrous kindness." The Hebrew word "ness" also refers to a banner; in this context, a banner is something which we salute, which refers to our values and faith.

The miracles are less about wondrous acts of God and more about stopping to recognize and appreciate them. In this context, it's gratitude and appreciating something that was amazing, unexpected or saved, and sharing that.

Ask:

- What would you consider daily miracles?
- Noam Zion, an Israeli educator and scholar, wrote, "Believing in miracles is another way of learning to keep my options open and letting myself be surprised." Does this make sense to you? Do you agree or disagree?
- What is a miracle the world could really use?
- What miracles are you grateful for?

Do:

- Write a thank you letter to someone you know—be specific about why.
- Say the "[Shehecheyanu](#)" prayer (said on the first night of Chanukah, too) to stop and appreciate the moment of trying something for the first time or for the first time this year.

This blessing gives thanks to God for enabling us to experience a new or special occasion. “*Bah-rukh ah-tah Ah-do-nai El-o-hay-nu meh-lekh ha’o-lam sheh-hekh-ye-anu, v’key-ye-mah-nu, v’hig-ee-yah-nu lahz-man hah-zeh,*” which means “Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has given us life, sustained us, and allowed us to reach this day.”

- Write a thank you letter to someone serving the Armed Forces—or put together a care package for them.
- Start a journal and have your family share a “calendar in review” of the miracles they want to remember, either in your lives or something you saw on the news or happening in the world. Keep the journal with your menorahs to pull it out and add to it each year.
- *Our family’s ideas:*

Read:

- [All Kinds of Strong](#) by Sharon Baker, illustrated by Kris Wiltse
- [I Say Shehechyanu](#) by Joanne Rocklin, illustrated by Monika Filipina

Education (*Chinukh*)

Learn:

Another shade of meaning of the Hebrew word, Chanukah, is education (*chinukh*). Becoming a life-long learner of Jewish culture is a way to renew yourself and your community.

Playing with the *sevivon*/dreidel (Hebrew/Yiddish for the four-sided spinning top) is more than just a game. When the decree was issued forbidding Jews from studying Torah or practicing rituals, a creative response helped Jewish life continue. In fields and caves, Jews gathered to study and pray, keeping spinning tops and the equipment of games of chance nearby. If Syrian-Greek soldiers approached, the books were swept away and the “gaming” set up. What looks like a game today was indeed an act of courage and spiritual resistance to oppression.

Ask:

- “Knowledge is power.” What other examples of spiritual resistance or non-violent demonstrations are you familiar with in history?
- How would you demonstrate your displeasure at a law or social situation?
- What sparks your curiosity to learn?
- If you could teach any subject, what would it be?
- Who passes on the stories of our family? How would you tell future generations?

Do:

- Make room on your bookshelves by donating gently-used books that are no longer read in your home to an organization that gives books to kids that don’t have any. Check out Reading Together, First Book, Books for America or Turning the Page
- Read a book together—it could be a PJ Library book or any family favorite!
- Play dreidel—and teach a friend. If you don’t know how, [learn here](#).
- [Learn the real story of Chanukah](#).
- *Our family’s ideas:*

Read:

- [Hanukkah Moon](#) by Deborah Da Costa, illustrated by Gosia Mosz
- [Jeremy's Dreidel](#) by Ellie Gellman, illustrated by Judith Friedman
- [Clever Rachel](#) by Debby Waldman, illustrated by Cindy Revell
- [See all of the PJ Library books about Chanukah](#)

Conservation (*Shomrei Adamah*)

Learn:

The energy source for light in ancient times was olive oil, and Judaea was a major producer of this natural resource. You may have a Chanukah discussion about today's energy sources and how we can encourage the use of renewable energy. You can make a connection that what the Maccabees did preserved Judaism for future generations, and what we should do to preserve the earth for future generations.

Ask:

- Who is in charge of turning off the lights in our home?
- Play, "Guess the total of our electric bill." (Closest to the right answer gets a prize!)
- What can we do to conserve water/oil/light/paper/etc?

Do:

- Learn more about [Shomrei Adamah](#) ("protecting the earth").
- As a Chanukah gift to your family, do a home energy audit to save money and natural resources. Get started at [Energy.gov](#) or DC's [Department of Energy & Environment](#).
- Learn about *Bal Tashchit*, the Jewish value of not wasting, in "[Waste Not](#)," a Shaboom! episode from BimBam
- See if you can use something renewable or reusable to wrap your gifts. For creative "upcycle" ideas, check out "[15 Awesome Alternatives To Gift Wrapping Paper That You Already Have In Your Home](#)."
- Make reminder signs (out of recycled paper) to post near light switches or garbage cans to remind family members to turn off the lights or to try to recycle their trash.
- *Our family's ideas:*

Read:

- [Nonna's Hanukkah Surprise](#) by Karen Fisman, illustrated by Martha Aviles
- [Just a Dream](#) by Chris Van Allsburg
- [It's a Mitzvah, Grover](#) by Tilda Balsley, illustrated by Tom Leigh
- [Good Night, Laila Tov](#) by Laurel Snyder, illustrated by Jui Ishida

Rededication (*Chanukah*)

Learn:

In 167 BCE, a Syrian-Greek king named Antiochus ruled Judaea. He issued decrees that banned Jews from practicing Judaism, culminating in the desecration of the Temple in Jerusalem. After a three year battle, Jews, under the leadership of Judah Maccabee, regained control of Jerusalem and rededicated the Temple to Israelite worship.

In modern times, we find ways to rededicate our lives to the values of Jewish tradition and the values of religious freedom. We can ask, in the spirit of New Year's resolutions, who are we, and what do we want to be in the world?

Ask:

- To what are you really dedicated?
- What else do you wish lasted eight days?
- Who are we, and what do we want to be in the world?
- Which of the values we discussed this week had the most meaning for you?

Do:

- [Read more about the history of Chanukah](#)
- [Watch videos about the history of Chanukah](#)
- Reflect back on the other nights' values. Make a plan to rededicate your family to one, some or all of them.
- Make plans for the next time that you'll see family in other places. You can also make a regular Skype date plan.
- *Our family's ideas:*

Read:

- [Emanuel & the Hanukkah Rescue](#) by Heidi Smith Hyde, illustrated by Jamel Akib
- [Hannah's Way](#) by Linda Glaser, illustrated by Adam Gustavson