

CHANUKAH FUN

by Torah.org

What is Chanukah? On National Public Radio this week, a reporter posed this basic question to a young father attending a Chanukah party with his wife and two-year-old son. He responded, "You eat fried food. You have some doughnuts. You light some candles. You sing some songs. And you open presents. It's just fun." While I'm all in favor of having some fun from time to time, I think it's sad that Jews are being taught that Chanukah is "just fun," and missing out on the true purpose and meaning of the holiday.

To answer the question of "What is Chanukah?" the Talmud records the famous episode of the Jewish priests of the Bais HaMikdash (the Holy Temple) entering the Temple sanctuary after the Jewish victory over the Greeks. The Temple had been defiled by the enemy soldiers, and the priests could find only one flask of pure oil to kindle the Temple Menorah. It was enough oil for only one day, but it lasted for 8 days — precisely the time needed for new, pure oil to be produced. Upon seeing this miraculous display of Divine favor, in the wake of the Jews' unlikely victory over the Greek army, the Sages established the annual holiday of Chanukah as a time to praise and thank the Al-mighty.

This explanation is echoed in the prayer of "Al HaNisim.." — the special Chanukah prayer recited three times daily and after meals during through the eight days of Chanukah. Although Al HaNisim focuses primarily on the victory over Greek culture, while the Talmud highlights the miracle of the oil, the establishment of Chanukah is again explained as an opportunity to "give thanks and praise" to the Al-mighty for His miracles.

Lighting the Menorah, eating fried food, singing songs and spinning dreidels are important observances; they help us relate to the spiritual aspect of Chanukah. Giving thanks and praise to G-d is intangible, and these physically engaging activities help us relate more personally to the holiday. Yes, they are fun. They get us excited, and involved, and they help us share the memorable experience of the holiday with our children, but it would be so tragic to forget the purpose of it all.

So, please – have fun in your Chanukah celebration, but don't miss out on the primary experience of Chanukah: taking the opportunity to thank G-d for saving Judaism and His Torah from being effaced by Greek and modern culture, and for showing us His miracles even in the darkness of exile.

Happy Chanukah!