

Hanukkah

More than a spinning dreidel or potato latke



Oak Park twins Gregory (left) and Sarah Meyers, 4, light the menorah to celebrate Hanukkah, Festival of Lights, now being observed in Jewish homes. (Staff photo by Mindy Saunders)

By SHIRLEE IDEN

Think your head's whirling from holiday hype? Well, picture this. You're a dreidel (top) fated to spin in endless Hanukkah games at the whim of little children.

Or how would you like to be a potato latke (pancake) and have everyone pour sour cream or applesauce all over you?

Even the stately eight-branched candelabra, the menorah, so symbolic of Hanukkah — it has to put up with candle drippings oozing all over its graceful form.

It's not much better to be a Hanukkah present, all decked out in paper and ribbon, only to have all your clothes torn off. And with hardly an admiring glance.

LIKE EVERY holiday, Hanukkah has its symbols and its essence. Because it is so beloved by children, it's a holiday when parents like to get beyond the trappings and into the meaning.

The Jewish winter holiday, Hanukkah began at sundown Friday this year and continues for eight days until sundown on Saturday, Dec. 22.

Called the Festival of Lights, Hanukkah commemorates the first struggle in recorded history for religious freedom and personal liberty.

Nearly two centuries B.C., Jewish people already had a tradition and a revered faith. In 175 B.C., Antiochus IV became king of Syria, the land to which Israel had been annexed.

ANTIOCHUS tried to force the Jews to worship Greek idols and renounce their ancient faith. He wanted a melting-pot kingdom of people with one belief. He decreed that any Jew caught observing the Sabbath, possessing the Torah (five books of Moses) or maintaining Jewish customs should be killed.

So Antiochus is the villain of the story. But Hanukkah has its heroes — the Maccabees. They came from a small town called Modin, near Jerusalem. Mattathias, a man with five sons, rallied the Jews from the entire country to oppose the Syrians.

"Whoever is for God, follow me," was his rallying cry. Even after Mattathias' death his sons, especially Judah Maccabee, continued the fight for religious and personal freedom. They fought as guerrillas.

against the numerically superior Syrians.

In 165 B.C. Judah Maccabee and his small band won a series of brilliant military victories.

A FINAL BATTLE at Emmaus opened the road to Jerusalem. This made possible the restoration of the temple.

According to a well-known Hanukkah story, the Jews prepared to rededicate the temple. But only one cruse of purified oil could be found for use in the Ner Tamid (eternal light) which hangs over the holy ark.

That ration of oil should have burned for just one day, but miraculously burned for eight days. Thus Hanukkah has not only heroes and villains, but a miracle, too.

"Hanukkah" is the Hebrew word for "dedication."

TO COMMEMORATE the relighting of that eternal light by the ancient Jews, Hanukkah candles have been lighted in Jewish homes in all parts of the world since that time.

The symbolic games of dreidel, Hanukkah songs, the giving of gifts, and even the holiday food customs including the latke, are all added attractions. Like many Jewish holidays, Hanukkah is a family time, the customs shared in warm and festive gatherings. It is a highlight for young children who love the star-shaped cookies, the nightly presents, and the songs.

But as they grow in understanding, the children are taught that Hanukkah does not commemorate just the military triumph of the Maccabees but the spiritual victory they made possible.

For if the Maccabees had not been victorious, the Jews could not have maintained their identity and religious freedom, and could not have preserved Judaism.

Hanukkah should be considered for its greater meanings. It is not a Jewish Christmas. Indeed, if Judah Maccabee had not been successful, there would be no Christianity as we know it.

So, although you may not want to be a potato latke or a spinning dreidel, there is much to be enjoyed in Hanukkah.

With all the ingredients of a super thriller and a miracle to boot, the message of religious integrity and freedom that Hanukkah brings are a timeless treasure.

Riegle names review panel

U.S. Sen. Donald Riegle, D-Michigan, has named 12 Oakland County residents to a 23-member committee to screen area applicants to the nation's military academies.

They are: Oakland County commissioners Alexander Perinoff, D-Southfield, and Hubert Price, D-Pontiac; Aldo Vagozzi of Farmington Hills, editor of the Michigan AFL-CIO News, and attorneys John Vos of Southfield, Robert Roether of Farmington Hills and Vincent Gil-

leo. Also named were Oak Park Mayor David Shepard, Carl Austermaill, an economics professor at Oakland Community College; Pontiac City Commissioner Tom Padilla; Don Douglas of UAW Local 594; Jack Gillow, Millford Postmaster, and Gail Nolin, a teacher in the Waterford School District. The committee interviews military academy applicants and makes recommendations to Riegle.

Celebrating the vote

Michigan blacks received the right to vote on Feb. 7, 1870 with the ratification of the 15th amendment. Detroit

blacks celebrated with speeches and parades, carrying banners with portraits of the black Senator Hiram Revels, William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown and Abraham Lincoln. Twenty-nine women riding through the city streets in a chariot represented the twenty-nine states that had ratified the amendment, according to the travel bureau, Michigan Department of Commerce.

Worms are wonderful

Earthworms were once considered an all-round wonder drug in Iran. They were baked and eaten with bread to reduce the size of a bladder stone, and were dried and eaten to cure the yellowness of jaundice.

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