

Gift giving — It's a Hanukkah custom

By Debbie Wallis Landau
special writer

HANUKKAH, THE Jewish Festival of Dedication, begins at sundown this year on Sunday, Dec. 1.

This festival holiday celebrates the documented historical rededication of the Second Temple in 165 BCE, when, against all odds, the Maccabees — Mattathias, his five sons and their followers — triumphed over the Syrian oppressors who tried to destroy Jewish belief and convert all Jews to the ways of Hellenism.

Jews all over the world observe Hanukkah with joyous commemoration signified by the lighting of the Hanukkah menorah. More than any other symbol, this candelabrum with nine candle holders recalls a miracle that occurred when Judah Maccabee allegedly found only one vial of sacramental oil left to ignite the Temple menorah. The oil should have only burned for one night, but instead lasted for eight.

Worshippers in the subsequent centuries to the present day, therefore, have observed this festival holiday for eight days and nine nights, which begins each year on the Hebrew lunar calendar on the 25th day of Kislev.

WHEN GIFT GIVING on this holiday actually began is a much

Holiday gift choices varied

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TRADITION! TRADITION! is a Southfield business run by Alicia R. Nelson, who characterizes her diversified gift selection as "everything Jewish."

Nelson offers an expansive selection of menorim, crafted in various metals, alloys, ceramics, stained glass, cast aluminum and other materials.

She works closely with about 35 different artists and can arrange commissions of original designs if a customer has an idea different from what is readily available.

Havilah sets to usher out the Sabbath, Matzah and Challah covers, Seder plates and clocks with Hebrew symbols are other items that would make an appropriate gift for a Jewish home.

debated issue. Hanukkah is often erroneously compared to the Christian holiday of Christmas, but shares little in common with that event other than the time of year during which they both occur.

Twelve calligraphers as well as weavers are other sources Nelson calls upon for personalized and custom creations.

"We have some lovely items for babies that are strong sellers, such as the baby blanket with the child's name either woven into the fabric or applied on," she said. "Some of the children's apparel can be designed with Hanukkah symbols or Hebrew names. We sell 'First Hanukkah' bibs for infants."

Children's trucks with Hebrew and English personalization are another favorite she recommends for the toddler on your gift list. She sells four different types of Hanukkah candles, including hand-dipped multicolored ones that are a hit with youngsters.

Nelson works by appointment. Call 557-0109.

Nonetheless, perhaps because of the victorious nature of this holiday and the conviviality of sharing the festivities of latke making (potato pancakes fried in oil), candle lighting, songfests and family get-togethers, it

has become customary to exchange gifts.

How elaborate gift-giving becomes depends on the individuals involved, but many families and friends like to buy symbolic gifts or items rich in the Jewish heritage.


A wonderful source of "one-stop" Hanukkah shopping for all ages is the gift shop at Temple Beth El in Birmingham. In addition to religious objects like menorim and kiddush cups, handsome serving pieces crafted of Israeli glass are available, as are knitted blue and white wine bottle covers.

For the Jewish executive on your list, you might want to consider one of several brass or marble pen holders, some of which are inscribed with the word "Shalom" for peace.

"My Very Own Jewish Calendar" is a 16-month design with crafts for kids, Jewish recipes and candlelighting times noted. Wooden dreidels are a popular seller, too, and come in bleached or dark woods. "Mazel Tov, Baby's First Record Book" is a great gift for new parents.

LOVE OF learning has always characterized the Jewish cultural tradition, and Temple Beth El offers an interesting, diverse mini bookstore of its own.

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