

Hanukkah provides options in gifts

By Debbie Wallis Landau
special writer

ON THE evening of Dec. 11, Jews the world over will light the first Hanukkah candles of the festive holiday.

Hanukkah always begins on the 25th day of Kislev on the Hebrew calendar, and is appropriately called the Feast of Lights because of a victory over true, impending darkness.

The Maccabees — Mattathias, his five sons and their followers — triumphed over the Syrian-Greeks (Seleucids) in 164 B.C.E.

The Syrian-Greeks had desecrated the temple in Jerusalem and forced Jews to bow down to their gods and accept Greek customs. In attacking the temple, the Syrian-Greeks were attempting to destroy Judaism.

The legend is told that when the Maccabees went to light the temple candelabrum, only enough oil to keep it aglow for one day was found. Miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days. Thus, Hanukkah is observed for eight days.

That, indeed, is the main feature of the celebration of Hanukkah: the kindling of lights on eight successive nights of the holiday. It's customary for Jewish families to light their own menorahs. Many families give

individual menorahs (menorim) to each family member.

IF YOU'VE ever been to a Hanukkah party, you know a game of dreidel and a feast centered on potato latkes is the rule.

The latkes, or pancakes, are typically fried in oil to commemorate the Maccabees' use of the oil in the temple. In Israel, people instead celebrate by eating doughnuts, fried in oil, called sufganiyot.

All dreidls have four Hebrew letters: nun, gimel, hay and shem, which symbolize the words "Nes, gadol, haya, sham." "A great miracle happened here."

GIFT GIVING at Hanukkah is a very individualized custom. Some families observe the candle lighting with the opening of a different gift every night. Others buy one family gift.

To some Jews, gifts take the form of Hanukkah gelt, chocolate coins gaily wrapped in gold foil and bound up in a mesh bag and different kinds of dreidls.

What's less understood is that Hanukkah, though a cause for rejoicing and celebration, is not a major religious holiday in the Jewish faith.

It is often mistakenly linked with Christmas, for no reason other than the two observances take place usually in December.

WHETHER YOU wish to make your Hanukkah purchases elaborate or simple, many local merchants have anticipated your shopping needs.

For example, Chantel's in West Bloomfield carries what many local residents claim is the most extensive selection of menorim in the Detroit area.

Owner Sarah Skoczylas and Jordana Golan showcase menorim crafted from brass, silverplate, goldplate, ceramic wood and glass.

They range in price from \$25 to \$200. Skoczylas said, "We have menorahs which are very traditional, and some that are quite contemporary."

A true menorah will hold nine candles, one for each night of Hanukkah and the ninth for the Shamash, or worker. This candle illuminates all the others.

Chantel's sells candlesticks in varying materials, as well as kiddush cups for blessings with wine, and mezuza to fasten to a doorway, which symbolizes a Jewish household.

AT EMERY'S Creative Jewelers in

Farmington Hills, two generations of fine jewelers are available to create customized jewelry to the customer's desire.

Emery Weinberger and his son, Robert, always have on hand Stars of David, chan dle symbols and mezuzot.

But they will put their artistry to work and personally design a custom name ring with any Jewish symbol you prefer, or a necklace or even wedding ring with a Hebrew inscription. Hebrew name necklaces are popularly requested.

The store offers patrons a blend of fine gold, silver and gemstone jewelry and timepieces with contemporary jewelry and gift items by artisans.

THE WEINBERGERS carry antique clocks by David Scherer, an assortment of musical boxes, Christmas pin, time clocks, and a collection of candles, figurines, paper and metal menorahs.

They also have a large and attractive collection of menorahs and gifts jewelry.

Initial pins are a big seller, as are sterling chain, bracelets that Terry Weinberger Herman personally designed for the store.

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