

Chabad of Greater Somerset, Hunterdon and Union Counties CHABAD JEWISH CENTER AT BASKING RIDGE, NEW JERSEY

LIFE is about growth and development. But, life also has a way of settling into patterns; we can live on 'auto-pilot', without mindfulness and consciousness. **JEWISH HOLIDAYS** each provides an opportunity, a 'pause button', for us to reflect on a specific life-lesson and value. **CHANUKAH** commemorates the tenacity and principle-centeredness of the Macabees, who fought and won a difficult battle for the right to live by their values. The **HOLIDAY'S LESSON** is clear: We need to identify our deeply-held values, and then be willing to stand by them; even - or especially - when they are threatened. And when we do, we'll be surprised at the strength we find inside ourselves. Chanukah reminds us to stand up for what we believe to be moral and correct. Even when it's difficult and unpopular. We're reminded of the **MACABEAN TENACITY** and encouraged to find our own. Thus, the Macabees are more than a group who lived in the ancient world, they are a concept. And Chanukah is more than a Holiday, it's a value by which to live.



Prepared for the parents of Breitman Family Hebrew School



CHANUKAH

The story of Chanukah opens 2000 years ago, when the land of Israel was part of the Syrian-Greek Empire, under the rule of King Antiochus. Desiring to unify his vast kingdom through the medium of a common religion and culture, Antiochus tried to root out the individualism of the Jews by suppressing all the Jewish Laws, and replacing them with Hellenism. Hellenism was a mindset that idealized outward beauty in contrast to Judaism's emphasis on a Divine moral code. **KING ANTIOCHUS** blasphemed all that was righteous and holy to the Jewish people. He disallowed religious practice, going from town to town forcing the inhabitants to worship pagan gods. He replaced the High Priest from the Temple in Jerusalem with a Hellenist. The High Priest used his high office to spread the Greek customs among the priesthood. Sacred practices, like the daily kindling of the Menorah in the Temple with sanctified oil, was halted. Judaism and its practices were under siege. **ONE DAY**, the henchmen of Antiochus arrived in the village of Modin where the respected Mattityahu lived. The Syrian officer built an altar in the marketplace of the village and demanded that Mattityahu offer sacrifices to the Greek gods. Mattityahu replied, "I, my sons and my brothers are determined to remain loyal to the covenant which our G-d made with our ancestors!" He, his sons, and a group of loyal and courageous Jews slipped into the hills of Judea. There they formed a small army, its soldiers called the Macabees, and from time to time, they left their hiding places to fall upon enemy detachments and outposts,

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QUESTIONS *for* DISCUSSION

These can be modified for young children

JOY:

Joy is an important component to the Jewish experience; it is a fuel that energizes our practices and customs. Which part of Chanukah makes you feel most joyful? Why?

INTEGRITY:

The Macabees were loyal to their belief system; they weren't bullied into deviating from their principles. Have you ever been faced with a situation in which you had to stand up for your own beliefs? Have you ever had to choose between group popularity and sticking to principles? In retrospect, would you make the same choice?

GRATITUDE:

The holiday of Chanukah is an expression of gratitude to Hashem for helping us during that period in history. It is also a recognition that Hashem helps us through our lives today. What are things for which you feel grateful?

SYMBOLISM:

The mitzvot are not just decontextualized rituals; they are designed to remind us of certain themes. For example, the mitzvah of morning prayers reminds us to set our day on a meaningful course. The mitzvah of eating sweet foods on Rosh Hashanah reminds us of the potential for us all to attain sweetness and goodness in the year to come. Which of the Chanukah rituals has a message you can personally relate to?

IDENTITY:

As Jewish people, we share a Torah, our history, a culture, and customs. The Macabees felt that the Torah's Divine moral code was central to *their* identity and fought to protect it. How would you define your Jewish identity?

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and to destroy the pagan altars that were built by order of Antiochus. **BEFORE HIS DEATH**, Mattityahu called his sons together and urged them to continue to fight in defense of G-d's Torah; he made his son Judah the leader of the Macabees.

ANTIOCHUS SENT HIS GENERAL

Apolonius to wipe out Judah and his followers, the Macabees. Though greater in number and equipment than their adversaries, the Syrians were defeated by the Macabees. **NOW THE MACABEES RETURNED** returned to Jerusalem to liberate it. They entered the Temple and cleared it of the idols placed there by the Syrian vandals. They were eager to reinstate the practices of Temple life. When they set out to light the Menorah, they found only a small cruse of sanctified oil (bearing the seal of the High Priest), which was sufficient for only one day. By a miracle of G-d, this oil continued to burn for eight days, until a new batch was made available.

IN COMMEMORATION of this, our sages appointed these eight days for annual thanksgiving and for lighting candles. Each year since, we celebrate the Chanukah holiday. **WE LIGHT THE MENORAH** for eight days, commemorating the miracle of the oil. Judaism is a sensory religion, with its practices intended to reinforce the essential message. So, we eat foods that are made with oil like latkes and doughnuts and remember how G-d rewarded the Macabees because they stood up for their beliefs. We remember how the Macabees fought for the right to live by their Jewish moral code; we remind ourselves, that we, too,

