

Chanukah: Miracles, Lights, and Action

Chanukah's themes suggest a wide range of activities that families can celebrate at home. Over the course of the eight-day holiday, enhance your nightly candle-lighting ceremony with one or more of the following activities.

Celebrate the Miracle of Chanukah.

For many educators, the miracle of Chanukah is the defeat of the Syrian-Greek army by the small band of Maccabees and the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem. (The story of the oil is widely believed to be a rabbinic construct to take the focus away from the three-year war.)

Either way, the holiday is a celebration of miracles. In the Jewish worship service, we give thanks to God for the “miracles that we experience every day”.

Preparation: No preparation is needed for this activity.

Activity:

1. Go for a short family “miracle walk” – to observe the miracles that surround us. Make it a silent walk.
2. At your candle-lighting ceremony, have family members share:
 - A miracle of nature - something they observed on the walk, or
 - A miracle of humanity – an experience with someone else, or a quality they’ve observed in someone else.

Celebrate the Festival of Lights.

Another name for Chanukah is the “Festival of Lights.” But not all light is a literal flame or light bulb. The expression “the light of my life” refers to a person who can make you happy when you are having a bad day. In “My Jewish Year” the author discusses happy memories as points of light in our lives and talks about how important it is to “preserve single moments of radiance”.

Preparation: No preparation is needed for this activity.

Activity: At your candle-lighting ceremony, have each person tell about:

- An especially happy time that brightened their day, or
- A memory that lights them up whenever they think about it, or
- A time when someone was the “light of their life.”

Giving Night.

Gifts are a big part of our modern Chanukah celebration. In many homes, families designate one night of Chanukah as “Giving Night” – a day when they give, instead of receive, gifts to add more light to the world.

You can make a family or friends group activity out of shopping for and assembling food baskets for a homeless shelter or shopping for and wrapping small gifts for children at a Ronald McDonald House or orphanage. Feel free to choose your own favorite organization for your giving activity.





This activity augments the Rodef Reads selection for 2018-2019, *My Jewish Year* by Abby Pogrebin. It is designed to support at-home family celebration of the Jewish holidays.

One organization in the DC area that appreciates donations is “So Others Might Eat” (SOME). At this time of year they particularly look for holiday “shoebox gifts” for their clients; preparing these shoeboxes is a great way to combine family and friend togetherness with a giving activity. In 2018, SOME is accepting holiday shoebox gifts through Friday, December 7, which is about half-way through Chanukah. If that timing doesn’t work for you, toiletry kits are accepted year-round and are described here: <https://some.org/give/ways-to-give/donate-goods/>

Preparation: A description of the holiday shoebox gifts can be found at this site: <https://some.org/volunteer/holiday-opportunities/shoeboxes/> . You will need:

- Empty shoeboxes
- Giftwrap, scissors and tape. Consider holiday or other brightly colored giftwrap.
- For each shoebox:
 - 5 Clothing Items: One hat, scarf, pair of gloves, one pair of socks, one pair of underwear
 - 7 Hygiene Items: One travel size each: soap, shampoo, lotion, toothpaste, toothbrush, deodorant and two razors.
 - For women, also include 5-10 sanitary napkins and/or tampons;
 - For children, also include a small gift or toy.

Activity: This is a three-part activity.

1. Divide the shopping list of items for your boxes among family members and friends. Ask friends and neighbors to donate shoe boxes.
2. On Giving Night, gather for a Shoebox Assembly Party. Bring all of the items to one house. Consider serving latkes, donuts, or other holiday food. Assemble as many boxes as you can and wrap them as holiday gifts (wrap the lid and box separately). Label each box to indicate if it is appropriate for an adult woman, adult man, boy, girl, or infant.
3. Deliver the wrapped boxes to SOME at 71 O Street, NW Washington, DC 20001. Drop-off hours are: Monday – Friday 8:00am - 4:00pm and Saturday – Sunday 7:00am - 2:00pm. Questions regarding donations should be directed to the Donations Manager at 202.797.8806, ext. 2104 or [**donations@some.org**](mailto:donations@some.org).