

# The Chanukah Play

by *Mike Freedman*

## Cast

Speaker 1  
Speaker 2  
Speaker 3  
Speaker 4

Father  
Mother  
Child 1  
Child 2

King Antiochus - King of Syria  
Captain of the Guard  
Syrian Soldiers

Mattathias - An elderly priest  
Judah -  
Johanah } his sons  
Eleazar  
Simon }

*A Chanukiah can probably be borrowed from a teachers; centre, from a Jewish family or from a local synagogue.*

## Introduction:

*Modify  
according  
to day*

**Speaker 1:** Today is the first day of the Jewish festival of Chanukah. Last night Jewish people all over the world celebrated by lighting the first candle.

**Speaker 2:** This evening two candles will be lit, tomorrow three candles and so on until next Sunday evening when there will be eight candles.

**Speaker 3:** This candlestick is called a chanukiah. It is a special candlestick which is used at Chanukah. Each night there is an extra candle called the servant candle which is used for lighting the others.

**Speaker 4:** Let's look in on a family who are about to light their chanukiah...

## Scene 1:

**Father:** Come, children, it's time to light the Chanukah candles.

*The family gather round*

**Father:** Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who makes us holy through doing His commands, and commands us to kindle the lights of Chanukah. (all say Amen)

We kindle these lights to commemorate the wonders, the heroic acts and the marvellous and consoling deeds which You performed for our fathers through your holy priests in those days at this season. During all the eight days of Chanukah these lights are holy and we are not permitted to make use of them, but only to see them in order to thank Your name for the wonders, the victories and the marvellous deeds.

**Child 1:** Dad, tell us the story of Chanukah.

**Child 2:** Yes, Dad, why do we light the candles. What is Chanukah about?

**Father:** O.K. It all happened a very long time ago - almost two thousand three hundred years ago. In those days the Jewish people lived in the country that we now call Israel. They had a temple in the city of Jerusalem where they worshipped God.

**Mother:** But in those days the land was ruled by the king of Syria, whose name was Antiochus. He didn't believe in God. Instead he believed in Zeus and the other gods of Greece. Antiochus wanted everyone to be the same as him so he made a law...

### **Scene 2:**

**Antiochus:** Everyone had better listen to this new law that I have just made. You must worship Zeus and the other Greek gods. If you don't you will be put to death. Guard! Take some of soldiers and take over the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Knock their altar down and put up a golden statue of the Great God Zeus. That will show them whose god is the best!!

**Father:** So the Syrian soldiers took command of the temple. They damaged the building, They stole the great gold candlesticks and they put up a statue of the god Zeus. They even put out the Ner Tamid, The everlasting light that stays on in the synagogue all the time to remind us that God is there. Most people were too frightened to complain.

**Mother:** But in the small town of Modin lived a priest called Mattathias and his 5 sons. Their names were: Johanan, Simon, Judah, Eleazar and Jonathan. One day some soldiers came to Modin....

### **Scene 3:**

**Captain:** Right, men, put that statue of Zeus over here. OK you townspeople you must come and worship the Great god Zeus.

**Mother:** At first no one came forward but after the soldiers threatened to kill anyone who didn't a man stepped forward and bowed down to the statue. Mattathias, the priest was furious...

**Mattathias:** (*grabbing a sword from the nearest soldier*) You traitor!! (*He kills the man – The other townspeople attack the soldiers and kill them*). If you are for God follow me!

**Father:** Many of the people, including Mattathias' five sons followed him and the rebels hid in the hills. Before long they had formed a small army led by Mattathias' son Judah.

They had many battles with the Syrian troops and won so many of them that the people called Judah Maccabee, which means The Hammerer. Judah Maccabee and his army were so successful that they soon drove Antiochus out of the land and they were able to get the temple back.

**Mother:** But when they got there...

**Scene 4:**

**Judah:** Look at this mess! We'll have to clean it up.

**Johanah:** The Ner Tamid has gone out. We must relight it straight away.

**Eleazar:** Judah, there's only a day's supply of oil for the lamp.

**Simon:** I will go and get some

**Jonathan:** But It will take more than a week to get it and to purify it so that it can be used in the holy temple!

**Judah:** Well, we'll light it anyway and well pray to God to keep the flame burning.

**Mother:** Although there was only enough oil for one day the flame in the Ner Tamid kept burning for eight days while more oil was prepared. The people said it was a miracle.

**Townpeople:** It's a miracle!

**Father:** When Judah and his people had cleaned up the temple they held a ceremony to dedicate it once again to the worship of God. The name Chanukah means Dedication, and for eight days we light candles to remind us of the miracle that happened so long ago.

**Speaker 1:** For Jewish people Chanukah is a special time. Rather like the Christian festival of Christmas, it is a time when families get together and children are given presents. At Chanukah there are special games to play and special foods to eat.

**Speaker 2:** A favourite game is driedle. A driedle is a sort of spinning top with letters on its 4 sides. When it stops spinning and falls over one of the letters is on top. Children play a game where they win or lose sweets depending on which letter lands upwards.

**Speaker 3:** Jews make a special point of eating foods like doughnuts which have been fried in lots of oil. A favourite is potato pancakes called latkes (*Pronounced LUTK-Z*), which are made from grated potato which is mixed with flour and egg and onion to make a thick mixture. Spoonfuls of the mixture are deep fried until they are golden brown and delicious!

**Speaker 4:** But Chanukah also has a serious side. All those years ago Judah Maccabee and his followers fought for the freedom to follow their own beliefs and at Chanukah Jews like to spend some time thinking how important it is for people to be free to believe in their own religions.