

# 'Happy Chanukah' -- What It Means

## Catholic Press Features

"Children will enjoy watching for the menorah in the window of Jewish homes and will be interested in knowing that some people think the custom of lights at Chanukah — which is also called the Festival of Lights — may be the source for the lights on our Christmas tree."

A menorah is an eight-pronged candle holder. Chanukah is the Jewish Feast celebrated this year between Dec. 16 and Dec. 23, and the quote is from the National Council of Catholic Women's "The More We Are Together, The Happier We Will Be."

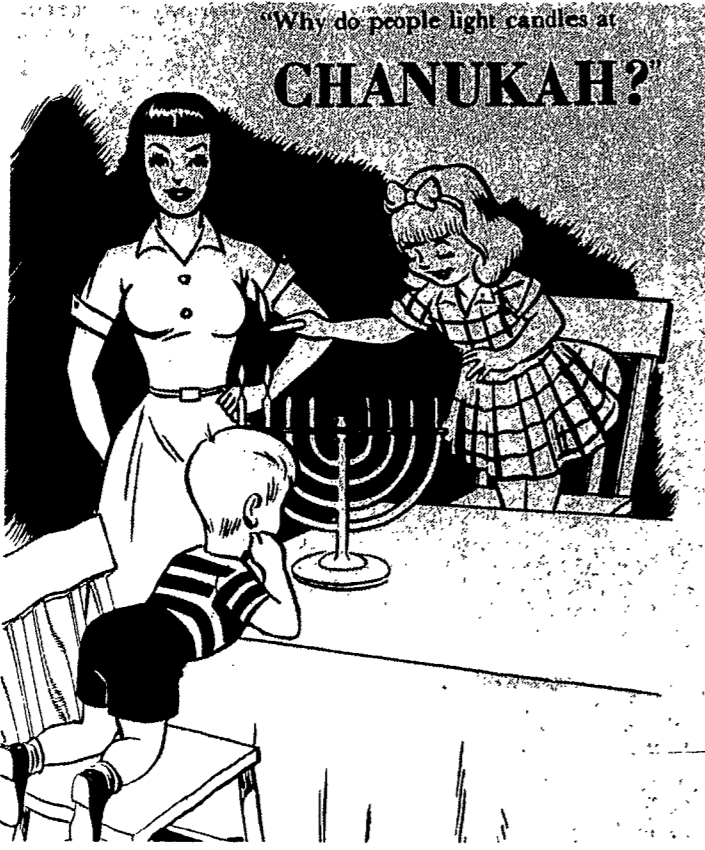
A highlight of the kit is the attention given to Chanukah, with a description of the feast, its importance to the Jewish people, and several suggestions on how Catholic children and adults can learn more about the Jewish tradition at Chanukah time.

Included in the kit, distributed by the NCCW's church communities commission, is a booklet for 6 and 7-year-old children, titled "Why do people light candles at Chanukah?" The booklet was originally designed to teach Jewish children about Chanukah, and it was included in the kit because "the official statement of the Catholic Bishops' Commission for Ecumenical Affairs... points out that we must go to the sources, and where possible, have teachers from various traditions present their own materials."

In an NCCW commentary, written by Mrs. Arlene Swidler, national chairman of the NCCW church communities commission, Catholics are advised to read Chapter 4, Verses 32 to 59 of the First Book of Maccabees for the origin of the Chanukah feast.

"It celebrates the recovery of the Temple from the Syrians by Judas Maccabee and its rededication," says the commentary on Chanukah. "From the traditional story that the Maccabees could find only enough oil in the Temple to light the candelabrum one night, but that it miraculously lasted for eight nights, derives the custom of lighting one more candle on the menorah each night until all are lit on the eighth night."

"During this festival the children also love hearing again the story of the Mac-



Why do people light candles at CHANUKAH?

cabees and the story of Hannah and her seven sons (2 Maccabees, Chapter 7).

"This is the story about how they accepted torture and death rather than obey a heathen king's command to eat swine's flesh, which was forbidden to them."

Mrs. Swidler notes that, in addition to Chanukah's probably having inspired the Christmas tree "throughout the world, holidays which emphasize candles and lights come at this time of the year. Besides Christmas and Chanukah, we could mention Diwali in India and Lucia Day in Sweden."

She also notes that "Jewish children enjoy playing

with their dreidels at this time. Dreidels are four-sided tops with a Hebrew letter on each side; the letters stand for 'A great miracle happened there.'"

In the illustrated children's booklet, a mother tries to answer simply her two children's question about why people light candles at Chanukah. The brief text, written by Jacqueline Bregoff, goes:

"That's an old, old story, children," Susan's and David's mother explained. "Thousands of years ago, a king called Antiochus ruled over Palestine. He wanted everybody to pray to the Greek gods of his religion. But Jews refused to do this. They wanted to pray

only to the one God of all the world.

"One Jewish priest and his five sons were ready to fight. They were called the Maccabees. And they led the fight against Antiochus for the right to their own religion. After a few years of fighting, the Jews won. They got back their Temple in Jerusalem and again lit the Everlasting Light. They celebrated for eight happy days. That is why we light candles every night at Chanukah time. We light one candle the first night, three on the third night, and so on, until finally, when the last night of Chanukah comes, eight candles burn all at once."

The text continues: Susan and David looked at the candleholder which stood over the fireplace. They counted to see how many places there were in it for the candles.

"There's room for nine candles, not eight, Mommy," Susan said.

"You're right," Mother agreed. "There are nine altogether. The extra candle is called the 'Shammos,' or servant candle. We use it every night to light the other candles."

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## Seminary Stores Hebrew Documents On Microfilms

New York — (RNS) — American scholars now have quick access to almost every Hebrew manuscript in the world through a massive microfilming project nearly completed at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Dr. Louis Finkelstein, chancellor, reported here.

Dr. Finkelstein explained the importance of the more than 3,000 microfilm reels. "Before the microfilm era," he said, "I used to go regularly to the British Museum and to the Bodleian Library at Oxford University to consult manuscripts for research and books. Some of my colleagues had to travel to Paris, Rome, Jerusalem and other cities to study manuscript sources."

The use of microfilm for providing access to original documents is widespread in the nation's higher education institutions. Notre Dame University and St. Louis University, both Catholic schools, have microcopies of the most important Greek and Latin and Western European language manuscripts from the Vatican Library as a result of a project by the Knights of Columbus, Catholic laymen's group.

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## Rabbi Asks For New Year's Fast

NEW YORK (RNS) — The president of the Rabbinical Council of America has urged that New Year's Eve be kept as a day of fasting and prayer to mourn the burning and desecration of synagogues here recently.

A proclamation issued by the Rabbinical Council said that members of all faiths should be concerned with these desecrations because "an attack against one religion is a signal for war against all religions."

## be a real hero



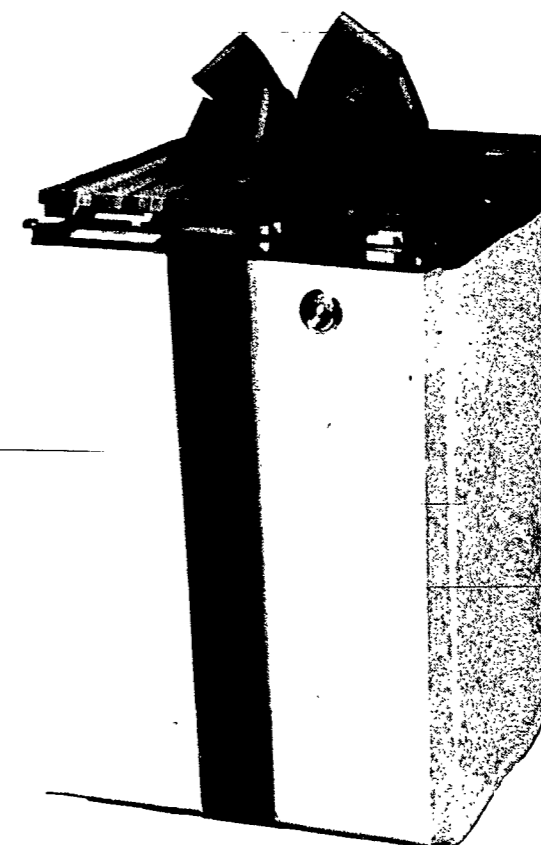
This is your year to leap tall buildings with a single bound—to be faster than a speeding bullet—to be more powerful than a locomotive. And that's because this is the year you become a super hero.

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one on her Christmas list—an automatic dishwasher.

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