

We all know when Christmas is, but when the heck is Hanukkah? It changes each year. The Jewish calendar is based on the moon cycle with each month beginning at the new moon. The months have different names than the Gregorian calendar, such as Nissan, Adar, Tammuz and Tishrei. Hanukkah begins on 25 Kislev, which will fall sometime in December. This year, Hanukkah begins the evening of Sunday December 18th.

The 25th of the Jewish month is close to its darkest time with the moon just a sliver. And the Festival of Lights, as Hanukkah is sometimes called, starts at the darkest time of the year, near the winter solstice. Jewish families worldwide bring out their menorahs, or candelabras, and candles, and starting on the first evening gradually light from one to eight candles. What are they actually celebrating?

This is the only festival that has a clear historical record. During the second century BCE, the Land of Israel was under Greek domination and all local religions were being rooted out. Over a three-year period, a group of Jewish fighters called the Maccabees staged a revolt, were able to recapture Jerusalem, and set out to re-dedicate the Temple. While unclear as to what really happened, the story that has been handed down is that when they went to light the lamps using the holy oil, only one day's supply was found and it would take eight days to procure new oil. But the lamp stayed lit the whole eight days, and it was declared a miracle.

So how do we celebrate it? With the lighting of a candle, adding one each night until there are eight candles glowing. But also with foods that reflect the oil theme: potato latkes (pancakes) and special doughnuts called sufganiyot. And the custom has been to

give children Hanukkah gelt, or money, each evening; some families now give small gifts.

The Bowen Island Jewish community has traditionally gathered for a yearly Hanukkah party where we have made menorahs (you can make the candelabras from driftwood, play-clay or even a potato), sang songs, lit the candles, played games such as spin the dreidel, and then, of course, eat!

Bowen Islanders have many customs to bring more light during this long dark month of December. Light up Bowen on the first Saturday in December is the usual start. People put up their Christmas trees and string outside house lights. Jewish families on Bowen get out their candelabras; tradition says that they should be placed at an outside window, and the candles lit as soon “as the stars come out each evening”.

As of last year, a driftwood Menorah is now a part of the Children’s Centre Festival of Trees. This year, as Hanukkah begins after the December 3rd Light up Bowen, the first candle lighting will be on Sunday December 18th. Please come down at 430 pm to be part of the celebration. In this way, we all contribute in making the world a little brighter.



Happy Hanukkah!

Shirat Hayam