

Tani Talks Life (TTL), Brought to you by The Tani Talks Podcasts-This is the Shiur Where We Talk A Topic Per Session With Some Practical Lessons

Tonight's Topic: "**Flames, Games, and Staying Sane**"

All of my Podcasts of the TTP, TTPA, TTD, TTOT, and this life show, are on different podcast forums including iTunes Podcasts, Google Podcasts, and **MOST RECENTLY, YIDPOD!** (The Jewish podcast app service—download it on the app store!)

Shout out to Jake W/Eli N for their amazing hard work! For the refuah and yeshuah of anyone who wants or needs

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I used to think that Spring was my favorite time of year. But for some reason, this year it has changed to Fall, and now my favorite time is fall. After we get through the stressful period of the chagim that come out at us in full force back to back, we get the crisp weather, the feeling of renewal of the new school year, the changing leave colors...and then the clocks change and it gets dark and cold, literally overnight. In our town it felt like 65 degrees one night and then like 40 the next day. What happened?

The coldness of the winter is looming upon us. The fall transitions to the "holiday season" as the secular society calls it. They change from shmalloween decorations to thanksgiving ones to xmas ones. The holidays they have are very in your face, but ours are much more modest and low key. They make things into games and lack of meaning, but ours are full of meaning. We too have "Games" but they have purpose and they have meaning. We play dreidel as the ancient custom related back to when there were families hiding in caves from the Greeks and when the Greeks came to check the caves, instead of seeing Torah learning which was not allowed, they saw games being played. We have the four letters N G H SH for us outside of Israel, neis gad hahah shum—the miracle took place there in Israel, and in Israel the Sh turns to the Peh to say neis gad haya Poh, the oracle took place here, in Israel for those who live there.

Over the years I have thought of some aspects. Obviously oily foods to resemble the oil miracle, such as doughnuts and latkes and the like. Music and lights to celebrate the actual miracle. Some play for gelt chocolate gelt, as it could be indicative of how sweet it was Hashem had the oil last eight days and the few over took the many. The idea of presents also could be that we want to give to those around us—our spouses and our kids, as Hashem gave to us a period of renewal in the mikdash back then.

Interestingly, this holiday is often under appreciated and done out of rote. Which for me is extra sad as this is my favorite holiday of the entire year, the one I connect with most and love most the whole year. Some people don't decorate or do more than the lights. Some do presents, some do decorations, some just try to get through it. I personally have changed our stance recently. We

decorated the house and front door last year and g-d willing this year. Since we were married, I whip out my guitar to play each night, and we played with the kids as well over the years. Last year we got the two boys their own train candle menorah and I theirs with them hand over hand. We did presents in the past and this year the idea was to do more craft and activities Chanukah related. Its' easy for me to get very into this holiday. It's awesome! We have Chanukah lights, good food, music, presents, and so much more! Yet for some reason secular society makes ten times as much a seal out of their one day in late December as is given to our holiday which is 8 times as long and at least eight times as awesome.

Why do they go all out for one day with elements that don't make sense with one another? I highly recommend listening to the Shiur by Rabbi Kelemen on the topic the true story of xmas to see how bewildering their day is and how no aspect makes any sense and it all is not based in anything real. You can find his awesome Shiur, which I try bli neder to listen to every year, on simpletoremember.com

The question is how to turn the cold of this time of year, this one holiday in the dark cold nights to bring light and warmth to us and make it have the ability to hold us over and incorporate true meaning. I mentioned what we do in our house, but what can you do in your house with your family to make the most of this awesome holiday? Think about how to really gain and How to really stay sane in our holiday, **real holiday**, when society goes crazy for their one or two small holidays. Let's figure out about flames, games, and staying sane.

Growing up, our house was decorated very well for Chanukah.

However, in society, We know that many people go a little crazy decorating in the fall and winter, especially in secular culture for shmalloween and Xmas. Have you ever heard of overabundance for Chanukah?

Listen to this story from click2houston.com:

Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday that celebrates the miracle of when just a day's supply of oil kept a menorah in the rededicated Temple in Jerusalem lit for eight days.

Jewish families celebrate the first night of Hanukkah by lighting the menorah, eating traditional latkes and gelt, and playing games like spinning the dreidel.

And in a year where we have seen many dark moments, the Hanukkah House in Meyerland has very a special light display that is sure to brighten your day.

Philip Grosman is the man behind the lights— he has been putting up this massive display for thirteen years.

His wife Dana and three kids (Sophie, Matthew and Ellie) do help in putting up some of the lights, but Philip admits he's the Clark Griswold of the family --- making sure each light is perfectly placed.

At the end of the day, Philip says he continues to put up the Hanukkah display each year for all the kids.

If you and your family would like to stop by the Hanukkah House in Meyerland, it's located in the 5100 block of Carew Street.

abc7chicago.com also points it out

- Every year you'll see thousands of Xmas light events, decorations on neighbors' homes, even displays up at work.

But one father is on a mission to make decorating for Hanukkah more popular.

Philip Grosman started putting out lights for Hanukkah a few years ago at his home in Meyerland. Over the years it has grown bigger and bigger, with inflatables, wooden dreidels, even giant gelt added to the lawn.

He even has a button so people can listen to Hanukkah music while they enjoy the display. If you want to check it out in person, you can visit the 5100 block of Carew St, Houston, TX 77096.

You can also check it out on Instagram at www.instagram.com/hanukkahhouse.

That is why I call an interesting reaction to the secular decorations and displays.

Let's think a little bit about the real elements of Chanukah itself. As we are now leading up to the days of Chanukah, let us talk a little bit about it. As mentioned, Chanukah happens to be my favorite holiday of the entire year-I LOVE Chanukah. I love every element to it-I love the aspect of lighting the candles, giving the presents, dancing and singing, playing games (like the dreidel), and eating oily foods. All around I think it is an awesome holiday, lasting 8 amazing days (again-it lasts eight times as long as the "holiday" of what the secular society has), and to repeat, I believe it is totally underrated and under-appreciated, as well as under-showcased. In fact, we went all out recently with lots of decorations and wrapped things!

But, if we think about the focus of the holiday, the menorah and the candles, an essence can come to "light" -pun intended. The candle and candles that we light, is really a light to the darkness around us. As the phrase goes, "One candle can banish the darkness." In the dark, cold, dreary days of winter, when the days are so short and so dark and all hope seems lost, the candles of Chanukah ***come to be a light to us***, reminding us to be persistent and stubborn in hope that we can bring light to the world and have light in our lives, making the world better and brighter even when all around us seems so dark and depressing.

The lights shine bright, bringing us serenity and peace. The lights remind us also of the burning candle in our hearts—“Ki ner mitzvah v'torah or” the pasuk goes, the mitzvos are our candles and the torah is our light, as the pasuk says “Ner hashem nishmas Adam, chofets kol chadrei batten”—which is one of my passukim that I actually say daily, which shows that the candle of Hashem is within us and protecting us from all around us, ***persistently*** every day.

These lights on Chanukah remind us that the world can be good, when seen through the prism of Torah and mitzvos. *The lights remind us to stubbornly follow the passion to do what we love to do through the framework of the Torah to hopefully make the world a better place.* The flames burning remind us that the Torah should be burning always in our hearts and in our lives, every single day.

Let us also reflect on the fight for the good of the Chashmonaim, commemorated in the Al hanissim prayer we say in shemone esrei and benching on Chanukah (translation from chabad.org):

And [we thank You] for the miracles, for the redemption, for the mighty deeds, for the saving acts, and for the wonders which You have wrought for our ancestors in those days, at this time—In the days of Matityahu, the son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, when the wicked Hellenic government rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and violate the decrees of Your will. But You, in Your abounding mercies, stood by them in the time of their distress. You waged their battles, defended their rights, and avenged the wrong done to them. You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton sinners into the hands of those who occupy themselves with Your Torah. You made a great and holy name for Yourself in Your world, and effected a great deliverance and redemption for Your people Israel to this very day. Then Your children entered the shrine of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your Sanctuary, kindled lights in Your holy courtyards, and instituted these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great Name.

Hashem was with us in this fight in our history the whole way through and these fighters were stubborn and perseverated to the end of the story. Hashem is also with us within our own fights of our own lives every single day as well.

So why hide this awesome holiday? Why not decorate your house and surroundings and be proud of this wonderful holiday? Play meaningful games with your family and stay sane during a crazy time in the world.

The Gemara in [Shabbat 21b](#) explains

מאי חנוכה? דתנו רבנן: בכ"ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמנא אינון דלא למספד בהון ודלא להתענות בהון. שפשינכנסו יונים להיכל טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל. וכשגברה מלכות בית השמונאי ונצחום, בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פה אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול, ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד. נעשה בו גם והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים. לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשוהו ימים טובים בהלל והודאה.

The Gemara asks: **What is Hanukkah**, and why are lights kindled on Hanukkah? The Gemara answers: **The Sages taught in *Megillat Ta'anit*: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the days of Hanukkah are eight. One may not eulogize on them and one may not fast on them.** What is the reason? **When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary they defiled all the oils that were in the Sanctuary** by touching them. **And when the Hasmonean monarchy overcame them and emerged victorious over them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil that was placed with the seal of the High Priest**, undisturbed by the Greeks. **And there was sufficient oil there to light the candelabrum for only one day. A miracle occurred and they lit the candelabrum from it eight days. The next year the Sages instituted those days and made them holidays with recitation of *hallel* and special **thanksgiving** in prayer and blessings.**

So really there are two great miracles on Chanukah—one wide open about the few defeating the many—a large revealed miracle, and the oil lasting eight days—a hidden miracle within the temple. that occurred on Chanukah. This has been explained by commentators about involving hidden and open miracles. What better way to show the gratitude to Hashem then in hidden and revealed ways. Decorating our homes inside, with private family time of lighting, paying eating, and decorating our outside of our homes with music, parties, and events that could be a kiddush hashem. I love when there are major menorah lighting ceremonies such as the huge Chabad menorahs or the white house lighting, or when there are mitzvah trucks driving around playing music—as long as it is not too loud or making a chill hashem or desecrating G-d's name or bothering our neighbors. We can see the flames, play the games and make sure to stay sane—and show society what is really proper and not lame.

Look at the text of what we say each night of Chanukah, from the siddur, from sefaria.org:

ברוך אתה "אל מלך העולם

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe

אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של חנוכה.

who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light the Chanukah candles.

ברוך אתה ""אל מלך העולם

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe

שְׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה.

who made miracles for our ancestors in their days in this season.

בלילה הראשון מוסיפים:

On the first night:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe

שֶׁהֵחֵינּוּ וְקִיָּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעֵנוּ לְזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה.

who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

Festivals, Chanukah, Service for Lighting Chanukah Candles, Hanerot Hallalu

הַנִּירוֹת הַלְלוּ שְׁאֲנוּ מְדַלִּיקִין, עַל הַנִּסִּים וְעַל הַנִּפְלְאוֹת וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת וְעַל הַמִּלְחָמוֹת, שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה, עַל יְדֵי כַּהֲנֵיךָ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים. וְכָל שְׂמוֹנַת יָמֵי הַחֲנֻכָּה הַנִּירוֹת הַלְלוּ קֹדֶשׁ הֵם וְאִין לָנוּ רְשׁוּת לְהַשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בָּהֶם, אֲלֵא לְרְאוּתָם בְּלִבָּד, כְּדֵי לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְהַלֵּל לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל עַל נִסִּיךָ וְעַל נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ וְעַל יְשׁוּעָתְךָ.

We kindle these lights on account of the miracles, the deliverances and the wonders which thou didst work for our fathers, by means of thy holy priests. During all the eight days of Chanukah these lights are sacred, neither is it permitted us to make any profane use of them; but we are only to look at them, in order that we may give thanks unto thy name for thy miracles, thy deliverances and thy wonders.

Festivals, Chanukah, Service for Lighting Chanukah Candles, Maoz Tzur

מֵעוֹז צוּר יְשׁוּעָתִי לָךְ נִצָּה לְשַׁבַּח.

O Fortress, Rock of my salvation, unto thee it is becoming to give praise:

תִּכּוֹן בֵּית תְּפִלָּתִי וְשֵׁם תּוֹדָה גִּזְבַּח.

let my house of prayer be restored, and I will there offer thee thanksgivings

לְעַת תִּכּוֹן מִטְבַּח מִצַּר הַמִּנְבַּח.

when thou shalt have prepared a slaughter of the blaspheming foe,

אֲזוֹ אֲגַמֹּר בְּשִׁיר מִזְמוֹר חֲנֻכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

I will complete with song and psalm the dedication of the altar.

רַעוֹת שְׂבָעָה נִפְשִׁי בְּיָגוֹן פָּחִי כָלָה.

Full sated was my soul with ills, my strength was spent with sorrow;

חַיִּי מָרְרוּ בְּקוֹשֵׁי בְּשׁוּעָבוֹד מַלְכוּת עֲגָלָה.

they embittered my life by hardship during my subjection to the dominion of Egypt,*

וּבְיָדוֹ הַגְּדוּלָה הוֹצִיא אֶת הַסַּגְלָה.

but God with his great power brought forth the chosen race,

תָּחִיל פִּרְעֹה וְכָל יָרְדוֹ כָּאֶבֶן בְּמַצּוּלָה

while the host of Pharaoh and all his seed sank like a stone into the deep.

דְּבִיר קֹדֶשׁוֹ הֵבִיאֲנִי וְגַם שָׁם לֹא שָׁקֵטִי

To his holy oracle he brought me, yet there also I found no peace,

וּבָא נוֹגֵשׁ וְהִגְלִנִי. כִּי זָרִים עֲבַדְתִּי

for the oppressor came and led me captive, because I had served strange gods:

וַיֵּין רַעַל מִסִּכְתִּי כַּמַּעֲט שְׁעַבְרְתִּי

I had to quaff the wine of bewilderment; well nigh had I perished,

קִזַּבְתִּי, זָרְבָבֶל, לְקִיץ שְׁבָעִים נוֹשַׁעְתִּי

when Babylon's end drew near; through Zerubbabel I was saved after seventy years.

בְּרוֹת קוֹמַת בְּרוֹשׁ, בְּקֵשׁ אֲגָגִי בֶן הַמְּדַתָּא

The Agagite (Haman), the son of Hammedatha, sought to cut down the lofty fir tree (Mordecai)*;

וַנְהַיְתָה לוֹ לִפְחַ וּלְמוֹקֵשׁ וּגְאָוָתוֹ נִשְׁבְּתָה

but his design became a snare to himself, and his pride was brought to an end.

רֹאשׁ יְמִינִי נִשְׂאֵת וְאוֹיֵב שְׂמוֹ מְחִיתָ

The head of the Benjamite thou didst exalt, but the enemy's name thou Midst blot out:

רַב בָּנָיו וְקִנְיָנָיו עַל הָעֵץ תְּלִיתָ

the many sons he had gotten thou didst hang upon the gallows.

וַיִּנָּגְפוּ נִקְבְּצוּ עָלַי אֲזַי בְּיָמֵי חֲשֻׁמְנַיִם

The Grecians were gathered against me in the days of the Hasmoneans;

וּפָרְצוּ חוֹמוֹת מְגִדְלִי וְטָמְאוּ כָּל הַשְּׁמָנִים

they broke down the walls of my towers, and defiled all the oils;

וּמִנּוֹתַר קִנְקֻנַיִם נַעֲשָׂה גַם לְשׁוֹשְׁנַיִם

but from one of the last remaining flasks a miracle was wrought for thy beloved*,

בְּנֵי בֵינָה יָמֵי שְׁמוֹנָה קָבְעוּ שִׁיר וַיִּרְנְנִים

and their men of understanding appointed these eight days for song and praises.

תְּשׁוּרָה זְרוּעַ קֹדֶשׁוֹ וְקָרַב קִיץ הַיְשׁוּעָה

Bare Your holy arm and hasten the End of salvation –

נָקָם נִקְמַת דָּם עֲבָדֶיךָ מֵאַמְהַת הַרְשָׁעָה.

Avenge the vengeance of Your servants' blood from the wicked nation.

כִּי אַרְכָּה לָנוּ הַשָּׁעָה וְאֵין קֵץ לַיְמֵי הַרְעָה.

For the time has delayed and there is no end to the days of evil,

דַּחֲהָ אֶדְמוֹן בְּצֵל צְלִמוֹן, הִקָּם לָנוּ רוּעָה שְׁבָעָה.

Push away the Red One in the lowest shadow and establish for us the seven shepherds.

We sing and dance about the great miracles Hashem has done for us not only in that time but in other times as well. Our beautiful holiday has inherent meaning and purpose and the aspects of Chanukah should represent that.

Rambam also points out in [Mishneh Torah, Scroll of Esther and Hanukkah מגילת תורה, הלכות מגילה Chapter 3](#)

During the period of the second Temple, when the Greek kings were in power, they proclaimed decrees against the Jewish people, abrogating their religion and forbidding them to study the Torah or to perform the divine precepts. They laid their hands on their wealth and their daughters; they entered the Temple and broke through it, defiling the things that were pure. The people of Israel were sorely distressed by their enemies, who oppressed them ruthlessly until the God of our fathers took pity, saved and rescued them from the hands of the tyrants. The Hasmonean great priests won victories, defeating the Syrian Greeks and saving Israel from their power. They set up a king from among the priests and Israel's kingdom was restored for a period of more than two centuries, until the destruction of the second Temple.

When, on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the Jews had emerged victorious over their foes and destroyed them, they re-entered the Temple where they found only one jar of pure oil, enough to be lit for only a single day; yet they used it for lighting the required set of lamps for eight days, until they managed to press olives and produce pure oil.

Because of this, the sages of that generation ruled that the eight days beginning with the twenty-fifth of Kislev should be observed as days of rejoicing and praising the Lord. Lamps are lit in the evening over the doors of the homes, on each of the eight nights, so as to display the miracle. These days are called Hanukkah, when it is forbidden to lament or to fast, just as it is on the days of Purim. Lighting the lamps during the eight days of Hanukkah is a religious duty imposed by the sages, like the reading of the Megillah on Purim.

Chanukah teaches us about the idea of a time of miracles.

The commentators also explain that the Maccabees were only 300 people fighting thousands, and it has been pointed out as well that the war lasted three years ([aish.com](#)). [chabad.org](#) points out but the Greeks had wanted to get rid of the spirituality of the Jew, especially with banning three major mitzvos, of shabbat, rosh chodesh, and brit Milah, three fundamental laws to Judaism

(without rosh chodesh there would be no Jewish calendar or holidays, without shabbat, the fundamental basis of Hashem controlling everything is doubted g-d forbid, and without brit Milah the trait of a Jewish male and foundation of being a Jew is gone). The greeks wanted to destroy us spiritually, and those courageous few stood up physically to take them out, and rededicated the temple in a physical and spiritual way.

aish.com points out that

*While the ancient Greeks enlightened the world with art, philosophy and science, they limited the human condition to the **physical and intellectual** realms. The **spiritual component**, indispensable to the Jewish worldview, was not part of the Greek worldview; thus our tradition associates the Greeks with **forces of darkness** (while we fight with light, symbolized by the candles)*

*The holiday of Hanukkah, established to commemorate the Jewish battle against **cultural assimilation**, has great relevance today, as we again confront a **struggle for Jewish survival**. Indeed, the emphasis on **external appearance** is a prominent theme in modern society.*

Over the centuries, the message of how Hanukkah has unexpectedly ignited the Jewish spark.

We fight using light, trying to inspire, ignite, and light those around us with meaning, purpose, spirituality, and fulfillment through Torah, Mitzvos and Chessed. We do so, throughout the centuries, throughout the years, throughout history, throughout our lives, and currently while we are all present in this world now, every single day. We should also put on an external appearance to Chanukah to show the world we are here to stay have always been here for good, and we stand for a treasure of beautiful values with holidays that have beautiful and proper foundations and meanings.

We can make it meaningful and fun for kids in non-present ways as well. We actually bought crafts for our kids this year to try to do together on different nights, such as stick and peel, coloring, felt items, and much more.

aish.com points out how to officially play the dreidel game:

The wonderful dreidel (Sevivan) game!

Learn how to play and understand the meaning behind the dreidel symbols.

Each player starts off with an equal number of coins, nuts, M&Ms, stones or whatever you wish to use.

Each player takes turns spinning the dreidel. If it lands on:

- **Nun** - the player receives nothing, next player spins.
- **Hey** - the player takes half of the pot.
- **Gimmel** - the player takes the entire pot.

- **Shin** - the player puts one piece into the pot.

Each time the pot is emptied out, each player puts in a piece (coin, nut, candy) and the game continues.

There are easy ways to get the holiday awesome aside from eating and giving presents, in addition to the dreidel game.

Judy Gruen points out on aish.com

Hanukkah arrives at the darkest time of the year, when daylight is in short supply, but the miracles that God performed for us thousands of years ago light our path to a festive, meaningful celebration. Hanukkah is a fun, delicious (fattening!) yet deeply spiritual holiday that is easy to share with friends and family.

Here are some ideas to light up your celebration during the eight nights of Hanukkah:

1. Give each child his or her own menorah. Children are especially proud of lighting menorahs they make themselves, and they can be made simply and creatively. During one of the last nights, when the room is bright with Hanukkah lights, take a family photograph. This custom can become a treasured chronicle of how your family grows over the years.

2. Be here now. Take plenty of time after lighting candles to enjoy being with family. Sing Hanukkah songs: *Ma Ozur*, *Haneiros Halalu*, and any others you enjoy. Stay “unplugged” from your smart phones while the candles are burning. Savor this special time together. When you’ve sung everything you feel like singing, bring on the gifts and dig into those hot latkes and *sufganiot*!

3. Talk up the miracles. Hanukkah means both “dedication” and “education,” so retell the story of the great Hanukkah miracles, both hidden and open. Buy a Hanukkah or Judaica-themed book for your children each year – you will build a nice holiday book collection, and reserving them for the holidays makes them seem new again for the children. For older children and adults, set a challenge for everyone to find a new Hanukkah insight to share. Every year there are new things to learn!

4. Let Mom rest. Part of the Hanukkah victory is credited to Yehudit, a daughter of Yochanan the High Priest and father of the Hasmonean family. During the time of the Maccabean revolt, Yehudit bravely and cleverly earned the trust of a Syrian-Greek general named Holofernes, convincing him that she would bring him valuable information that would help him defeat the Jewish uprising. Instead, like the heroine Yael who slew Cicera, Yehudit fed Holofernes wine and cheese until he fell into a deep slumber. She then unsheathed his sword and killed him, saving untold numbers of Jews. In deference to the heroism of Yehudit, it is a custom for women not to work while the candles are burning. This is a challenge for many women who are not used to

sitting still, so it's up to other family members to ensure that their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers actually just sit and enjoy!

5. Let the games begin! Along with the traditional dreidel game, make up your own: Hanukkah-themed word searches, Bingo, quizzes, and other games are a fun way to involve all family members, as well as guests at your Hanukkah party. Did you know that the dreidel traces its lineage all the way back to the time of the Syrian-Greek rule over Israel? Since Torah study had become a crime punishable by death, Jewish children hid in caves in order to study. When Greeks would approach to see what they were up to, out came the spinning tops, which the children pretended they were engrossed in playing. Visit <http://www.aish.com/h/c/f/> for more great activities. Think about Chanukah coloring pages and craft or art activities too!

6. Jingle gelt, Jingle gelt. No child is likely to let parents forget the custom of giving Hanukkah *gelt*, and not just the chocolate coins, either. In some communities a little *gelt* is given each night. Why money as gifts? One answer is that the Greeks did not destroy the oil from the Temple; they defiled it – a statement of their intent to infuse Greek ideas and ideals into Jewish life and Jewish possessions. Giving Hanukkah *gelt* reminds us of our freedom and obligation to use our material wealth for noble and spiritual ends. Underscoring this message, children are taught to give away some of their *gelt* to tzedakah.

7. Give thanks, modern-day Maccabees. Many families have the custom of taking one night and having everyone express what they feel grateful for, spiritually and materially. Feeling gratitude and expressing it are defining Jewish qualities, and what better time to do so than on the holiday that means “dedication”? Here's another angle to this theme: Since Hanukkah celebrates the Jewish affirmation of our spiritual values, and a refusal to buckle to even harsh pressure to assimilate, discuss ways that you have found to stand up for Jewish values when they have been challenged.

8. Check out the neighborhood. If you live in a Jewish neighborhood and it's not utterly freezing, take a walk and enjoy the sight of the dozens, if not hundreds, of menorahs spreading their beautiful, flickering lights in windows up and down your streets. The menorah is meant to be lit at the entryway of your home, visible to the street, to help publicize the miracle. Yet there have been times when it was dangerous for Jews to do so. We who live in lands of freedom can appreciate our ability to light our menorahs with pride and without fear, and to delight in the sight of endless Hanukkah lights spreading their special glow.

[aish.com](http://www.aish.com) also points out with writer Yael Zoldan:

(In relation to Chanukah and its decorations, the elements of the holiday like the menorah,) the whole scene isn't very big. You have to look for it to know that it is there. And who will look for it? The season outside is so very big, so exaggerated and all encompassing. Their holiday has music and peppermints and men standing outside of stores ringing bells. They have emails and catalogues and matching striped pajamas.

...And we have these small silver lights.

... It comes to wonder how our holiday has been made to seem small, insignificant, a momentary aside in the glitzy false cheer of this advertising extravaganza. How we have been sidelined in our own homes...

... However, isn't that, in fact, what the story was all about? They were many and we were few. Their culture was appealing and inviting. It desired to swallow up the small remnant of Judaism, to make them all part of a large whole, the same as everyone else. And that small band of Jews, those stubborn Maccabees refused. Faced with a life of hardship, hiding and privation they insisted. We don't want what you have. We would rather live in caves, in battle, on the run, than accept the sameness you offer us. We want only to be what we are, what we have always been. Separate, different, other.

...They were proving with action their passionate belief that God would not let them fail. ...with God on their side, they knew that the few could overcome the many, the weak could overpower the strong.

And so because of their faith, the Jewish people survived. Our culture, our pride, our stubbornness all survived. And all these years later we, their descendants, find the faith to defy our surroundings. Not for us the glitzy cheer of tinsel, not for us the big red man. Our menorahs are small but beautiful, our tiny flames light up the darkness of this long lonely night.

... We should think of our insistence on maintaining customs that must seem antiquated; our way of dress, the Jewish names we give our children, our careful Shabbos observance...think of our refusal to be assimilated, our insistence on maintaining the purity of our line, our pride at our differentness....maybe our tiny lights might be a signpost to someone who has lost his way in the darkness of this exile, who needs to know where home is....

That the lights are like us, small but pure. ...you have to look for them, but you may find that they are looking for you too.

The small persistent lights can light up our lives and our souls, we just have to look for them and find them. However, We too can have pride in our traditions, our holidays, our ways of life. Don't be afraid to showcase your Chanukah spirit! We aren't afraid to walk around on Purim looking crazy in our weird costumes, so why don't we showcase the wonderful holiday of Purim? Why should one Jew, of whatever traditional level, be the only one to make news about Chanukah decorations? We too can have and share proper Chanukah holiday cheer based on real values and traditions.

Listen to this story from chabad.org from writer Mina Gordon:

One frosty morning in December, the children from Joshie's 10 year old public school class were led to a bus and dropped off with their teachers in the busy downtown area of their city. The children looked in wonder at the crowds of shoppers passing by, the long lines of honking cars

impatiently waiting for pedestrians to finish crossing and the tall buildings blocking the winter sun. After making sure that every child was accounted for, the teachers led their group down the street. Their goal was to show the children the holiday season's displays and the intricately decorated shop windows.

As most of the children oohed and aahed, Joshie remained silent. He stood on the periphery, somehow knowing instinctively that he would not find anything familiar in those tinsel-framed windows.

The little group continued on their way, most of the children chattering excitedly. A teacher noticed that Joshie was uncharacteristically quiet and fell in step with him.

“Joshie, don't you like seeing the holiday decorations?”

“Holiday?” He repeated, looking confused. After a moment, he shook his head. “No, not looking like my holiday.”

The teacher had no answer to give and walked silently alongside Joshie, his heart going out to this little boy.

The group turned a corner and found themselves at the edge of a large plaza. All eyes were drawn to the enormous fir tree decorated with hundreds of yards of shiny tinsel—all eyes, that is, except one pair. Little Joshie was looking a bit further to the right, at the giant menorah. A smile lit up his face as he pointed to the familiar object and cried out: “THAT'S MINE!”

When Joshie's father heard what happened on the excursion, he found a deep message in his son's words. He said: “Today, there are many Jews who are ‘religiously challenged’ and don't know much about their heritage, but when they see the public menorah, something within lights up with Jewish pride, and they feel it, knowing, ‘That's Mine.’”

We should realize the flames are ours, the Torah is ours, the ability to be persistent in our learning and influence through the Torah is ours. We have a major symbol, the menorah, as well as gelt and dreidels and Jewish stars that can decorate our homes. We can have pride and use the flames with games to properly stay sane.

Listen to this story from aish.com from Nesanel Safran

Chanukah might have been right around the corner, but Josh Feldman sure didn't feel it. What kind of Chanukah could it be anyways, when the gift he had been lobbying for constantly,

and the one he was sure he'd be getting - a cool top-of-the-line electric powered Road Skimmer mini-bike - wasn't going to happen?

Well, he sighed, whether or not he felt Chanukah was coming, his teacher sure *did*, and assigned him and some of the other kids to bring in menorahs to display at the school's holiday crafts fair. The assignment's deadline was drawing near, and Josh realized he'd better get to work.

Half-heartedly Josh fished through his arts and crafts box to find some stuff to use. *Let's see ... maybe some shaped wooden spools, glue, colorful paints and lacquer to finish it off. Yeah that ought to do it*, he thought.

Josh sat down to work on his project, but it was hard to get into it. He couldn't help thinking about the gift that he *wasn't* going to be getting. Every year his parents would give him whatever present he wanted for Chanukah. It was the highlight of his holiday. But this year when he asked for the mini-bike, his parents had told him they were sorry, and would certainly get him a different gift they hoped he would like, but the mini-bike was just too expensive. Josh understood, but budget or no budget, without getting his special gift this year, Chanukah just wasn't really going to be Chanukah.

As Josh started gluing the spools together to form eight candle holders, he began to feel more relaxed. He loved doing craft projects, and when they had a special meaning he would really put his heart into it.

Josh carefully glued the candle holders onto a smooth wooden base in a straight line, and then painted each one a different rainbow color. Two hours later, as he brushed on the last stroke of lacquer, Josh sat back to look at this handiwork. *Not bad at all*, he thought with satisfaction.

The next day he took his creation, wrapped in a paper bag, onto the school bus and sat down in an empty seat. Soon Barry Ellis, a kid from his class, sat down next to him. He was also holding a paper bag, and a couple of shiny silvery poles were sticking out from the top.

"Hey, you wanna see my menorah project?" Barry asked. Without waiting for an answer, he pulled out a big, gleaming professional-looking menorah.

"Wow! You *made* that?" asked an astonished Josh.

"Sure did," answered Barry with a smile. "It came in a kit. I just had to screw the pieces together."

"Where did you get it?" Josh asked, sliding his own wrapped-up menorah behind him on the seat, hoping Barry wouldn't notice it.

"My mom bought it for me at that new fancy gift store downtown. She said it cost a fortune, but," he laughed, "she said that it was nothing compared to all the expensive presents she bought for me, including a new Road Skimmer. Hey, where's your menorah, Josh?" Barry asked.

The boy squirmed and cleared his throat a couple of times, and took a big breath of relief as the bus pulled into the school parking lot and Barry jumped out of his seat before he could answer.

Josh shuffled into class and sat down.

"Okay, people, everyone please turn in your projects for the fair," said their teacher Mr. Frank. Josh cringed as he watched kid after kid turning in fancy store-bought kits as nice as Barry's and some even nicer. The teacher placed each project in the special display case he had prepared, as the kids looked on in pride.

Josh felt terrible - unlike Barry, he wasn't he going to be getting the gift he wanted. And he felt embarrassed - that he had brought in a dumb looking hand-made menorah that was nothing compared to the beautiful expensive ones his friends had.

When the bell rang he tried to dash out of the classroom unnoticed.

"Oh, Josh!" his teacher called out just before he slipped out the door. "Could you come here a minute, please?"

Josh stopped in his tracks. "I don't believe I received your project, did I?"

Josh shook his head.

"Did you forget about the assignment?"

Josh shook his head again.

"Well?" asked the teacher.

Josh slowly lifted the bag he was holding. "Well, I made something, but it's not very good." He started to unwrap it. "I won't be upset if you don't display it. In fact I'd prefer it if you..."

"This is magnificent!" Mr. Frank cut him off. Josh looked at him to see if he was joking, but the man looked serious. "I can see you really put your heart and soul into this, didn't you?"

Josh didn't get it. "But Mr. Frank, mine is so plain and the other ones are so much nicer."

The teacher shook his head. "The other ones might be fancier, or cost more money, but yours is the one which best captures the spirit of Chanukah."

"I don't understand."

"Chanukah's main lesson is that we shouldn't get caught up in external things, but rather we should learn to see beyond them and realize it's something's meaning which is important, and not what it looks like, or how much it costs. That is what our ancestors fought for back then, and that is what we celebrate now. A lot of people nowadays remember to give Chanukah gifts, but forget to receive this special gift of understanding that Chanukah has to give *us*."

The boy nodded as the teacher continued. "That's why your beautiful hand-painted menorah has much more meaning and Chanukah spirit in it than if you had just bought and snapped together a kit. And," he smiled, "that's why I'm putting yours in the front and center of the display!" Mr. Frank pushed a big, shiny menorah aside and put Josh's in its place.

Josh went to his next class, but all day the teacher's words about the spirit of Chanukah had him flying and kept ringing in his ears. He thought about his parents and how much they loved and cared for him. And how whatever gifts they would give him were only a way to show him that they cared. *That* was what was really important, and not the gift itself.

Josh smiled to himself. Mini-bike or no mini-bike, Chanukah was really going to come this year after all, and Josh had a feeling it was going to be his best one yet.

We can and should be proud of the Chanukah element as well as all of our Jewish elements. But showcase it and decorate it in the right way.

The ancient Greeks were obsessed with the external, with the physical and with showing things off...maybe that has some manifestations with the showiness of society this time of year as well....The Jewish ideal is to live a spiritual life with physical means.

Listen to his other story from Nesanel Safran. On aish.com

Beads of sweat rolled off of Gary's face as he strained his body to the max. "Okay, push it, push it, Gary. Yeah, you did it, man! You pressed a hundred pounds!"

He and his buddy, Rob, had been trying to make the best use of their winter break by working out every day in the local gym. The long, cold winter usually meant a lot of time indoors and it was hard to exercise. So when the gym in town advertised a special two-week winter break package deal, the guys jumped at the chance to pump some iron.

Gary was good and hungry after the early morning workout, and didn't know what was taking Rob so long to get changed and head back to his place for breakfast. Finally Gary's patience ran out. He went back into the locker room and got his answer. Rob was standing in front of the mirror flexing his muscles.

“Hey, let's get going, Rob! If you spend any more time in front of that mirror, it's going to crack,” he laughed.

Rob blushed for a second and then said, “What's the problem? Don't you want to see how big your muscles look too? After all, isn't this the whole point of doing that record-breaking bench-press of yours?”

“That's not what *I* do it for,” Gary replied shaking his head. “I didn't spend the last 45 minutes sweating bullets just to be able to stand in front of a mirror and admire myself.”

Rob clicked his tongue as he flexed his bicep. “Of course it's not for only us,” Rob explained. “All the kids back at school are going to be really impressed too when they see how great we look, and...”

“That's not what I meant. Didn't you pay attention to the Chanukah story we learned about on the last day of school? How the Jewish way is to use our physical strength and good looks for something worthwhile?”

“And what could be more worthwhile than looking good?” quipped Rob. “Anyway, don't be a hypocrite. You work out as much as I do, and if anything your biceps are much bigger than mine.”

“That's just the point. It's fine to get physical – but for a purpose. Chanukah teaches us that everything physical, everything we have – including our bodies – are all just packages for our souls. They're tools God gave us to use properly for something really worthwhile, not just to admire.”

Rob, who had by now put his arms down and turned from the mirror, looked confused.

Gary went on. “For instance, do you know why I work out? I do it to keep healthy and have more energy to concentrate in school. And I also do it so I can really be some help around the house, like by shoveling out our driveway instead of my dad who had an operation a couple of months ago. The big muscles are just 'the package' that let me do that.”

Rob wasn't convinced. “That's all great, but I still say when it comes to looking good, it's 'the outside package' that counts.”

The guys packed up their stuff and headed back to Gary's place where his mom had set out some bowls of milk and several boxes of cereal for the hungry athletes. Gary picked up a bright, colorful box and began to pour it into Rob's bowl.

“Whoa, I'll take some of that other stuff if you don't mind, it tastes much better.”

But to Rob's surprise, Gary hid the second box behind his back and wouldn't pass it to him.

“Hey, c'mon man! Let me have that other cereal.”

“What do you want *that* for?” Gary said with a smile. “It's in such a *plain* box. This cereal here is in a much nicer looking package, and that's 'what counts,' remember?”

Despite himself, Rob couldn't help laughing – or getting the point either. After breakfast Rob decided to stick around to help Gary shovel out his driveway, and celebrate Chanukah and what it stood for by not just admiring his muscles, but putting them to good use for a worthwhile cause as well.

We should use our physical elements in life for good. The using of physical for spiritual is the ideal in this life and we must use it in the right way.

The Chashmonaim were brave people who weren't officially soldiers but they had the stubbornness to stand up for what's right and stand up to the enemy. They would not allow Judaism to be trampled on. They also had the persistence to search high and low in the whole temple for the olive oil to light, only finding a tiny pitcher that would maybe last a night but ended up lasting the eight nights.

Chanukah thus teaches us not only about stubbornness and refusing to give up, but about light, and the zest for Torah to have the candle of Torah and the flames and passion to do mitzvos in our hearts. IF the society around us can go crazy with “holiday fever” decorating their homes without major proper fundamental elements, why can't we? Where is our Chanukah pride? Where is our flames our real games, our staying properly sane? Where is Our Chanukah spirit? Further, where is our pride in our flames, our games, and our fame of what we have accomplished over the years? Dont be led astray by the false illusion of the secular decorations of a holiday that has that are sales, don't make sense, and have no real value. Focus on ours and stay sane. Live up to our values, our beliefs, our customs and our cultures.

As pointed out on ofishel.com, As Rav Chaim from Vilushin famously said “If the Jews don't make Kiddush, then the non-Jews will make Havdalah. Meaning that if we don't sanctify Hashem by keeping ourselves separate from the non-Jews and living a life devoted to Hashem and keeping his commandments, then Hashem will cause the goyim to separate us from the culture around us. We can do this by being involved with all aspects of Judaism, but especially with the flames the proper games, and staying properly sane and sanctifying G-d's name around

us properly explaining this holiday, decorating for it, and practicing it, as well as with different aspects of our Jewish life.

If we stand up for our own beliefs and have pride in it , the world will respect us for it and we can finally make a true kiddush Hashem and hopefully bring Moshiach and the third temple speedily in our days.