

Hanukkah – the Festival of Lights in Israel

Michal Reshef



Dear colleagues,

I am happy to know that you are curious about how we celebrate Hanukkah in our Waldorf kindergartens here in Israel.

Below is a simple version of the story about our Festival of Light and I hope that the photos will give you a feeling of the diversity of our kindergartens. We send greetings of connection to you as we all join together to carry the flame of truth, beauty and goodness for the children across the world.

As with many other holidays, the origin of Hanukkah is seasonal, from the preparation for the winter, the darkest time of the year, when you have to believe that the sun will come back again, and you have to find your inner light. There is the possibility for a human being to give birth within himself to the outer sun. This is the time when, in older times, the farmers finished picking the olives from the trees and were ready to make olive oil for many uses. Some of the oil, from the best olives, was saved for lighting the candles.

Later came the historical event: the fight between the Maccabees and the Greeks, who destroyed the Holy Temple and took everything they could, including all the olive oil that was there for the special Menorah (the candle holder with 7 branches, which was the very holy symbol of the temple). In the darkest moment, after the people looked everywhere for oil, they suddenly found a tiny pitcher with enough oil for only one night. Everyone was so happy. Then a miracle happened: the oil lasted for 8 nights. There was great joy, and a great celebration took place. The light from the Menorah was spread all over the world. Many stories were told about the miracle, and many images were created out of it. Many songs were written, and many costumes were created.

In the kindergarten we usually do not tell the historical story; we put more attention to the celebration of light which becomes bigger and stronger every night. It is a holiday where families are come together, lighting candles for 8 days, each day we add a candle in the Hanukkiah (a special candle holder for this holiday), so the light gets bigger and stronger every night. We put the Hanukkiah at the window so that we can share our light with the others. Special food is prepared, like sufganiyot (doughnuts with sweet jam inside), latkes (potato pancakes), and special cookies. The children play with dreidels (spinning tops), and we sing many special songs.



"Down with darkness, up with light!
Up with sunshine, down with night!
Each of us is one small light,
But together we shine bright!
Go away darkest, blackest night,
Go away, make way for light."

Shalom-שלום and many good wishes,
Michal Reshef – מישל רשף

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