

Culture describes the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group.

During Hanukkah, Jews around the world will spend eight nights gathering around the Hanukkiah, telling the story of the victorious Maccabees and of course, eating so much fried food.

Many Jewish societies around the world celebrate the holiday based on their unique cultures relative to their local environments.

In some parts North America, Jewish people dream of a white Hanukkah while others dream of the opposite. Jewish people living in Australia celebrate the Festival of Lights in the heat of their summer while Jews in Alaska celebrate during the days when there is total darkness.

The following cover some of the unique ways that Jews around the world celebrate Hanukkah.



Cuba



In their cooking, Cubans use plantains in much the same way Americans and Canadians use potatoes: mashing them, baking them, and frying them. It should not come as a surprise, then, that Cuban Jews make fried plantains, otherwise known as *tostones* or *patacones*, for their Hanukkah celebrations.

Syria

The Jews of Aleppo were descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. When they finally found a safe haven in Syria, they vowed to light an additional *shamash* (helper candle) on Hanukkah as a sign of thanks.

Today's Syria is a much different country. This Hanukkah, consider adopting the Syrian Jewish tradition of lighting an additional *shamash* in solidarity with the refugees who have fled Syria in search of shelter and peace.



France (Avignon region)



In the wine-making region of Avignon in the south of France, it is customary to end the Shabbat that falls during Hanukkah by opening a new bottle or cask of wine.

After Havdalah, Jews would travel around the neighborhood to various homes, tasting the wines and toasting the holiday. This is a fantastic way to build community and to celebrate the holiday with family and friends.

Mexico

In Spanish, Hanukkah is known as *Januca* or *Lucenarias* – the feast of lights. Mexican children play a game called *toma todo* (winner takes all), which is similar to the version of dreidel that we play except the top has six sides instead of four. The *toma toda* dreidel is known as a *pirinola*.

For a true multi-cultural experience, Mexican Jews often break a dreidel-shaped piñata filled with Hanukkah trinkets and treats.



Italy



On Tishah B'Av, Jews read the Book of Lamentations, often in complete darkness. There is an Italian custom of saving the candle that was used to help Jews read on Tishah B'Av to help them light the menorah during Hanukkah.

On Tishah B'Av, Jews mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple; on Hanukkah, Jews celebrate its rededication. Using the same candle for both occasions connects the two events: On Tishah B'Av Jews are sad, but on Hanukkah they rejoice as they rekindle this same light as the *shamash* for their festival of freedom.

Kurdistan

Although Jews no longer live in Kurdistan, many Kurdish Jews still observe two unusual Hanukkah customs.

The first is similar to the giving of Hanukkah *gelt*, but with a twist: a week before the holiday, children lock the doors to their rooms. Their parents must give them coins in order to gain entry.

The second custom was developed by Jews too poor to afford a *hanukkiyah*. They used eggshells as cups for wicks and oil, lighting the required number of cracked shells every night.



Morocco



Jews in Morocco extended the joy of Hanukkah into a ninth day, which became known as “the day of the *shamash*.” On that day, children would go from house to house, collecting leftover Hanukkah candles. Then, they would make a giant bonfire, dancing and singing around it, and jumping and leaping over it.

It was believed that jumping over the fire could bring good luck. Single women would jump over the fire in the hopes of getting married. Married women struggling to conceive would jump over the fire in the hopes of being blessed with a child.

Tunisia

The seventh day of Hanukkah coincides with Rosh Chodesh Tevet, the beginning of the Hebrew month of Tevet, which has become a holiday within a holiday for Tunisian Jews.

Known as *Chag haBanot* (Festival of the Daughters), girls and women celebrate the courageous act of Yehudit, the Jewish woman who saved the Jewish nation by killing the general sent by Antiochus, the evil ruler of the Syrian-Greek Empire.

In celebration of the day, women would do no work, visit one another, and eat doughnuts and honey cookies. The holiday was particularly special for young women engaged to be married in the coming year.



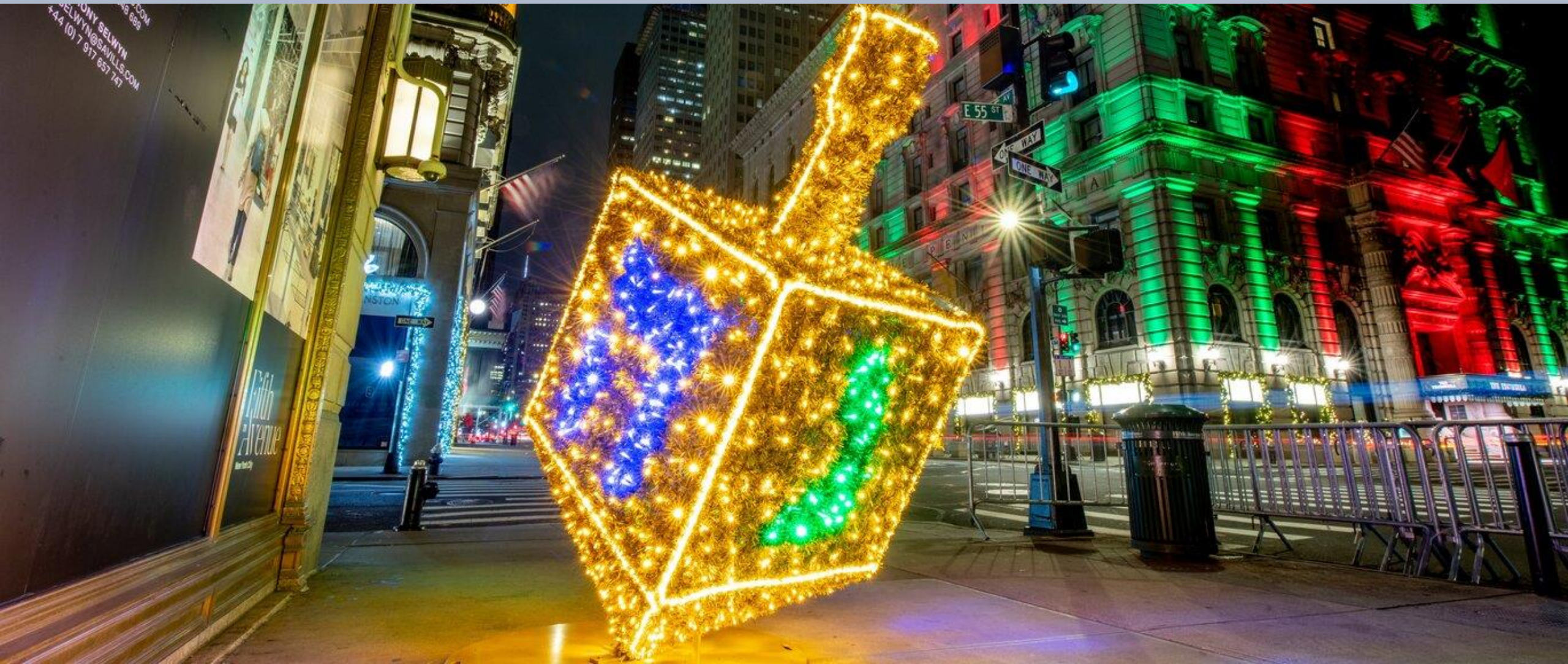
Israel



In Israel, writes Cantor Evan Kent, "Hanukkah is a holiday without the limitations of other holidays: we can go shopping, we can drive, the buses and trains run. And yes, everyone is seemingly in a good mood. The *sufganiyot* help the atmosphere, of course. It's impossible to be in a bad mood while eating a jelly donut."

He continues: "But Hanukkah isn't only about the donuts. It's about the entire city coming together in a rare show of cultural solidarity to observe the holiday."

What special Hanukkah traditions does your family have relative to their heritage and culture?





Source: 9 Hanukkah Customs From Around the World by Cantor Lauren Phillips
<https://reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/hanukkah/holiday-travelogue-8-hanukkah-customs-around-world>