

A Message from the Rabbi (December, 2016)

What is the reason for Chanukah?

Our Rabbis taught:

On the twenty-fifth of Kislev commence the days of Hanukkah, eight days on which lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil with the seal of the High Priest, but it contained sufficient oil for one day's lighting only. Yet a miracle occurred and they lit the lamp that burned for eight days." (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 21)

According to this source, our sages believed the fact that the only cruse of oil left in the Temple was enough to dedicate the Temple anew was cause for celebration. The oil lasting for eight days was truly a miracle, it enabled our faith to endure.

To honor that miracle, we traditionally indulge in fried foods on Chanukah.

Growing up in France, a major highlight of the Festival of Lights for me personally was my grandmother's home-made sfenges (Moroccan fried donuts).

Just like bagels, they had a big hole in the middle. But they were also very golden, bubbly and crispy, and of course out of this world.

They weren't filled with jelly. Instead, my grandmother placed a huge plate of vanilla infused sugar in the middle of the table and we all coated our donuts in it as soon as another batch came out of the pot.

Along with our sfenges we always drank sweet Moroccan mint tea, which was poured in yo-yo-like motions, from up high all the way down and up and down again...on and on, until the Moroccan clear and golden glass was almost filled to the top.

Between the warm donuts and the hot tea, we couldn't have been cozier on those long winter nights.

You may yourselves carry sweet memories of your own Chanukah family gatherings and continue to enjoy delicious treats you used to share on the holiday.

May this Festival of Lights shine brightly in our homes and may the miracle of the oil fuel our desire to keep the flame of our tradition alive.

Chanukah Sameach, wishing you a Happy Chanukah,
Rabbi Séverine Sokol