Darshan Yeshiva Students
Celebrate Chanukah Around the World
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A Special Message From Rabbi Barbara:

As mentoring Rabbi for my conversion students, it is my joy to guide them along the path of living Jewishly. Together as we practice rituals and blessings, holidays and festivals we grow in the understanding that becoming a Jew has less to do with academic achievement and more to do with a way of life. Enjoy the Chanukah experiences brought to you by your fellow conversion students as they celebrated the Festival of Lights and explained what the festival meant to them.
This year was our daughter Liat's first Hanukkah and it was a lot of fun. We started off the first two days of Hanukkah with the only candles we which were birthday candles! Not so kosher, but that's okay it was straight from the heart. Liat had never seen a candle before and she loved it, she also loved the Hanukkah songs her Abba (Daddy)sang to her in Hebrew. The next day Abba Oren made it his mission to make his very own Hanukkiah. He cut a piece of wood and glass and found different candles to put the creation together. The rest of the holiday was spent with lots of Sufganiyot, probably too many but hey it's not like Hanukkah last all year! During Hanukkah last year we got pregnant with our own little miracle, so this was a special time for us in more than one way to celebrate miracles, lights, love, and strength with our small family. Hag Hanukkah Sameach!
This Chanukah days - As always, we created an interfaith family event. Whereas in previous years we tend to have rather talkative evenings around the Chanukkiah, this time it was a Dreidel craze. Especially young Maxim loved to play and win whatever was at stake. And he did. At the third day of Chanukkah I was invited by Maxim’s home teacher at school to talk about the custom and the meaning in front of the pupils (grade 1). Again, playing the Dreidel, accompanied by Maos Zur and other typical songs was highly popular. Of course, using chocolate dollars (gelt) was helpful, indeed!
I hope you had a lovely 8 nights of Chanukah. I certainly have! For the first night of Chanukah we made sure our whole flat smell of latkes. My sister and I were making latkes and for main course we made roast beef with sweet potatoes. And had champagne, too! We lit the candles and said the prayers, which then was followed by dancing in the living room to Israeli pop music, I decorated my house with ornaments, candles and chocolate money (gelt). There is something romantic and cozi about Chanukah. The following nights, we lit the candles before going to bed and talked for a while. It still smells of Chanukah in my house because the smell of the latkes does not want to leave. And of course my flowers. Yes, I bought flowers for every empty surface in my flat!
How I celebrated Chanukka - I lit the shamash and then the other candles while reciting the brachot. Accompanied by a youtube video I sang the Maos Tzur. On the first night I made the spinach-ricotta latkes after the recipe on your website. On Shabbat morning I went to a Chanukka children’s show of the Jewish Berlin puppet theatre "Bubales" who made a guest performance in the former synagogue of Affaltrach (near Heilbronn, about 30 km from Murrhardt) which was really charming and heart-warming! I celebrated Chanukka very quiet with my partner Claudia - on one evening we did the dreidel game. I read several stories about the Maccabees and about Judith and Holofernes. How I feel about the festival and what it means to me: The more I read about the Maccabees the less I liked them to be honest. In my book of Jewish history they appear as fanatic warriors that had introduced - by the end of their period of power - the hellenistic cults they originally fought. Chanukka itself as a festival of rededication and of the return of the light, however, and it is beautiful. The lights brighten our lives and possibly the lives of others, too. I love the candles shining in our window and the ritual of kindling them. Also the kabbalistic individual meaning of each candle is very interesting.
Ho festeggiato Chanukah, sono riuscita a trovare le candeline adatte per la Chanukkiah che aveva fatto la mia figlia, Francesca a scuola e non è stato facile trovarle. È stato bello e la luce delle candeline è cresciuta dentro di me ogni sera di più. La sera di venerdì ho celebrato prima Shabbat e poi Chanukah e la sera dopo, prima Havdalah e poi Chanukah. Ho pensato che Shabbat fosse più importante e gli ho dato precedenza. Mi sono informata su internet a riguardo e ho scoperto che ci sono scuole discordanti a riguardo, per cui alla fine ho agito come mi sentivo di fare. Ho meditato sul significato delle luci ogni sera come consigliato. La canto di Maoz tzur l’ho trovato su Youtube, ne ho cercato una versione che mi sembrava simile a quella che ci avevi cantato tu e la terza sera di Chanukah Francesca l’ha cantata in quanto se la ricordava ...Magica Chanukah!!!
Finally have some time to write about the lovely week of Hanukkah I got to celebrate this year. I started "my Jewish calendar year" this time last year, so from Hanukkah on I celebrated all festivities and actively was part of the Jewish community. I started in Berlin and the last days were spent in Barcelona. It was perfect. I went to Berlin for work but my obligations ended on the first night of Hanukkah. The next day my friend from the Jewish congregation I go to in Barcelona came to visit and we spent three days immersed in Jewish Berlin, eating at a Palestinian/Israeli restaurant of a friend (where I had the best falafel and hummus ever), keeping our mitzvah of eating fried foods every day, exploring the Jewish history of Berlin... We also went to see the lighting of the candles at the Jewish museum, were there was also music and they asked me to dance with them...and then we went to a friend's house who was hosting a Hanukkah party with plenty of vegan latkes and homemade sufganiyot that were delicious. We also went to a Yiddish musical festival which was very beautiful. All in all it felt like community and it was lovely to share it with my good friend who was overjoyed to see how vibrant Jewish life is in Berlin. Then we hosted a Hanukkah party at my place, which was a huge success. It was a cozy space for my Jewish friends to celebrate all together mixed with plenty of non-Jewish folks who have never been around Jewish people. I felt so grateful to be able to host such a beautiful event, were we all cooked latkes (we took turns and it was a big party), we drank wine, we played with our dreidels and gelt, and my friends explained what Hanukkah was all about (including the beautiful story of Judith and Holofernes). For the last night, I went to my parent’s house and we had dinner there, we had the Hanukkiah shining full of light, latkes and fresh salads, and I got to share that with them. I even got my grandma her Hanukkah present! I loved including friends and family in Barcelona, making them part of this identity of mine that I'm building for myself. I'm very grateful for that.
During this 5778 Chanukah (2018), I try to celebrate as much as I could: in fact, due to work shifts, I could not attend the service in my synagogue (West London).

On the 12th of December, I lighted the first Candle of the Chanukyah, the eight lights holder. I lighted the first candle (called “Shamas”, the servant), with its own blessing (first one). With this candle I lighted the first one (the Justice one), in the mean times that I was reciting the blessing (second one). Only for the first time (the first night of Chanukah) it is a Mitzvah to recite the Third Blessing.

Afterwards, I had my seder with Kosher food: I choose to have Baba Ganoushe and Pita bread, chicken bone soup and fried chicken wings; as dessert I could not have nothing than my favourite food, the Suvganyot of Chanukah. I made them with bread dough fried in the boiling oil and dip in the marmalade and sugar. In fact, as tradition, during Chanukah we have to eat some fried food for reminding us the miracle of the oil.

After my seder, I read the history of Chanukah: Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday commemorating the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire, but despite the importance of this celebration (unproperly called Jewish Christmas), It is a delayed festivity, which cannot being found in the Torah.
During the following eight days, each night, I lighted the servant candle and with this one I lighted the candles, adding every night one on the Menorah, until all the eight candles were light during the last night.
The most important thing is to remember that if one of the night happens on Friday evening, the Chanukah candle must be lighted BEFORE the Shabbat candles, in order to respect the Melacha (do not light fire during the Holy Shabbat).
I report the blessings (credits: Chabad.org)
First blessing:

 Роֹכֵח אַדְּנֵי אֲלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ עָלָלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוָיו קִדְשָׁנוּ אֲשֶׁר הָעֹלָם מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲדֹנָי אַתָּהּ רְזוּ בּוּרּעָךָ אָדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעָלָם אֵלֹהֵינוּ אֲדֹנָי אַתָּהּ רְזוּ בּוּרּעָךָ אָדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעָלָם אֵלֹהֵינוּ אֲדֹנָי אַתָּהּ רְזוּ בּוּרּעָךָ אָדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעָלָם

 Ba-ruch A-tah Ado-nai E-lo-he-nu Me-lech ha-olam a-sher ki-de-sha-nu be-mitz-vo-tav ve-tzi-va-nu le-had-lik ner Cha-nu-ka.
Blessed are You, Lord our Gd, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light.

Second blessing:

 Роֹכֵח אַדְּנֵי אֲלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ עָלָלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לָאָבֹתֵינוּ בְּזֵמֶן זוֹ הָזֶה.

Blessed are You, Lord our Gd, King of the universe, who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.

Third blessing, recited only on the first night (or the first time lighting this Chanukah):

 רֹכֵח אַדְּנֵי אֲלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ עָלָלָם שֶׁהָחִיינוּ הָעֹלָם מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲדֹנָי אַתָּהּ רְזוּ בּוּרּעָךָ אָדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעָלָם אֵלֹהֵינוּ אֲדֹנָי אַתָּהּ רְזוּ בּוּרּעָךָ אָדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעָלָם

Blessed are You, Lord our Gd, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.
I have celebrated the two, first days of Chanukah with a good friend of mine. The 5th day I was in downtown by the time of the lighting and did the blessings in silence, in front of the big Hanukiá, Jabad installed in the main square of the city.

The followings days were very happy for me, because my mother - who has chosen christianity - accompanied me. She prayed too. And the 7th day, I was so busy with work and exams, I almost forgot it, when she came and lighted the candles. 

Sharing with her this celebration was unexpected and wonderful, a really familiar atmosphere for Chanukah, that I didn't think I could have.

I'm not used to praying a lot. This Festivity has allowed me to have a time for reflection and spirituality. These were very special days, beyond the fact that it is commemorated, Chanukah, represents for me the victory of freedom and life over death and oppression, and it is important to reaffirm within ourselves the value of hope in difficult time.
Thank you for sharing your Chanukah experience!