

How Many Hannukkahs Have There Been?

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Unless you've been living in a cave on an island with no wifi, you know that this year, Hannukkah and Thanksgiving are coming together. For those of us on the cooking end of this deal, we've been planning and preparing (and freezing) food for weeks. So for those long-suffering souls—and everyone else—it's time for a little spirituality.

We all know the story of the Maccabees and the oil that lasted eight days, but did you know that that Hannukkah was only one of 7 in Jewish history? Each time an important building project was celebrated by putting up lights, it counts as a Hannukkah.

1. The first Hannukkah was when God finished creating the heavens and the earth. God's Hannukkah lights were the sun and the moon (Genesis 1-2:1).
2. The second Hannukkah was when the wall surrounding Jerusalem was finished and dedicated (Nehemiah 12:27).
3. The third Hannukkah was when the Jews returned from Babylonian exiled in 516 B.C.E. (Ezra 6:17).
4. The fourth Hannukkah was "our" Hannukkah, the Hannukkah of the Hasmoneans.
5. The fifth Hannukkah will be in the World to Come, as has been foretold, "When I free Jerusalem it shall be with lamps (Zephaniah 1:12).
6. The sixth Hannukkah is that of the princes (Numbers 7:84).
7. The seventh Hannukkah is that of the First Temple by David (Psalm 30:1). (Pesikta Rabbati 2:2)

So we have these seven, but by all rights there should be eight, since it is an eight-day holiday. Which means that this is Hannukkah/Thanksgiving is the ideal time to celebrate the finishing of a project and celebrating it with light and thanks.

Discussion Questions

1. What Hannukkah would you add to make the total come to eight? The creation of the state of Israel? A Hannukkah of peace should all our troops come home (may it happen soon and in our day!)?
2. Would you make the additional Hannukkah something more personal? Is there something this year over which you have long labored that is finally coming to fruition? If so, what is it and how could you celebrate its completion with lights?
3. Does Thanksgiving itself suggest a look back over the last year to see what you have accomplished? Did you graduate from something? Start a new career? Find love? Escape a painful marriage? Can you incorporate these feelings into the miracle of the lights?

BONUS QUESTION: For myself, after 30 years of using the same menorah, and after having nearly burned down the house several times in the last few years, I finally relented and bought a new menorah, so we'll be dedicating that menorah this year. Does anyone have some creative ideas as to how to incorporate the old menorah into the lighting of the new one? I sort of feel about it the way you might about an old Torah scroll. It may no longer be usable but it carried holiness for many, many years.

As always, looking forward to your insights!