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Lighting the Chanukah Lights with Emily

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By Laura G.



Emily loved the first night of Chanukah. Her whole family would gather together in the dining room and do all of the things you're supposed to do on Chanukah. They would light the candles on the Chanukiyah, and say the blessings, and sing songs, and have lots of latkes with sour cream and apple sauce, and jelly doughnuts. And get presents. And eat chocolate gelt and play dreidel (even though the dreidels never seemed to work right because she always lost.) But it was the other nights that were a problem, because her mother was always too busy doing other things to light the candles every night, and say the blessings every night, and sing the songs every night.

On the first night of Chanukah they would always light the candles. Her mother would light the shamash (the helper candle) which she would give to Emily (since at nine she was the oldest child) who would then light the real first candle of Chanukah (because the shamash didn't really count). She usually picked a yellow candle because she liked how it was a quiet way to begin the holiday. She never picked a red candle for the first night because that was such an eighth-night color (even though Rose, her seven-year-old sister, sometimes tried to use red for the second night when it was her turn, but generally Emily could convince her to pick a different color and select it for the sixth night, but not before.)

After they lit the candles they would all sing the blessings together. They would sing the dreidel song and whatever other song she learned in temple. This year she finally remembered "Maoz Tzur," well, some of it, but since she got a song sheet, they could all sing along.

Since they couldn't wait any more for their presents, their mother would give them their presents before they ate. She said that at least they wouldn't choke down their food in a rush, but would enjoy it properly. Their mother was so silly. Did she really think that they would do something like that? OF COURSE!

Two years ago she got Molly, a real American Girl doll. Last year she got a new basketball and a book. Rose got a book and a necklace last year. One year they got a sled, but it wasn't so much fun getting a shared present, especially one that they

had to wait such a long time to use. After opening their presents, they would sit down to eat.

They would all eat far too many of her mother's delicious potato latkes. Emily especially loved them with sour cream, lots and lots of sour cream. Every year her mother made fresh apple sauce, so she and Rose would take a little, just to make their mother feel good, but really, they both liked sour cream best. There was usually some sort of meat, but she didn't really pay attention to it, since all she really cared about were the hot latkes and the cool sour cream and how yummy it was together.

After they couldn't eat another latkes (usually because they had finished them all), they would have dessert. Jelly doughnuts. Her mother called them sufganiot, like they call them in Israel. Her mother had lived in Israel for a long time, so she would generally talk about being in Israel during Chanukah and how boxes of sufganiot would appear in the grocery stores a month before Chanukah. She would tell them every year about how the doughnuts in Israel were better, but that she didn't like the jelly and would squeeze it out!

Then they would get chocolate gelt (coins) and new dreidels so that they could play dreidel.

When they were tired they would go to bed with their presents and whatever gelt they had left.

But the next night, and the next, and the next, and all the rest of the nights until the end of Chanukah she could never be sure if they would do something. There was always something or Emily's mother was too tired to bother lighting the candles. Emily would ask, "How hard is it to light candles? Any way, I'm old enough to light the shamash myself, I can do everything." But her mother seemed to get too sad after the first night to do anything. And so the box of now 42 candles would stay almost full, until it got lost sometime before next Chanukah when her mother would need to buy another box that they would never use up.

But this year Emily wanted to make sure that they would light the candles every night. Emily had friends who told her if they were good, then Santa Claus would bring them lots of gifts, or at least the gifts they wanted. They all knew that Santa Claus didn't exist (they were nine), but that's always how they talked, that if they were good, then they would get what they wanted. Emily wondered if there was some kind of Jewish Santa Claus who could make it so that her mother would agree to, no, WANT TO light the candles every night.

She figured that in the meantime, until she figured out who could help her, she could start on the being good part of the Santa Claus present-giving story.

At first she thought of God, and maybe she could ask God to help her. But then

she decided that God shouldn't be bothered about something so little, so unimportant as helping a girl convince her mother to light the candles every night.

For a whole week Emily did everything she was supposed to do. She walked Popcorn their little Maltese, kept her room neat, helped her sister with her homework, and even cleared the table without being asked.

Tomorrow was Chanukah, and she still hadn't figured out who she could talk to to help her convince her mother to light the candles every night.

That night her mother came into her room to give her a goodnight kiss. She sat on Emily's bed and said that she saw that she had been an especially good girl this past week and was there a specific reason why she had been so good or was she just being her ordinary extraordinary self?

Emily started to cry. Her mother hugged her and asked her "what's the matter"?

After she wiped away her tears, she told her mother that she hadn't figured out a way to get her mother to light the candles in the Chanukiyah every night of Chanukah and the holiday was starting the very next night.

Emily's mother looked at Emily. "Why didn't you just ask me?" she asked in her nicest voice (the voice she used when Emily had hurt herself or was upset about something that happened in school).

"Because every year I ask you to light the candles every night and it never helps. We never light the candles every night." Emily looked at her mother and then turned away to look out her window because she was starting to cry again.

Emily's mother had a strange sound in her voice when she spoke again, "Emily, if it is so important to you, then we will light them every night. And you know what? I have a new Chanukiyah this year, so you and Rose will be able to light the candles every night on your own Chanukiyahs."

And so Emily learned for herself, that even for Jewish children, Santa Claus is really their parents.

That was the best Chanukah ever. And she even told Rose, who used red candles in her own Chanukiyah on the first night, that it looked beautiful. And it did.

For the first time ever they finished not only one box of 44 candles, but two boxes. They used all 88 candles. Even their mother agreed that it was wonderful to light the candles every night.

Happy Chanukah!

Chanukah Blessings for All!

Lighting a Chanukiyah

הַדְּלָקַת חֲנֻכָּיָה

Place one new candle in the *chanukiyah* for each night of Chanukah, increasing one candle per night (plus the *shamash*). Candles should be placed from right to left. Light the *shamash* first and use it to light from left to right.

Then say the blessings:

on each night

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה

Baruch atah Adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam asher kidshanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu lehadlik ner shel Chanukah.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has made us holy by mitzvot and instructed us to light the Chanukah candles.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים
לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ, בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה

Baruch atah Adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam she'asah nisim lavotaynu bayamim hahaym bazman hazeh.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who performed miracles for our ancestors at this season in ancient days.

on first night only

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁחִיָּנוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ
וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה

Baruch atah Adonai elohaynu melech ha 'olam she-hecheyanu vekimanu vehigiyanu lazman hazeh.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has given us life, sustained us, and helped us to reach this day.