

December 3, 2010



Celebrate Chanukah... Even If You're Not Jewish



The December holidays provide ideal opportunities to expose children to different cultural traditions. Chanukah is here, so **Jordan D. Brown** suggests some fun ways to celebrate this Jewish holiday.

December Holidays? The More the Merrier!

What? Chanukah's here already? It seems like just last week we were celebrating Thanksgiving! But seriously, every time December rolls around, the holidays catch me by surprise. I'm Jewish and my wife Ellen is Christian, so we celebrate both Chanukah and Christmas with our children, Olivia and Finian. While the holiday season can be a stressful and overwhelming time, it is a wonderful opportunity to experience the [diversity](#) of the holidays in fresh ways by sharing the best parts of the holidays including special food, songs, and games.

Even if your family is not Jewish or doesn't know the first thing about [Chanukah](#) (also spelled Hanukkah), I encourage you to explore some of the joys of this holiday with your family. Not sure where to begin? This week, Sesame Workshop launched [Shalom Sesame](#), a web site filled with Chanukah resources.

Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel

Earlier this week, I visited my daughter Olivia's kindergarten classroom as part of my bi-weekly volunteering. When I arrived, her teacher explained that in honor of Chanukah, I would be teaching small groups of children how to play the dreidel game. For those unfamiliar with this game, children take turns spinning a special 4-sided top called a dreidel. Players take turns spinning the dreidel, and depending on which side is facing up when it stops, the player either earns or loses chocolate coins wrapped in foil.

I smiled when I heard my assignment. It brought back happy memories of Jewish traditions growing up. In recent years, I had fallen out of the habit of celebrating Chanukah. The fact that Ellen is very enthusiastic and organized about Christmas means we lean toward celebrating the traditions of this holiday. Since having children, I've enjoyed decorating Christmas trees, singing carols with neighbors, baking cookies, and so on.

Playing the dreidel game in Olivia's classroom taught me two life lessons. First, it is never too late to revive a fun holiday tradition with your children. I left the class eager to buy dreidels for the kids to play at home. Second, I learned that if you give a group of feisty kindergarteners a bunch of chocolate coins, and ask them to please not open them until the dreidel game is over, about 1 in 5 kids will listen to you!

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After school, Olivia and I were driving home, when out of the blue she announced, "We need to light a menorah! But you need to remember to light the Shamash first. That's the candle in the middle." Olivia explained that she had learned this from a book that her teacher read to the class. "Oh, one more thing, Dad," Olivia says a few minutes later. "I want to celebrate Kwanzaa, too." It seems Olivia has been bitten by the holiday bug, and is eager to celebrate in every way she can.

Cooking Up Traditions Together

As regular readers of my newsletters know, [cooking](#) with my children is an important way we spend time together. Chanukah is no exception. To commemorate the Chanukah story about a small amount of oil miraculously burning for 8 days, many Chanukah foods are fried in oil. What's not to love? Two of my children's favorites are latkes (potato pancakes), and sufganiyot (pronounced "soof-gah-nee-YOTE"), small jelly-filled donuts.

I hope you and your family enjoy the December holidays. Have fun nurturing your children's curiosity about your family's cultural heritage, as well as creating new traditions about the many marvelous rituals from around the world.

Jordan D. Brown

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Resources to help children learn about Jewish holidays, play games, and more.

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