

The Schmooze

Stories with a Yiddish Twist

HANUKKAH WITH STEPHEN COLBERT-- AND OTHER INTERESTING FACTS

by
Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe



Syosset, New York

The first night of Hanukkah is Wednesday, Dec. 16; the eighth day is Dec. 24.

Hanukkah (Chanukah, Khanike, Hanuka, and Channukah) has emerged as a card-worthy holiday. One of my favorites shows a black-hatted rapper, complete with peyes, beard (“bord”) and microphone. The message:

“HAVE SOME FUN. AND SPIN THE DREIDEL. GRAB YOURSELF A ZAFTIK MAIDEL. DON’T YOU WORRY ABOUT GETTING CHUBBY. EAT SOME BRISKET. AND KISS YOUR BUBBEE. TAKE A LATKE - TWO OR THREE. CAUSE YOU CAN’T EAT A CHRISTMAS TREE. HAPPY HANUKKAH.”

Note: “Bubbee” or “bubee” is an affectionate term of endearment. It’s also used as an Americanized nickname for Grandma, in which case it is usually pronounced to rhyme with “tubby.”

Another card says:

“YOU KNOW IT’S HANUKKAH WHEN FIDDLER ON THE ROOF COMES DOWN YOUR CHIMNEY!”

And a “For Santa” card shows Santa propped alongside a jar of pickled herring, a bagel and a bottle of schnapps. The punch line:

“HEY, JUST BECAUSE A GUY COMES TO THE WRONG HOUSE DOESN'T MEAN HE HAS TO STARVE. HAPPY HANUKKAH.”

Note: “shnaps/schnaps/schnapps” rhymes with “tops.” It means brandy or any intoxicating spirits.

Stephen Colbert says that the biggest challenge at home is lighting the menorah for Hannukah. “Trying to convince the kids that it’s a viable holiday--it’s hard. The Daily Show host’s wife is Catholic so the kids know about the fat guy with the beard who is coming with toys. Try to compete with that with some potato pancakes.”

Colbert wrote a wonderful piece titled, “Can I Interest You in Hannukah?” The lyrics, taken from lyricsmode.com, are as follows:

Jon: Can I interest you in Hanukkah?
Maybe something in a Festival of Lights
It’s a sensible alternative to Christmas
And it lasts for seven--for you--eight nights

Stephen: Hanukkah huh? I’ve never really thought about it

Jon: Well, you could do worse

Stephen: Is it merry?
Jon: It’s kind of merry
Stephen: Is it cheery?
Jon: It’s got some cheer.
Stephen: Is it jolly?
Jon: Look, I wouldn’t know from jolly. But it’s not my least
unfavorite time of year.

Stephen: When’s it start?
Jon: The 25th
Stephen: Of December?
Jon: Kislev
Stephen: When is when exactly?
Jon: I will check
Stephen: Are there presents?
Jon: Yes, indeed, 8 days of presents
Which means one nice one, then a week of dreck.

Stephen: Does Hanukkah commemorate events profound and holy? A king who came to save the world?
Jon: No, oil that burned quite slowly
Stephen: Well, it sounds fantastic!
Jon: There's more.

Jon: We have latkes
Stephen: What are they?
Jon: Potato pancakes. We have dreidels
Stephen: What are they?
Jon: Wooden tops. We have candles
Stephen: What are they?
Jon: THEY ARE CANDLES! And when we light them, oh the fun; it never stops.

What do you say, Stephen, do you want to give Hanukkah a try?

Stephen: I'm trying . See me as a Jew
I'm trying even harder
But I believe in Jesus Christ
So it's a real non-starter.

Jon: I can't interest you in Hanukkah? Just a little bit?
Stephen: No thanks, I'll pass. I'll keep Jesus, you keep your potato pancakes. But I hope that you enjoy 'em on behalf of all of the goyim
Jon: Be sure to tell the Pontiff, my people say, Good Yontif.*
Stephen: That's exactly what I'll do
Both: Happy holidays, you
Jon: too!
Stephen: Jew!

Jon: Too?

*A denizen of Flatbush, having seen the pope in one of the large, public audiences, felt obligated to send His Holiness a Christmas greeting. It ran: "Good yontif, Pontiff." (Source: "The New Joys of Yiddish" by Rosten.)

Shown below are some explanations of the holiday:

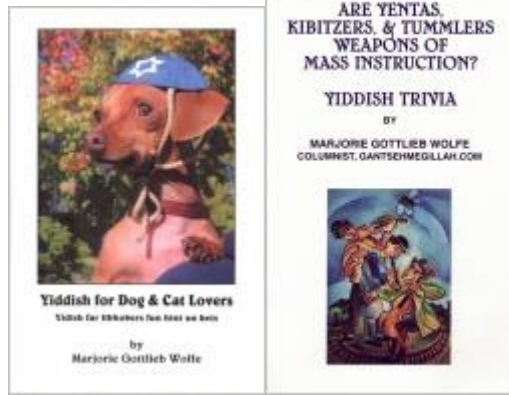
1. Hanukkah rhymes with Monica.
2. The 8-day holiday usually falls in December. Last year it fell on

Thanksgiving!

3. Hanukkah commemorates the victory of the Jewish Maccabees over Syrian despots in a fight for religious freedom.
4. Jews light candles for eight days--one the first evening, adding one light each night on the nine-branched menorah. A special 9th candle is called the shammes (servant) and stands taller than the rest in the menorah. It is used to light the others.
5. Hanukkah is observed with parties, game and gifts to the children, family, and friends.
6. Some Jews get practical presents like underwear and socks.
7. If someone screws up on their gift (a Spongebob Square Pants fleece throw blanket instead of a Play And Learn Smartphone), there are 7 more days to correct it.
8. Hanukkah gelt, a small gift of cash, is often distributed. There's even chocolate gelt.
9. A home preparing for Hanukkah smells of oil, potatoes, and onions.
10. A dreydl is a four-sided top initialed N, G, H, S...for Nichts (nothing), Ganz (all), half (halh) and stell (put). The letters stand for the Yiddish words nem (take), gib (give), halb (half) and shtel (put).
11. Some families follow the tradition of Chanukah tsedakah--charitable giving.
12. One of the Top 10 reasons to Celebrate Hanukkah: No need to clean up big piles of reindeer poop off your roof.
13. Leo Rosten ("The New Joys of Yiddish") wrote, "I have it on disputable authority that in Scarsdale, during a school celebration of Christmas, one of the children sang the carol as "GOD REST YE, JERRY MANDELBAUM."

MARJORIE WOLFE wishes all of her readers a Happy Hanukkah.

**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of
two books:**



"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and "Are Yentas, Kibitzers, & Tumblers Weapons of Mass Instruction? Yiddish Trivia." To order a copy, go to her website: MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com

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