Hanukkah Factsheet 2021

1. What is Hanukkah?

Hanukkah (Chanukah) is a Jewish holiday which celebrates the rededication of the Jewish Temple of Jerusalem during the second century B.C. This followed the triumph of a small group of Jewish rebels, known as the Maccabees, against their oppressors the Greek-Syrians, who had defiled the temple. The Hebrew word ‘Hanukkah’ means ‘dedication.’

Also known as the ‘Festival of Lights’, Hanukkah additionally celebrates a miracle that happened during this time. In order to rededicate the temple, the Maccabees had to light a menorah – a candle stick - that should have burned within the temple at all times. However, they only had enough pure olive oil to last for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days, leaving time to find a fresh supply.

Today, like winter holidays the world over, Hanukkah emphasises light and fun during the darkest part of the year and celebrates victory of the underdogs over their dominant oppressors.

2. When does Hanukkah take place?

Hanukkah starts on the 25 Kislev in the Hebrew calendar and lasts for eight days. The timing of Hanukkah in the Western/Gregorian calendar changes every year, although it always falls in November/December. In 2021, it will be held from sundown on 28 November through to sundown on 6 December. Future dates include:

- 18 - 26 December 2022
- 7 - 15 December 2023
3. How is it celebrated?

Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days to mark the eight days the oil burned.

People celebrate Hanukkah by lighting candles on a menorah (a nine branched candlestick), which is also called a Hanukiyah. Each night, an additional candle is lit and many families sing Hanukkah songs after the lighting.

As another reminder of the Hanukkah miracle, people eat traditional Hanukkah foods that are fried in oil. Potato pancakes (known as latkes) and jam-filled donuts (sufganiyot) are particularly popular in many households.

Other Hanukkah customs include exchanging gifts and playing with four-sided spinning tops called dreidels. Dreidels have a Hebrew letter on each side and once spun, the side the dreidel lands, determines what happens next in the game. The four Hebrew letters also form an acronym of a Hebrew sentence that translates to “A great miracle happened there” which is another reminder of the Hanukkah story.

4. What do inclusive organisations need to consider during Hanukkah?

Jews make up a relatively small proportion of the population. According to the 2011 Census of England and Wales, 263,346 people answered “Jewish” to the voluntary question on religion, (an increase from 2001 when it was 259,927). Jews comprised 0.5 % of the national population in 2001, the fifth largest Jewish population in the world. However, the population tends to be concentrated in large cities such as London, Manchester and Birmingham.

Amongst the Jewish community there are a wide variety of traditions and practices with many identifying as being culturally Jewish rather than religious. In other words, being Jewish is more a part of their ethnic or racial identity than a religious practice.

Hanukkah, unlike the major Jewish holidays, does not require any time off work, any major preparation or any long worship services. All this being said, recognition and celebration of
Hanukkah within the workplace will form part of an on-going message to staff that difference is welcome and celebrated.

**Awareness raising and celebration**

Inclusive organisations may want to take this opportunity to raise awareness of the Jewish faith, the festival and mark the celebrations. Suggested activities:

- Communications to all wishing them a Happy Hanukkah and explaining its significance;
- Communications which pick up on themes from the story and link with the wider inclusion agenda. For example, demonstrating solidarity with marginalised groups around the world who are pushing for greater freedom/equal rights or who might be living under persecution, religious or otherwise;
- Wishing individual Jewish colleagues a happy holiday, the common greeting at this time is Chag Sameach (“Happy holiday”);
- Profile Jewish employees from across the organisation and how they are celebrating;
- Mark the event by eating traditional fried foods with colleagues.

**Awareness that not everyone will be celebrating Christmas**

It is easy to get caught up in the fun and excitement related to Christmas, but at this time, it is important to notice that not everyone will be entering into the Christmas spirit in the same way. When planning celebrations, it might be worth checking in with colleagues who do not celebrate Christmas to see how they feel about the intended preparations such as decorations, communications, parties etc, and whether it is possible to incorporate other traditions in new and creative ways. For example, if Christmas and Hanukkah coincide, would it be possible to have a celebration that acknowledges both traditions?

**Resources:**
