



# Chanukah Food-tacular!

Dear Program Coordinator:

The following program proposal is meant to create a fun, exciting and educational Chanukah program that can be offered in conjunction with a menorah lighting ceremony. In addition to creating a memorable event where a good time can be had by all, the goal of this program is to educate participants regarding the historical connections between Chanukah and these particular food groups.

To prepare for the program, you will need to purchase sufficient quantities of the following supplies for your expected participants:

olive oil  
cottage cheese  
bread crumbs

All of these items are available with kosher certification. You can, of course, improvise and add. The following items are also suggested: onions, garlic, celery, salt, pepper and apples.

The basic program is a “cook-off” that can be offered in one of several ways:

- 1) Group Cooking Competition: Provisions are placed in the center of the table with a frying pan, a pot, a spatula and a portable electric burner. Groups are instructed to work together to create a fun food that uses the primary ingredients of oil and cheese. The finished item must be “plated” in such a way as to represent one aspect of the Chanukah story or emphasize the connection of dairy to the holiday. Each table also receives the included information sheets to help the participants come up with plating ideas.
- 2) Masterchef: In advance of the program, choose several prominent community members to participate in and/or judge the cook-off. (Do not inform them of the ingredients in advance.) In advance of the program, the MC can talk about the connection of dairy and Chanukah and, during the cooking time, explain the significance of using oil.
- 3) Demonstration: Choose a well-known local caterer or chef and invite them to do a cooking demonstration. A separate MC can use the included information sheets to inform the audience and participants about the history of oil, dairy and the connection to Chanukah in a fun way.

## Chanukah Yum

While Jewish holidays are known for their food (except Yom Kippur, of course), unfortunately, most of these foods are not known for being particularly healthy. Chanukah is no exception. Forget matzah or apples, those are healthy in comparison--pull out your deep fryer, because Chanukah is a celebration of oil.

*Soufganiyot* (that's Hebrew for doughnut): Did you know that Homer Simpson's favorite treat is a traditional Chanukah delight in Israel? Deep fried dough, most often filled with an injection of jelly, is how Israelis celebrate the tiny cruse of oil found by the Maccabees. This tradition probably developed from the custom among some Sephardi Jews to celebrate Chanukah with *bimuelos*, which are best defined as a type of fritter (deep fried dumpling).

According to Jewishrecipes.org, the Greek Sephardi community eat *loukoumades*, a popular, deep-fried Greek pastry comparable to a doughnut, coated with honey and cinnamon. "Romaniotes, the Jewish community in Byzantine Greece, called this pastry '*Zvingous/ Zvingoi*.' ... Today both Greek Jewish communities, Romaniotes and Sephardi--who immigrated to Greece five centuries ago--make these Chanukah treats."

*Latkes*: (That's Yiddish for pancake, in Hebrew they are called *levivot*): Read any children's Chanukah book today and you'll find descriptions of pancakes made of grated potatoes sizzling away in oil. But, potatoes were only introduced into European society in the 1500s (they originated in South America).

Prior to the introduction of the potato to the *latke*, Ashkenazi Jews celebrated Chanukah with cheese *latkes*. Same basic idea, yummy food fried into pancakes. Dairy, however, has its own special connection to Chanukah. Dairy foods were eaten as a reminder of the heroic Judith (*Yehudit*), who, according to tradition, was a beautiful widow who beheaded an enemy general by plying him with cheese and wine until he fell asleep.

Taken from NJOP's JewishTreats.org

## Pure Olive Oil

While a large number of Jews today light Chanukah candles, the more traditional custom is to light the Chanukah candles using olive oil. This is done in order to most accurately recreate the original Chanukah miracle.

When God instructed Moses to construct the Tabernacle in the wilderness (the vessels of which were eventually placed in the Temple in Jerusalem), He specifically stated: "And you will command the children of Israel, to bring to you pure olive oil, pressed for the light, to cause a lamp to burn continually" (Exodus 27:20).

Pure olive oil, known in Hebrew as *shemen zayit zach*,\* is the first drop of oil when the olive is first squeezed or pressed. The Mishna states that there is nothing better than the first oil of the first crop, and the sages of the Talmud described the process of how this oil was produced:

"The first crop is when the fully ripe olives are picked from the top of the tree; they are brought into the olive-press, are ground in a mill and put into baskets. The oil which oozes out is the first kind [of oil]. They are then pressed with the beam, and the oil which oozes out is the second kind" (Talmud *Menachot* 86a).

Olive oil, which burns slowly, cleanly and without an unpleasant odor, has many uses both in daily life and in Jewish rituals. Indeed, oil is one of the ingredients that was offered with the sacrifices in the Temple. However, only the menorah required the purest *shemen zayit zach* from the first pressing.

"If the candlestick, which does not need [the oil] for eating [but as fuel], requires pure olive oil, how much more do meal-offerings, which [need the oil] for eating, require pure olive oil! But the text states, pure olive oil beaten for the light, but not 'pure olive oil beaten for meal-offerings'" (*Menachot* 56b)

\*It is interesting to note that the words *shemen zayit zach*, when written in Hebrew, are composed of eight letters, one of the many interesting allusions to Chanukah that are hidden in the Torah (as found on inner.org).

Taken from NJOP's JewishTreats.org