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Rabbi Elihu Milder of Lincoln's Tifereth Israel Synagogue says that American Jews have become more elaborate with gift-giving during Hanukkah because of the strong Christmas influence on Jews in this country.

# Happy Hanukkah

*Holiday commemorates Jews' hardship, but celebrates in traditional foods, gifts*

By Andrea Kaser  
 Senior Editor

**D**ebi Schneider won't be home this year for Hanukkah.

But the UNL junior history major isn't heartbroken. The Jewish holiday, which begins Dec. 9 during dead week, does not carry the same importance as it does for those who celebrate Christmas.

During the holiday season, Hanukkah gets more attention than it merits, she said.

"It's kind of overdone just because of Christmas," she said.

But that doesn't mean Jews don't look forward to the celebration.

Ofer Asif, a junior electrical engineering major from Israel, said Hanukkah was a time for family, food and remembrance.

"(Jews) really like this holiday," he said.

The holiday commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after the Jewish leader Judas of Macabee conquered the Syrians in the first century B.C., according to Rabbi Elihu Milder of Lincoln's Tifereth Israel Synagogue.

There was a shortage of untainted oil. The Jews found only one cask of oil with an unbroken seal, which was enough for one day, Milder said. But they needed enough for eight days — enough time to obtain a fresh supply

of oil.

The single cask burned for the eight days, though, a miracle which Milder said was to be remembered later through the lighting of the eight candles of the menorah at Hanukkah.

Asif said Hanukkah, like most Jewish holidays, commemorates a somber period in Jewish history.

"The celebrations are because of hardships we've overcome," Asif said.

American Jews celebrate Hanukkah differently than Jews in Israel, he said, as they tend to give more gifts.

In Israel gifts at Hanukkah usually only amounted to the gelt, a small monetary gift, he said.

"It's just pocket money, just something to give the kids. It's really insignificant," he said.

Young children might receive \$2 or \$3, he said, while older children might receive about \$20.

Schneider, of Omaha, said her family gave gifts such as clothing and CDs every night of the celebration and also received gelt.

Milder said Americans have become more elaborate with gift-giving because of the influence of the strong U.S. tradition of giving gifts at Christmas.

Either way though, Hanukkah is time for family bonding, Schneider

— “*It's kind of overdone just because of Christmas.*”

— Schneider  
 UNL junior history major

said. Parents tell stories to children and children play games, including spinning the dreidel, a top with Hebrew letters.

It's also a time to eat good food, Asif said.

Unlike Schneider, Asif will catch the end of the celebration in Israel, where he looks forward to some of the holiday's traditional food. His favorite, doughnut-like pastries that can't be found in Lincoln, and potato pancakes are among the fare, he said.

Last year Asif spent the holiday in the states, but it wasn't the same as being at home, he said.

"I didn't have a major doughnut feast."

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