

Chanukah, Historically – Discussion Questions

Note to Teachers: This section can be done in multiple ways. It can be teacher-directed, with the teacher asking the questions and calling on individual students for answers. Answers can be recorded (scribed) or not, depending on the teacher's preference. These questions can also be discussed and answered in small groups, hevrutah pairs, or even individually. The "sharing out" element can be oral, in writing, journalling, or whatever other means the teacher chooses.

A. How do we view and/or frame a historical event?

Based on the four primary sources you read, what was the focus of the celebration of Chanukah both close to the events and even 200 years later? Why do you think that the focus began to shift to the "miracle" described in the Gemara? How does the passage of time impact how we view historical events?

B. How do we commemorate and/or celebrate historical events?

According to the sources, how was Chanukah celebrated? How does the celebration reflect the values and lifestyles of the people? How does the perspective change based on the source, its author, and its timeframe?

In your opinion, what is the focus and/or emphasis of Chanukah now? How has it changed and how has it stayed consistent?

C. How do we connect with our history?

How do commemorations and celebrations allow us to connect with our history? Why is this connection important? In what ways do you connect with your history—as a citizen of your country, a member of your community? Which national holidays and commemorations resonate with you and why?

D. What does Chanukah mean for us, historically and presently?

How do you commemorate Chanukah? What do you think Chanukah has meant for us as Jews historically? How have these four texts expanded and/or deepened your understanding of Chanukah? What does Chanukah mean for you today? Has this meaning changed as you have gotten older?