

HANUKKAH 101



Burning bright

After the Jews drove the Syrians out of Jerusalem in 165 B.C., they immediately took steps to cleanse the Temple of Zerubbabel (built on the same spot as the vanished Temple of Solomon, which, centuries earlier, had been razed by the Babylonians). The temple had been defiled by the Syrians and the Seleucids (the Greek imperial overlords who placed the Jews under Syrian rule).

An important part of cleansing the temple was to light the sacred menorah, a seven-branched candelabrum that would burn for seven days. The problem, said Utah Valley University history professor Alex Stecker, was that the temple's liberators "didn't have enough oil." There was only a one-day supply. Pragmatically, Stecker said, they decided to light the menorah anyway: "When it went out, they would pretend it was still lit."

Only, according to Jewish tradition, the menorah miraculously burned for seven days on a single day's supply of oil. That's why the most important and best-known aspect of Hanukkah is the lighting of a special commemorative menorah. Unlike the temple menorah, a Hanukkah menorah has nine branches. Eight of the candles represent the eight days of Hanukkah, while the ninth candle, in the center, is used to light the other eight.

Save the date

Hanukkah begins on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev. It is observed for eight days. Because of the variation between the Jewish and Roman calendars, the first day of Hanukkah typically falls in mid-to-late December, but can arrive as early as late November. In 2008, Hanukkah begins at sundown on Dec. 21, and the first day of

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If you go

► **What:** "The Symbols and Stories of Hanukkah" with Alex Stecker. A discussion of the Jewish holiday Hanukkah, which begins on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev, meaning that it falls somewhere between late November and late December each year.

► **When:** Monday, 7 p.m.

► **Where:** Storytelling wing, Orem Public Library, 56 N. State St., Orem

► **Cost:** Free

► **Info:** 229-7050

About the Presenter

Alex Stecker, 71, was born in Brooklyn, in New York City, and grew up there through his teenage years. When he was 16, his father decided to move the family across the country to California. After stopping in Pleasant Grove to visit friends, however, the Steckers had a change of heart and settled in Utah Valley.

Though he was raised a Roman Catholic, Stecker said, in Brooklyn "all of my friends were Jewish." After moving to Utah, Stecker took an interest in the missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were teaching his recently emigrated grandmother. "They taught her the gospel in German," he said. "I listened in and we were baptized together."

After serving an LDS proselytizing mission to Switzerland, Stecker was attending Brigham Young University in Provo and, hoping to lose some of the weight he'd gained on his mission, decided that he needed a class to distract him during lunch. "The only class being offered was in classical Hebrew," he said.

The subject proved immensely appealing to Stecker, and after graduating BYU with a degree in history and political science, he pursued his studies of Hebrew and Judaism at Brandeis University, Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Oxford University.

LaRae Free Kerr

It's All Relatives



THE YEAR OF DOUBLE CHRISTMAS

One golden November morning in 1949, Sis and I walked the block to Grandma Free's house. We unlatched the gate, walked beneath the bower and entered her magic land.

The covered porch was overflowing with green, flowering plants. Old oft-read books filled shelves. Across arms of overstuffed chairs, on bookshelves and tables were partly finished Christmas gifts — tatting, crocheting, knitting, sewing projects, decorating the two parlors like holiday trees.

This cozy day Grandma was working on a satin quilt in her bedroom. Thimbles on both middle fingers, she put eight tiny stitches on the needle, pushed it through with the right thimble, controlling from below with the left. We watched the needle go in and out several times while Grandma looked up at us, glad to see us but obviously not about to entertain us. We turned our attention to the alcove full of canaries that were singing in the warm winter weather.

Four- and 5-year-olds can only watch canaries so long. Besides, we knew we could find something interesting if we looked long enough. We rejected the near parlor with only a cursory glance. The second parlor held more interesting projects, but Grandma did not take kindly to dropped stitches or tangled yarns. So we didn't touch.

When everything around you is forbidden, and you are only 4 and 5, you just might get into the thing that is the least forbidden. So we headed for the walnut sideboard Grandma kept playing in it one other time and been sternly removed. But it surely seemed the least dangerous of all the things we could get into that day.

The sideboard had little doors on both ends, so we could go in one side and come out the other. Whispering excitedly, we pulled open the doors, ready to climb in.

But there, lying on the linens and laces were two naked muslin dolls. They were each a foot and a half tall. One was fat with red hair; the other was thin with black hair. We had always suspected that fairies lived in Grandma's house. Now we knew they did. Santa could do no better. We grabbed the dolls, hugging them tightly. Like new mothers, we checked them over from yarn hair to painted eyes and mouths to flat little tummies to rounded feet. They were ours. They had to be ours. It never occurred to us that they might be meant for Grandma's other grandchildren.

By the time we got to Grandma with our treasures in our

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Learn the basics of Jewish holiday

Cody Clark
DAILY HERALD

While brightly lit Christmas trees are all aglow in many Utah homes this month, a few local families will have holiday lights that don't put a strain on the electric bill. The Jewish observance of Hanukkah, which is sometimes called the Festival of Lights, gets its seasonal radiance from candles.

Hanukkah is probably at least somewhat of an enigma to many in Utah Valley, which is why the Orem Public Library has invited Utah Valley University history and political science professor Alex Stecker to speak about the history and traditions of Hanukkah on Monday night. Library division manager Lori Stevens said that a lot of people have seen a menorah or a dreidel but may not know very much about them.

Stecker said that Hanukkah commemorates the Jewish uprising against the Syrians in 165 B.C., when the hero Judas

Maccabaeus helped his countrymen recapture and restore the Temple of Zerubbabel. Stecker, 71, is not Jewish himself, but holds, among other academic degrees, a Ph.D. in rabbinical studies and archaeology from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

"I kind of wish I was (Jewish)" he said. (Stecker is LDS.) "I have all this knowledge. I'd make a damn good rabbi."

You don't have to be Jewish to celebrate Hanukkah, of course. Erik Ludwig, executive director of the United Jewish Federation of Utah (www.shalomutah.org), said that Gov. Jon M. Huntsman, a high-profile member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, will be hosting a Hanukkah party at the Governor's Mansion on Dec. 21.

The Daily Herald can't tell you everything there is to know about the Festival of Lights — that would be stepping on Stecker's toes — but we've put together a mini-primer to help broaden your Hanukkah horizons.



Professor Alex Stecker, of Utah Valley University, displays his Passover plates at his office on Tuesday in Orem. Stecker will be giving a presentation at the Orem Public Library about the symbols and stories of Hanukkah on Monday.

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