



# It's a Miracle!

## Topic

Hanukkah

## Grade Level(s)

5th and Up

## Goals for the Lesson/Activity

### **Students will:**

- Think about the different miracles of Hanukkah
- Reflect on the miracles in their own lives
- Document the miracles in their own lives and in the lives of others

## Technology needed

- Smart phones
- A video editing app. Two possibilities include:
  - **iMovie**; free for iOS
  - **Adobe Premiere Clip**; free for Android

## Background for Teachers

What was the miracle of Hanukkah? In the popular vernacular, it is probably the miracle of the oil burning for eight days after the Maccabees rededicated the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) in Jerusalem. However, references to that miracle do not occur until the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Hanukkah 21b) quotes an earlier source. Meanwhile, that same source makes passing mention of the Hasmoneans (i.e. the group led by the Maccabees) defeating the Assyrian Greeks to take back the *Beit Hamikdash*.

This mention of the undermanned Maccabean army defeating the mighty Greeks recalls several earlier sources that emphasize the military victory and rededication of the *Beit Hamikdash* but that make no mention of the miracle of the oil (1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Josephus).

Traditional liturgy also demonstrates a focus on the miracle of the Maccabees defeating the Greeks. To wit, the *Al Hanisim* prayer, which traditionally is inserted into both the *Amidah* and *Birkat Hamazon* during Hanukkah, reads in part, “You [God], in your great mercy, delivered the strong into the hand of the weak, the many into the hand of the few...” *Al Hanisim* continues later by mentioning the return to the *Beit Hamikdash*, its cleaning, and the kindling of the lights in its courtyard. [Note that there is no mention of the miracle of the long-lasting oil.]



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For a fun modern example of a miracle, consider showing a clip of the end of the Miracle on Ice from the 1980 Winter Olympics, in which the U.S. Hockey Team, comprised of college players who were mostly new to international competition, beat the Soviet team, comprised of hardened veterans of international competition and heavily favored to win. The reference to miracles can be found around the 1:00 minute of this video (<http://bit.ly/1mTk5By>).

### Description of Activities

1. Introduce the idea of miracles by sharing a personal/family story of something "amazing" that happened. Divide students into groups of three or four and instruct them to share an amazing story or two from their own life -or their family's life -with the group.
2. Give students the definition of a miracle. Students may need assistance unpacking the definitions.
  - a. Consider pointing out that the second definition leaves room for the event not being divine in nature.
  - b. Consider comparing and contrasting what it means for something to be a miracle and something being amazing.

[Note that the Hebrew word "נִס" (*nes*) has similar definitions. The online dictionary milog.co.il even gives finding one's car keys in the morning as an example of miracle #2]

[From m-w.com]

### **Miracle**

*noun* mir·ə·cle \ 'mir-i-kəl \

- 1 : an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs
- 2 : an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment

3. Ask students to recall the "amazing" stories they told just a few minutes earlier. Back in their small groups, ask them to discuss which of the definitions of a miracle are applicable to their experience. What about their experiences fits with the two definitions and what does not? If their stories do not fit into either category (e.g. it was amazing when they were able to ride a particular roller coaster or to reunite with camp friends), ask them why they think the experiences do not qualify as miraculous. This might even be a good place to show the video from the 1980 Olympics in order to discuss why people call it "The Miracle on Ice."



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4. Discuss the miracles of Hanukkah. (See Background for Teachers for more information.) In the same groups, students discuss which definitions of a miracle are applicable to each of the two Hanukkah miracles. Note that each definition could apply to each miracle to a greater or lesser extent.
  - a. Students can use the following questions to guide their discussions.
    - i. How can miracles be explained? What do you think caused these miracles to happen?
    - ii. Which seems more miraculous to you: one day of oil lasting for eight days or a weaker army defeating a stronger army?
5. Students break into pairs and prepare to make video documentaries about miracles.
  - a. Individuals in each pair begin by interviewing each other about the Hanukkah miracles. Questions might include: What happened? How likely was the event? Why might it have been unlikely? Did any special circumstances enable the event?
  - b. Students continue at home by interviewing family members, friends, etc. about miracles that they have seen or experienced themselves.
  - c. Examples of modern miracles might include:
    - i. An underdog sports team winning a championship
    - ii. Finding a lost animal
    - iii. Recovering from a serious illness
    - iv. Acing a particularly difficult school assessment
    - v. Receiving money or an item that they really needed
6. Students edit their interviews into short documentaries.
7. Movie Marathon! Show the movies with popcorn, etc.

### **Differentiation Options**

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

#### ***For learners who need more assistance***

- Students create a video that portrays one of the miracles of the Maccabees.

#### ***For learners who need extension opportunities***

- Students create a second video that shows the parallels between Hanukkah and Sukkot. Students can refer to 2 Maccabees 10:1-9 and Josephus' Antiquities.
- Students explore other sources for lighting candles on Hanukkah. See for example 1 Maccabees 4:36-59, which describes the rededication of the *Beit Hamikdash*, and Babylonian Talmud Tractate Avodah Zarah 8b, which tells a Midrash about how Adam feared the days getting shorter and celebrated the days getting longer.