

Embracing the family aspects of the season during Hanukkah

By Brian Nordli, Reno Gazette-Journal

For each day of Hanukkah, Judy Schumer of southwest Reno gathers with her family and passes out a gift to each of her grandchildren.

The family will feast on traditional latkes (fried potato pancakes); light a candle on the Chanukiah, which many call a menorah; and play Dreidel. Many other Jewish families will do the same for the eight-night holiday that begins at sundown on Tuesday.

“Many people call Hanukkah the Jewish Christmas, but it has nothing to do with Christmas,” Schumer said. “It actually means dedication. “» Sometimes, it comes at the same time as Christmas. Sometimes, it does not.”

Yet, Hanukkah wasn't always a big family gathering that involved exchanging gifts.

Schumer, 66, recalled a time when her father gave her a dollar each day, but it wasn't a major celebration. But the holiday, which falls on the 25th day of the Jewish month Kislev, often lands within weeks of Christmas. That proximity has caused the holiday's reputation to grow during the years.

“As Christmas has gotten bigger and bigger, Jews have responded,” North Tahoe Hebrew Congregation Rabbi Meredith Cahn said of the growth of Hanukkah. “I think it's a particularly American thing.”

Hanukkah is considered a minor holiday in Judaism, a remembrance of how Judah Maccabee and the Jews successfully rebelled against King Antiochus IV and the Syrian oppression.

When the Jews retook their temple, they always had to have a lamp lit. There was only enough oil for one day, but thanks to a miracle, the oil lasted eight days.

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