

Why are potato latkes a traditional part of Hanukkah celebrations?



Answer: It's all about the oil.

While latkes are a very popular Hanukkah food, in reality it's fried foods in general that carry out one of the themes of this holiday. (There are several varieties of doughnuts that are also popular during Hanukkah, especially in Israel.)

The tradition of an eight-day festival centered around the lighting of the nine-branched menorah dates back to 165 B.C., when Judea was allowed to rededicate the Temple under the rule of the Maccabees, a family of warrior priests. The books of I and II Maccabees in the

Jewish Apocrypha and the history of Josephus describe the eight-day celebrations. 600 years later, the Talmud tells the story that when it was time to light the altar lamp there was only one small flask of oil that had been properly dedicated, but the lamp on the altar could not be allowed to go out. Miraculously, though, this oil lasted through the eight days needed for a new supply of oil to be prepared. Hanukkah is therefore also called the “Festival of Lights.” Our selection, “Hanerot Halalu” (which means “These Candles”) commemorates these ancient traditions. “Old Matthius” refers to Mattathias, the father of the Maccabees, and the “ya-ba bim bom bims” are apparently supposed to represent drums or a chant. I spent several years of early grade school in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood and remember being very envious of my Jewish classmates who had eight whole days of getting presents while Christmas lasted for only one!

And, in case you want to make your own latkes and be wildly entertained at the same time, watch this video from the fabulous, fabulous Maccabeats:

<https://youtu.be/fg51la8Yayc>

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