



J I M E N A

Jews Indigenous to the
Middle East and North Africa

CHAG HABANOT & MIZRAHI FEMINISM



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WHAT IS CHAG HABANOT?

Chag Habanot is a holiday celebrated by Mizrahi communities on Rosh Chodesh Tevet. The festival, which takes place during Hanukkah, honors the story of the Jewish heroine Judith and the important role of women in Jewish life. It is customary to sing, dance, and light the night's menorah candle in honor of women everywhere.



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W H O I S J U D I T H ?



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"In the second century B.C.E., as the powerful Assyrian army invaded the Near East, the town of Bethulia was besieged by the cruel and domineering Holofernes, the Assyrian emperor's top general. The city's elders agreed to surrender if they were not rescued within a few days. Judith, a young widow challenged them to take responsibility for the survival of their famine-stricken community.

Accompanied only by her maid, she set out for the enemy camp. Smitten with her beauty, Holofernes invited her to a banquet. When he fell asleep in a drunken stupor, they were left alone in his tent. After praying for G-d's help, Judith took his sword and decapitated him, confusing the Assyrian army and leading the Israelites to victory."

Adapted from the Jewish Women's Archive

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WHAT ARE CHAG HABANOT TRADITIONS?

Some communities will hold a feast in Judith's honor, featuring many dairy dishes. In the story of Judith, it is said she fed Holofernes salty cheese to increase his thirst for wine, ultimately helping her kill him. To honor Judith's guile, cheese is eaten on Chag Habanot.

Other customs include gift-giving, from mothers to daughters and grooms to their wives.



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