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## SUFGANIYOT FOR SOLDIERS: SPREADING HANUKKAH JOY TO ISRAEL'S MODERN DAY MACCABEES

By Raphael Poch [December 16, 2014](#), 9:00 am

“We thank You (God) for the miracles, for the redemption, for the mighty deeds, for the saving acts, for the victories at war, and the wonders which You have wrought for our ancestors in those days, at this time...” (Hanukkah Holiday Prayer)



IDF soldiers enjoy sufganiyot, the traditional fried doughnut eaten on Hanukkah. (Photo: IDF)

On the festival of Hanukkah, it is customary to eat foods that are cooked with oil to commemorate the miracle of the menorah, which stayed alight for eight days and nights from one small jug of oil back in the Jewish Temple.

Over the 1,944 years since the last Temple stood in Jerusalem, the idea of giving gifts to a friend, loved one or neighbor has taken root as part of the traditions of the holiday as well.

When it comes to Israel and the IDF, these two customs have become juxtaposed with an atmosphere of giving back and saying thank you in a very sweet way. Myriads of *sufganiyot* are handed out to soldiers all across the country by your average Joe as sign of recognition for Israel's modern day [Maccabees](#).

Sufganiyot are traditional fried doughnuts eaten on Hanukkah. Your most basic sufganiya is filled with strawberry jam and sprinkled with a dusting of confectioners sugar. Chefs around the world have spruced up the simple fried confection with twists such as strawberry jalapeno and pistachio espresso.

A play on the Hebrew word "*lispog*," meaning to soak up, the term sufganiyot is a modern day label for these delicious doughnuts. The first Hebrew reference to what we know today as the sufganiya actually appears in 2 Samuel as a "*leviva*," the modern Hebrew term for fried potato latkes (pancakes).

Reflecting back on his time in the army during the holiday of Hanukkah, a First Staff Sergeant (res.) who wished to remain anonymous told *Breaking Israel News* that his base would overflow with sufganiyot during the holiday from all the citizens who came to spread some Hanukkah joy.

"While on duty a few years back, I recall that we received three trays of doughnuts in one shift. The next shift following, we received six more trays from local citizens on top of what the army gave us," he recalled. "We didn't have enough soldiers on base to eat all of these doughnut so we began to give them out to cars that passed through our checkpoint! One per person in every car."

He also bragged about his appetite that day. "People kept coming and dropping off more doughnuts, more food. People came to the door of the base, to the soldiers on duty at checkpoints, even to soldiers in the field, and just gave us food. We had so many doughnuts that we ended up having a doughnut eating contest to see how many we could wolf down over a single 8 hour shift. I won with 17, and I didn't even get sick, although I did go on a long hike the next day."



Classic Hanukkah sufganiyot (Photo: Noam Furer/ Wiki Commons)

When asked how the Israeli army celebrates the festival of lights, the First Staff Sergeant said, "The IDF takes celebrating the holidays very seriously. We have candle lighting ceremonies on each base, and soldiers whether on duty or off shift are given the opportunity to pray and light the candles, whenever security concerns allow for it. Most units throw parties, and even the higher ranking officers come down to celebrate with the regular soldiers on duty whenever they can."

The holiday of Hanukkah is one of joy to celebrate the ancient victory of a small army of the Maccabees who defeated the large Assyrian Greek army. While the Maccabean victory happened

long ago, Israel is still fighting for its survival each day against those who wish to annihilate the Jewish nation.

This Hanukkah, [LIBI USA](#), part of the official fundraising unit of the IDF, is partnering with the *Yashar LaChayal* and *4 the Soldiers* organizations to distribute not only sufganiyot, but more importantly, winter gear to the soldiers. Although sufganiyot certainly spread festive joy to soldiers, according to *LIBI USA* Chairman Dr. John Grossman, winter gear is what the soldiers need most at this time of year.

This year the IDF hopes for a quiet and joyous festival for all its soldiers as well as the citizens of Israel.

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