

# Taking a shine to December festivals

## Candles integral to cultural celebrations

BY MIKE ADLER  
Staff Writer

While many households are strung with Christmas lights this year, other December festivals will have beautiful lights of their own.

Festive candles are lit for both Chanukah, the Jewish festival of lights, and Kwanzaa, a cultural festival for the black community.

Chanukah begins this year on Friday night, Dec. 4, when the first candles will be lit in a nine-cup candelabrum called a menorah.

One candle is added on each night of the eight-day holiday, until all cups or branches of the menorah are used. (One special candle, filling the ninth space, is also lit each night to light the others.)

### LEGEND OF THE OIL

Eight branches of the menorah represent the miracle of Chanukah — after an ancient Jewish revolt, a day's oil in the lamp of the recaptured temple in Jerusalem continued to burn for seven more days.

Local stores selling Judaica have a variety of menorahs.

Israel's on Clark Avenue in Thornhill has approximately 50 different models, ranging in price from a basic metal stand (\$2.99) to a sterling silver menorah (\$575).

Some of the more creative designs draw from Judaism's long history or from what appeals to children today.

Menorahs at Israel's feature Disney characters or Winnie the Pooh, animals in Noah's ark, the cityscape of Jerusalem, the fronts of historic synagogues, a triceratops and children spinning the dreidel, the four-sided top which helps tell the Chanukah story.

One is a recreation of an Eastern European shetl (town), complete with a peddler by a pushcart and a shochet (slaughterer) reaching for a chicken.

One has clowns that spell out the word Chanukah (eight letters) with their bodies.

Chanukah celebrates a military revolt against an oppressive king.

But today, the Jewish community views that fight as one to maintain Jewish values and identity, rather than as a military victory.

### SEVEN DAYS OF KWANZAA

Kwanzaa, which begins Dec. 26, also promotes a set of seven values — called the Nguzo Saba — during its seven days.

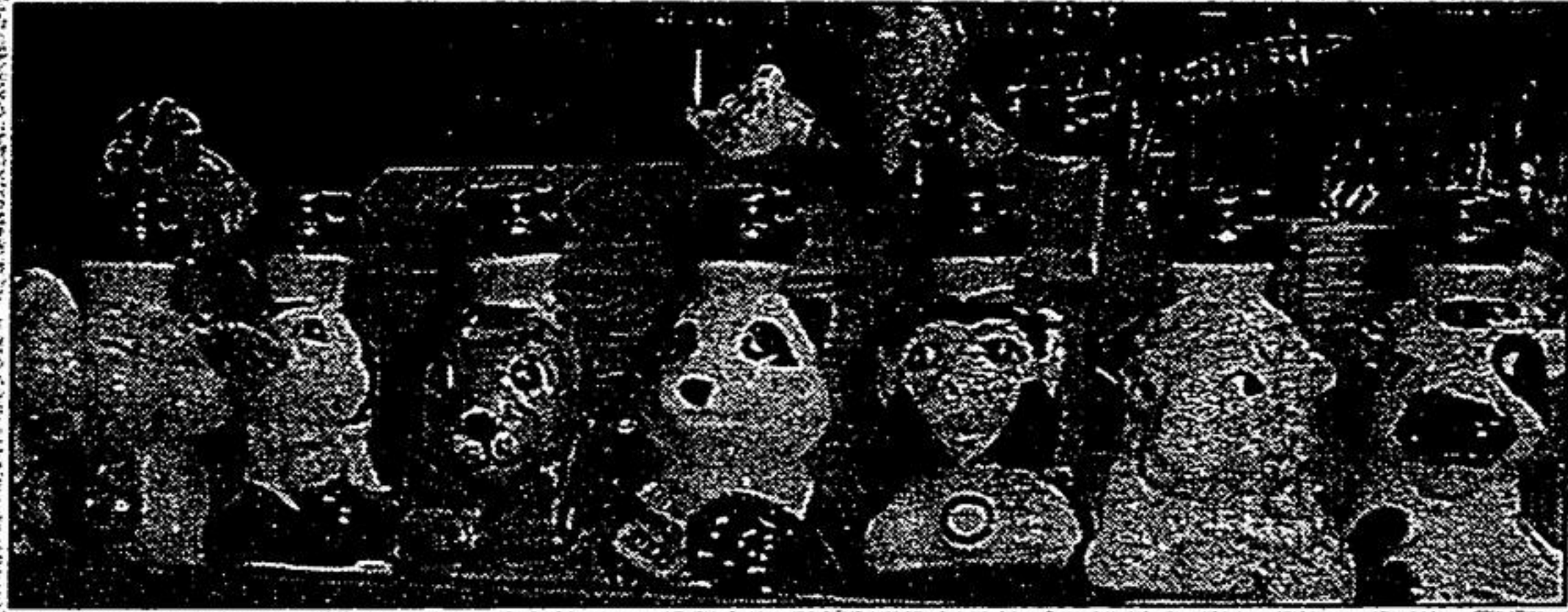
They are unity, self-determination, collective responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.

Each day, a candle representing one of the principles is added to a seven-cup candelabrum called a kinara, which is set on a straw mat.

The Kwanzaa candles are sometimes arranged in the colours of the black liberation flag — red, green and black.

Created in this century, but based on traditional harvest festivals in Africa, Kwanzaa ends with a feast for families and friends called Karamu.

Last year, community events in Toronto and at high schools in Markham celebrated the festival.



A Jewish menorah depicts the animals on Noah's ark.

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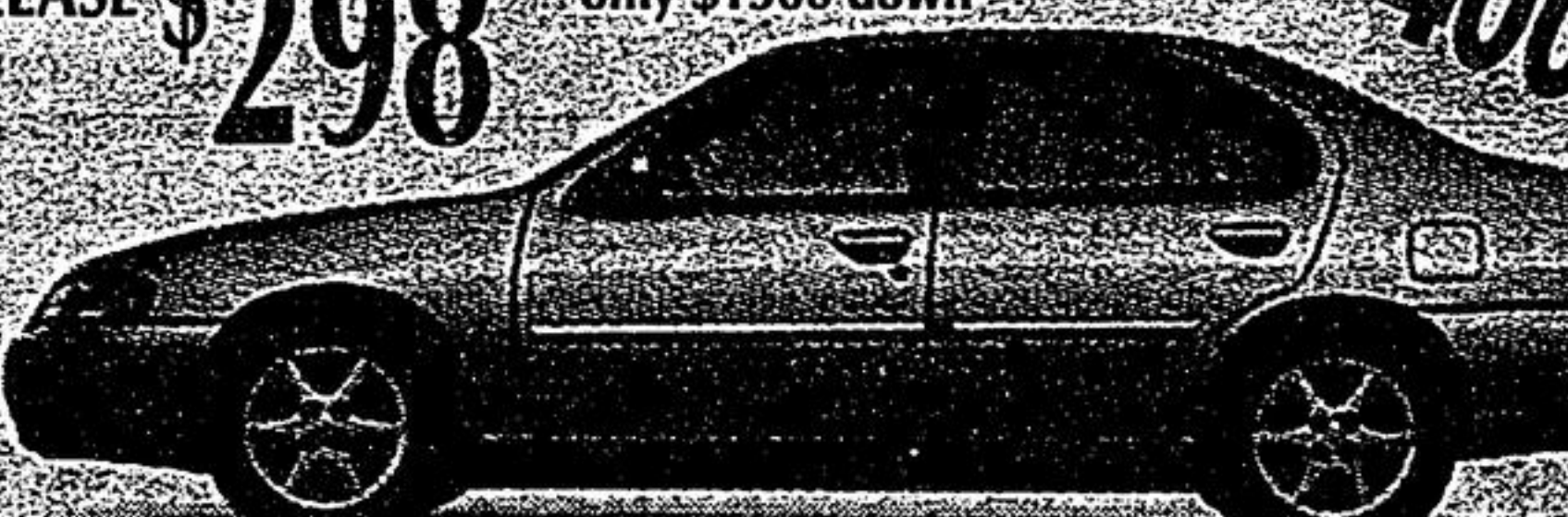
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