

Chanukah at KCT

Celebrating



5771



Wednesday evening December 1 - Thursday evening December 9



KEHILLAT CHOVEVEI TZION SHABBAT and CHANUKAH SERVICES

December 2010 Kislev-Tevet 5771

Chanukah 5771

Wednesday evening, December 1

Shabbat Chanukah (Third Day of Chanukah)

Friday	December 3	6:00 PM
Saturday	December 4	9:00 AM

Shabbat Vayigash

Friday	December 10	6:00 PM
Saturday	December 11	9:00 PM

Shabbat Vayechi

Friday	December 17	6:00 PM
Saturday	December 18	9:00 AM

Shabbat Shemot

Friday	December 24	6:00 PM
Saturday	December 25	9:00 AM

Shabbat Va'era

Friday	December 31	6:00 PM
Saturday	January 1	9:00 AM

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7 Kislev 5771
November 14, 2010

Chanukah recalls miracles, history, dedication and resolve.

The almost two decade history of **Kehillat Chovevei Tzion** and the impact it has had and continues to have on its member families, friends and community, is most exciting.

As an all-volunteer, lay-lead independent Kehillah, the challenges are many and the resolution and rewards are uplifting. The warmth of smallness with the passion of deep commitment spill across all of the Shabbat and Yom Tov services, special occasion events and educational programming throughout the year that bring us together in communal study and celebration. The passionate closeness that marks life-cycle events extends the reach of family into community.

We are delighted to be able to bring to you at various times throughout the year, these thematic and holiday preparation booklets for your enjoyment and personal study with friends, family and neighbors.

Speaking of friends and neighbors . . . Why not bring them with you to the next Shabbat service or to one of the exciting upcoming social and educational events? Be sure to stay informed about all happenings via the KCT listserv and the website (www.kct.org).

Being here, learning, speaking encouragingly of the activities, providing transportation to services and assistance in managing the needs of the Kehillah, sharing thoughts for improvements and for new programs, providing tzedakah to nourish the fiscal needs of KCT and its diverse program . . . all are the welcome expressions of dedication to the goals of the Kehillah that are most urgently sought as we approach in the coming weeks, the historic rededication symbolized by the Chanukah period.

The Trustees of KCT and their families join in bringing you our best wishes for an uplifting and meaningful Chanukah celebration.

L'hitraot,

Elaine Ehrenberg
Harvey Goldstein
Jeffrey Margulies

Bruce Engelberg
Douglas Lee
Martin Vitberg

Seth Forman
Charles Mann
Herman Werner



Please be aware that this booklet contains full blessings including God's name. Should you print it out and no longer wish to retain the printed booklet, please take care to dispose of it properly.

... Kindling the Lights



Washington DC Mall photo courtesy of Chabad.

(Text, photos and brachot compiled from various sources.)

Kindling the menorah lights is the most important Chanukah custom. Jews light the candles to remember the miracle of the Maccabees' victory and the miracle of the oil that burnt for eight days in the holy Temple. It is a mitzvah that Jews must "publicize the miracle" by lighting a *Chanukiah* each night during the eight days of Chanukah.

The Menorah should have eight candle holders in a row all at the same height, and a separate candle holder for the *Shamash*. The Shamash candle is used to light the other eight candles, since it is forbidden to use the Chanukah lights for any purpose other than viewing.

To best publicize the miracle, the Menorah is ideally lit outside the doorway of your house, on the left side when entering. If this is not practical, then the Menorah should be lit in a window facing the public thoroughfare. If the Menorah cannot be lit by the window, it may be lit inside the house on a table, which at least fulfills the mitzvah of "publicizing the miracle" for members of the household.

The Menorah should preferably be lit immediately at nightfall (Sundays through Thursdays). If necessary, however, the Menorah can be lit late into the night. It is best to wait until all members of the household are present to light the Menorah. It should remain lit for at least 30 minutes after nightfall. On Friday afternoon, the Menorah should be lit before

sundown, before lighting the Shabbat candles. On Saturday night, the Menorah should be lit after reciting Havdalah, concluding Shabbat.

On the first night, place one candle in the Menorah's far right (as you face the Menorah) candle holder. Another candle is placed for the Shamash. Recite the blessings below and then light the candle using the Shamash candle.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מְלֶכֶת הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַיִךְ
וְצִוּוֹנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל
חֲנוּכָה :

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מְלֶכֶת הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה
נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ
בְּיָמֵינוּ הֵם בְּזַמָּן
הַזֶּה :

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מְלֶכֶת הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַחֲזִינוּ
וְקִיַּיְמָנוּ וְהִגַּעְנוּ לְזַמָּן
הַזֶּה :

First Blessing . . .

Baruch Atah Adonoy Eloheynu Melech Ha'olom
Asher Kiddeshonu Be'mitsvotov Ve'tsivonu
Lehadlik Ner Shel Chanukah. Amen!

*Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the
universe, who has sanctified us by His
commandments, and has commanded us to
kindle the lights of Hanukkah.*

Second Blessing . . .

Baruch Atah Adonoy Eloheynu Melech Ha'olom
She'oso Nissim La'avoteynu Ba'yomim
Ho'heyim Bazman HaZeh. Amen!

*Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the
universe, who wrought miracles for our fathers
in days of old, at this season.*

Third Blessing (only on the first night of Chanukah)

Baruch Atah Adonoy Eloheynu Melech Ha'olom
She'hecheyanu Ve'ki'monu Ve'higi'onu Lazman
HaZah. Amen!

*Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the
universe, who has kept us alive, and has
preserved us, and enabled us to reach this time*



Note: On the second through eighth nights . . .

As shown in the diagram above, as you face the Menorah . . .

Place additional candles right to left . . .
light the candles each night left to right!

Say the first two blessings and then light the candles using the Shamash. Light the left-most candle first and then light in order, from left to right. Follow this procedure for each night of Chanukah.

While lighting the candles themselves, songs like "Hanerot Halalu" (see below) or verses from "Al HaNissim" are traditionally recited . . .

הַנֵּרוֹת הַלְלוּ אֲנֵנוּ מִדְּלִיקָן, עַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת, וְעַל
הַנִּסִּים, וְעַל הַנִּפְלְאוֹת, שְׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַיּוֹם, עַל יְדֵי כַּהֲנֵי הַקְּדוֹשִׁים. וְכָל
שְׁמוֹנַת יָמֵי חֲנֻכָּה, הַנֵּרוֹת הַלְלוּ קֹדֶשׁ הֵם, וְאִין לָנוּ
רְשׁוֹת לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בָּהֶן, אֶלָּא לְרֵאוֹתָן בְּלִבְךָ, כְּדִי לְהוֹדוֹת
וְלְהַלֵּל לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל, עַל נִסְיֶיךָ וְעַל נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ וְעַל
יְשׁוּעוֹתֶיךָ:

Hanei'rot ha'lo'lu anu mad'li'kin
Al ha'te'shu'ot v'al ha'nissim v'al ha'nif'la'ot,
She'a'see'ta la'avo'tei'nu ba'ya'mim ha'heim
biz'man ha'zeh,
Al ye'dei ko'hanecha ha'kedoshim.
V'chol shemonat y'mei chanukah, haneiro halalu
kodesh hem,
V'ein lanu re'shut lehish'ta'meish ba'hen,
E'la lirotan bil'vad, ke'dei lehodot u'lehaleil
l'shimcha hagadol Al ni'secha v'al nifle'otecha v'al
ye'shuotecha.

We light these lights for the miracles and the wonders, for the redemption and the battles that you made for our forefathers in those days at this season, through your holy priests. During all eight days of Chanukah, these lights are sacred and we are not permitted to make ordinary use of them. But only to look at them in order to express thanks and praise to Your great Name for your miracles, your wonders and your salvations.

Once the candles have been lit, Maoz Tzur is traditionally sung (See the next article). ◆

... Maoz Tzur (Rock of Ages)

Maoz Tzur, which translates from the Hebrew as "Rock of Ages", is traditionally sung after reciting Chanukah blessings and lighting the candles. Maoz Tzur is an acrostic poem with five stanzas. The first letter of each stanza spells the poet's name, Mordechai, in Hebrew (mem, reish, dalet, kaf, yud).

The first stanza, shown below, thanks God for deliverance from our oppressors. The next three stanzas (see *your siddur*) tell the story of the exodus from Egypt and the liberation from Babylonia, Persia, and Syria. The fifth verse recounts the story of Hanukkah.

מַעוֹז צוּר יִשׁוּעָתִי לַךְ נֶאֱחָה לְשִׁבְחֵךָ.
תִּכּוֹן בֵּית תְּפִלָּתִי וְשֵׁם תּוֹדָה נִזְבַּחֵךָ.
לְעֵת תִּכְיִן מַטְבַּח מִצָּר הַכּוֹנֵנֶיךָ.
אִז אֶגְמוֹר בְּשִׁיר מִזְמוֹר חֲנֻכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּיחַ:

Stanza 1: Transliteration

Ma'oz tsur yeshu'ati lecha na'eh leshabeach.
Tikon beit tefilati vesham todah nezabeach.
Le'et tachin mat'beach mitsar ham'nabeach,
'az 'egmor beshir mizmor, chanukat hamizbeach.

Stanza 1: Popular English Translation

Rock of ages, let our song praise Your saving power;
You, amid the raging foes, were our sheltering tower.
Furious they assailed us, but Your arm availed us,
And Your word, broke their sword,
When our own strength failed us.

Stanza 1: Literal Translation

O mighty stronghold of my salvation, to praise You is a delight.
Restore my House of Prayer and there we will bring a thanksgiving offering. When You will have prepared the slaughter for the blaspheming foe, Then I shall complete with a song of hymn the dedication of the Altar. ◆

... Maoz Tzur: A Sixth Stanza

Written by Dr. Ron Wolfson, who is the Fingerhut Professor of Education at American Jewish University and the president of Synagogue 3000.

This well-known Chanukah song summarizes historical challenges faced by the Jewish people that have been overcome with God's help. Yet this joyous song also contains a later addition, a sixth

stanza composed three centuries after the original Maoz Tzur was written. The appearance of this little-known, rarely-sung stanza poses a challenge to modern Jewish sensibilities. It is a raw, emotional reaction to persecution faced by the Jewish community in Christian Europe. While being able to identify with the emotions that arise out of the historical circumstances, the call for Divine retribution is foreign to the modern ear. Nonetheless, the theological question of God's role in history raised in the last stanza of this song is a question that is still asked today.

Maoz Tzur is undoubtedly the most famous of Chanukah songs. Composed in the 13th century of the Common Era by a poet only known to us through the acrostic found in the first letters of the original five stanzas of the song--Mordecai-- it became the traditional hymn sung after the candlelighting in Ashkenazi homes. The familiar tune is most probably a derivation of a German Protestant church hymn or a popular folk song.

Although many families attempt to sing the first stanza, either in the original Hebrew or in a not-so-accurate English translation by M. Jastrow and G. Gottheil entitled "Rock of Ages," the song as it has evolved through the years now contains six stanzas, the last stanza having been added by an unknown poet sometime during the 16th century. Unfortunately, due either to the exuberance of children rushing to open presents or general illiteracy with regard to Jewish liturgy, Maoz Tzur often gets a token singing at best, with the vast majority of Chanukah celebrants quite unaware of its true meaning.

In a fascinating look at Maoz Tzur, Professor Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, examined the text of the poem in a penetrating article entitled "A Meditation on Maoz Zur" (Judaism, fall 1988, pp. 459-64). Explaining that he and his family fled from Germany on the first day of Chanukah, 1938, Schorsch says the singing of Maoz Tzur has always held special significance for him. Yet, he wonders, why was it that their practice was to sing the first five stanzas and not the later sixth?

The theme of Maoz Tzur is a familiar one: God's unfailing redemption of the people Israel. After an opening stanza promising thanksgiving to God now and always, the poet recalls four moments of Divine intervention in chronological order: Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, and the Greeks of the Chanukah story.

It is the sixth stanza that brings Schorsch to his

analysis of the meaning of the poem. In a particularly blunt plea for revenge against the "wicked kingdom," the poet dares to wish for God to intervene once more and "vanquish Christianity in the very shadow of the cross." How could a Jewish poet who knew of the persecutions inflicted on his people by the Romans and their descendants be ignored at the triumphant moment of Chanukah? Yet, the addition of the sixth stanza calls into question the basic theology of the entire song. If God always redeems his people, why are we still awaiting the messianic kingdom?

Schorsch turns our attention to Psalm 31, upon which the opening phrase, "Maoz Tzur" is based. The second verse of the Psalm reads: "I seek refuge in You, O Lord; may I never be disappointed; as You are righteous, rescue me." The midrash, the rabbinic commentary that seeks to expound the simple meaning of the text, pounces on the word "le'olam"--"never"--and poses one of the most difficult problems for a religious person: how to reconcile the continuous promise of redemption with the harsh reality of life.

In the midrashic dialogue between the people Israel and God, Israel asks why, if God's redemption is everlasting, do we continue to suffer? "To be sure, You have already redeemed us through Moses, through Joshua, and through some judges and kings. But we have once again been subjugated and endure degradation as if we had never been redeemed." God responds that redemption effected through mere mortals is not true redemption, even if influenced by Divine intention.

The author of the sixth stanza of Maoz Tzur, reeling from the shock of persecutions and expulsions, attached his messianic codicil. The previous redemptions, from the Babylonian exile to the Syrian-Greek oppressions, were of limited duration because they were mediated by men. The fourth kingdom, Christianity will only be overcome by God directly.

Schorsch concludes that "taken together, the two strata of Maoz Tzur blend into a liturgical reflection on Jewish history--the precariousness of minority existence, the reality of Divine concern, the consolation of collective memory, and the rarity of true messianism." He warns us to be careful of emphasizing the human role of the Chanukah story and draws a parallel to the current political situation in Israel. Just as the Maccabees achieved only a limited "redemption," Schorsch warns that "messianism, properly understood, leads to political restraint."

The true meaning of Maoz Tzur serves both to remind us of the harsh divergence between history and theology and to hold out the promise of ultimate redemption by the hand of God. ◆

... Add or Take Away?

Drawn in parts from the writings of several authors including Rabbi Pinchas Frankel (writing for the OU) and Rivka C. Berman (writing for several of the MazorNet websites and publications).

One of the most famous disputes between the students of Mishnaic sages Hillel and Shammai examined the customary number of lights to be lit each Chanukah night. The students of Shammai thought it best to light all eight candles at the outset and to subtract one on each successive night. This would parallel the offerings brought on Sukkot which begin at 70 on the first day and dwindle each following day. The students of Hillel explained the hope that "we should ascend in holiness and not down" as the reason why it would be preferable to add a candle each night of Chanukah. (*Shabbat 21b*)

Hillel's academy won the debate and his is the practice followed to this day. As candles are added every night of Chanukah the amount of radiated light increases each night, mirroring a commitment to bring an ever-growing amount of spiritual light into the world.

On the question of the order of lighting the candles . . . The rabbis who established the blessing criteria consistently took care to avoid mentioning God's name without cause. There would be no reason to repeat the Chanukah blessing every night of the holiday if there wasn't something novel that merited the invocation of God's name. This is one reason given as to why the candle that represents the current night of Chanukah is lit first. It is over this new amount of light that the blessing is being said. ◆

... Remembering and Rededicating

Excerpted from a Dvar Torah by Rabbi Toba Spitzer, the rabbi of Congregation Dorshei Tzedek, Newton, MA.

[. . .] The historical background to Chanukah is that, in 167 B.C.E., a group of Jewish zealots-Judah Maccabee and his brothers, later known as the Hasmoneans - challenged the attempt by the Greek-Syrian rulers of Jerusalem to ban traditional Jewish practices and force the Jewish population to

assimilate to the dominant Hellenistic culture. This was not only a popular rebellion, but a civil war as well: the Hasmonean zealots killed other Jews who dared transgress Torah laws. After defeating the occupying forces, the Maccabees rededicated the desecrated Temple in Jerusalem.

There are parallels between then and now. The Hellenism of 167 B.C.E. was in many ways similar to American culture in the 2000's: a global force that absorbed and weakened other cultures as it spread worldwide. Just as assimilation is a hot topic in the American Jewish community today, many Jews of that time were similarly attracted to Hellenism and had abandoned traditional Jewish practices. [. . .] On Chanukah we celebrate Jewish courage in overcoming a cultural threat. We learn from the rabbis of the Talmudic era who created the holiday of Chanukah by transforming the historical story of the Maccabees.

It is in the Talmud that we first find the-now famous story of the little vial of lamp oil which lasted for a miraculous eight days. In honor of this "miracle" the rabbis ordained that we light candles for eight nights. And it was the rabbis who established the haftarah reading - a selection from the prophet Zechariah - for the Shabbat during Chanukah, which includes this wonderful verse: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says Adonai of hosts."

In creating the holiday of Chanukah, the ancient rabbis clearly wanted to downplay the militaristic aspects of the historical tradition, and to emphasize the importance of faith in God over faith in human power (which may have been wise, given the fact that the Hasmonean rulers went on to become Hellenized themselves, and very corrupt). Just as the rabbis "reconstructed" the tradition they had received to create a meaningful celebration, so too we are challenged to discover what Chanukah can mean for us today.

The rabbinic Chanukah centers around the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem (the word "chanukah" means "dedication"). The Temple was the successor to the mishkan, that structure in the wilderness, built by the Israelite community --which enabled the Presence of the Holy One to dwell among the people.

For me, the mishkan is a symbol of all that we want to create together as a Jewish community, and as a larger society. The lights we light at Chanukah remind us of the mishkan, and give us an opportunity to "rededicate" ourselves to creating a society and a world in which the Godly can "dwell."

What will help bring light into the world, and how can each of us bring some of that light? These are questions we can ask as we kindle our Chanukah candles this year. I wish you a holiday filled with light and song and the possibility of world ruled not by might and not by power, but by the Spirit that moves and works through each of us. ◆

. . . . From Gelt to Gifts

Dr. Eliezer Segal of the University of Calgary, intertwines an understanding of Jewish history with a look at the development of practices in the modern Jewish community. Readers of KCT publications will recognize the author from his whimsical writings published around Purim, Pesach and other holidays.

During the year that our family was sojourning in California, our children came home from school with marvelous reports of the gifts that their classmates had received in honor of Chanukah: color televisions, Nintendos and beyond. We had, of course, heard about the exaggerated commercialization of the American Chanukah, but the phenomenon did not become tangible for us until that experience.

In comparison with the *Mishloah manot* of Purim or the *Afikoman*-bargaining of the Passover seder, gifts are not a traditional feature of Chanukah observances. The closest equivalent to an institution of gift-giving on Chanukah is the Eastern European custom of distributing "Chanukah-gelt" to the children. However, even this is of recent vintage, and it is hard to find mentions of it before the nineteenth century.

It would appear that Chanukah-gelt evolved out of an earlier practice with a decidedly different character. Inspired by the semantic and etymological connections between "Chanukah" --dedication, and *hinnukh*--education, some Jewish communities used the Chanukah season as an opportunity to recognize their religious teachers and students. An interesting practical application of these ideals is related in "*Hemdat Yamim*," a homiletical collection first published in eighteenth-century Smyrna, a work whose author's identity (other than the fact that he was a devotee of the messianic pretender Shabbetai Zvi) has continued to elude bibliographers.

The *Hemdat Yamim* reports that "in some communities, the custom has arisen of having the children distribute coins to their teachers along with other gifts. Other beggars make the rounds then, though the mitzvah is intended primarily for the benefit of impecunious students."

Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polnoye, the renowned student of Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, wrote that in Eastern Europe it was customary during Chanukah for Rabbis to make the rounds of outlying villages to strengthen their Jewish education. Although initially the teachers were scrupulous about not accepting payment for their services, eventually they agreed to at least accept compensation for lost time. Before long the tour, with trademark lantern in hand, came to be seen by many as expressly intended for the collection of material tokens of appreciation, and this evolved into a quasi-obligatory gift of Chanukah-gelt. Chanukah-gelt tours are mentioned as a routine matter in some early Hasidic stories, and the practice expanded to encompass additional recipients--such as preachers, cantors, butchers and beadles--as well as a broader variety of acceptable currencies--including whiskey, grain, vegetables and honey. The right to collect Chanukah-gelt would be written into the contracts of communal employees, and legends were even circulated to the effect that one of the collectors might be none other than the prophet Elijah!

It is not until the nineteenth century that we begin to hear about Chanukah-gelt being directed primarily at children. We are not certain how or why this transformation occurred, but it is described in several autobiographical memoirs, especially by children of well-to-do homes.

Variations on these customs were also observed in Sephardic and oriental communities. Poor Jewish children in Persia would go door to door offering, in return for gifts, to protect their benefactors' households from the Evil Eye by burning special grasses. In Yemen, it was customary for Jewish mothers to give their children a small coin on each day of Chanukah, with which to purchase sugar powder and red coloring that would be used as ingredients for a special holiday treat: a sweet beverage known as "Chanukah wine" that was drunk at their nightly parties.

In the "old yishuv" of Israel, Sephardic yeshiva children circulated through the neighborhood asking for contributions of food for their festive Chanukah feast. The little "Maccabees" in Hebron would reinforce their demands with toy rifles. In Jerusalem, the teachers made their own tour of the Jewish Quarter, serenading the householders with Ladino songs. The custom was believed to be linked to the week's Torah portion in which Jacob urges his sons to "go again and procure some food for us."

Needless to say, an immense gulf separates the customs described here from the shopping frenzy that is associated with the North American Chanukah. ◆

... Hannah and Her Seven Sons

Excerpted from the extensive scholarly writings of the late Rabbi Gerson Cohen, z"l, past Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, 1972-1986.

[Editors' note: Scholars differ on a number of the historical details of the era in which the Chanukah miracle occurred. While none doubt the awesome influence of the events over the subsequent two millennia, the extract below illustrates the detail in which such study preserves the magnificent legacy of one of the two most influential heroines of the era, Hannah and Yehudit.]

Hannah and her Two Sons, a story told in II Maccabees, Chapter 7, of seven brothers who were seized along with their mother by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, presumably shortly after the beginning of the religious persecutions in 167/166 B.C.E., and commanded to prove their obedience to the king by partaking of swine's flesh. The brothers defiantly refused to do so. Encouraged in their resolve by their mother, they were executed after being put to frightful tortures. When the mother was appealed to by the king to spare the youngest child's life by prevailing upon him to comply, she urged the child instead to follow in the path of his brothers, and she herself died shortly thereafter.

The accounts of the manner in which she met her death differ. According to IV Maccabees, she threw herself into the fire. The Midrash states that she lost her reason and threw herself to her death from a roof, while according to Josippon, she fell dead on the corpses of her children. The story, along with that of the martyrdom of the aged priest Eleazar (II Macc. 6:18–31), became the subject of the book known as the Fourth Book of Maccabees. In rabbinic literature the story is recounted as an instance of martyrdom during the Hadrianic persecution (Lam. R. 1:16, no. 50; Git. 57b; PR 43:180; SER 30:151). The martyrs were venerated in the Roman Catholic calendar of saints (Aug. 1) as the "Seven Maccabee Brothers," although the mother is also mentioned with them, their martyrdom being considered a prefiguration of later Christian martyrdoms. According to Antiochene Christian tradition, the relics of the mother and sons were interred on the site of a synagogue (later converted into a church) in the Kerateion quarter of Antioch. On this and other grounds, it has been suggested that the scene of the martyrdom was Antioch rather than Jerusalem.

Whatever its historical substratum, the story in II Maccabees and in all subsequent sources is doubtless an adaptation of a stock form of a terrible tragedy (cf. I Sam. 2:5 and Isaiah di Trani's commentary; Job 1:2, 19; Ass. Mos. 9; Jos., Ant., 14:429; BB 11a; Sem. 8:13). Drawing directly on II

Maccabees, Sefer Josippon (c. 953) restored the story to its original Epiphanian setting. Although in II Maccabees and Gittin the name of the mother is not given, in other rabbinic accounts she is called Miriam bat Tanhum, while in Syriac Christian accounts she is called Shamone and/or Maryam. However, the obvious association with I Samuel 2:5 impelled a Spanish reviser of the Josippon (ed. Constantinople, 1510, 4:19) to name the anonymous mother of II Maccabees "Hannah," by which name she has become famous, thanks to the dissemination of the longer (Spanish) version of Josippon and the medieval piyyutim in Hebrew, Arabic, and Judeo-Persian which are based on it. The story has inspired many legends on the place of the martyrs' burial, as well as works of art, poetry, and drama on their martyrdom, down to modern times. ◆

... Dreidel: The Rules of the Game

Long associated uniquely with the holiday of Chanukah is the children's game of "dreidel". We present here the thoughts of three different sources. First, one educator's take on the rules of the game! Written by Noam Zion, Director of Shalom Hartman Institute's Resource Center for Jewish Continuity. He specializes in teaching Jewish Holidays, Bible and Art.



(Shown in the photo, from right to left, are the letters nun, gimmel, hey, and shin)

The Hebrew word for dreidel is *sevivon*, which, as in Yiddish, means to turn around. Dreidels have four Hebrew letters on them, and they stand for the saying, "*Nes Gadol Haya Sham*," meaning "A great miracle occurred there." In Israel, instead of the fourth letter "shin," there is a "*peh*," which means the saying is "*Nes Gadol Haya Po*"--"a great miracle occurred here."

The rules may vary, but here's how to play the basic dreidel game:

1. Any number of people can take part in this great game. Each player begins the game with an equal number of game pieces (about 10-15) such as pennies, nuts, chocolate chips, raisins, matchsticks, etc.

2. At the beginning of each round, every participant puts one game piece into the center "pot." In addition, every time the pot is empty or has only one game piece left, every player should put one in the pot.

3. Every time it's your turn, spin the dreidel once. Depending on the outcome, you give or get game pieces from the pot:

a) *Nun* means "nisht" or "nothing" [in Yiddish]. The player does nothing.

b) *Gimmel* means "gantz" or "everything" [in Yiddish]. The player gets everything in the pot.

c) *Hey* means "halb" or "half" [in Yiddish]. The player gets half of the pot. (If there is an odd number of pieces in the pot, the player takes half of the total plus one).

d) *Shin* (outside of Israel) means "shtel" or "put in" [in Yiddish]. *Peh* (in Israel) means "pay." The player adds a game piece to the pot.

4. If you have no game pieces left, you are "out". When one person has won everything, the game is over!

We suggest that if you use money to play the game, ask players to donate part or all of their winnings to tzedakah. ♦

... My Dreidel: I Made It Out of Clay

Photo courtesy of Aharon's Judaica in Denver, CO.

The Dreidel Song

Chorus:

Oh Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel
I made it out of clay
Oh Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel
Then Dreidel I shall play.

It has a lovely body,
With legs so short and thin.
And when it gets all tired,
It drops and then I win

Repeat the Chorus . . .

My dreidel's always playful,
It loves to dance and spin.
A happy game of dreidel,
Come play, now let's begin!

Repeat the Chorus one last time. . . !!

Other songs for Chanukah? You can find the lyrics, or even the sheet music, for many of these songs on-line or at specialty Judaic shops . . .



Chanukah Gelt Mi Yimalel
Al Hanisim Lights
Light One Candle I Have a Little Dreidel
Ocho Kandelikas (Eight Candles, in Ladino)
Ale Brider (We Are All Brothers, in Yiddish)
Hope Hiney Ma Tov
Chanukah's Flame Chanukah 'O Chanukah
Maoz Tzur . . . and so many more! ♦

... A Midrashic Dreidel Note

An interesting note from Rabbi Amy Scheinerman of Beth Shalom of Carroll County in Westminster, MD . . .

There is a midrashic explanation of the meaning of the dreidel that holds that the four letters on the sides of the dreidel represent the four kingdoms which attempted to destroy Israel in ancient times, but which passed away from history, while Israel is still alive and well. They are, according to the letters on the dreidel: NUN (Nebuchadnezzar/Babylonia); HAY (Haman/Persia); GIMEL (Gog/Greece); SHIN/SIN (Se'ir/identified with Esau and hence with Rome). Although this explanation is midrashic in nature and does not explain the origins of the dreidel, it is an explanation very much in keeping with the history and theme of Chanukah.

The actual origins of the dreidel go back to a game called "totum" or "teetotum" which was played in England and Ireland in the 16th century. It required a four-sided spinning top with a letter inscribed on each side directing the player to take a specific action: T (take all); H (take half); P (put in); N (nothing). When the game was played in Germany, which by all counts appears to be the source of the Jewish version, the letters were as follows: N (nichts/nothing); G (gantz/all); H (halb/half); and S (stell ein/put in). Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern

Europe substituted the Hebrew letters producing the same sounds: nun, gimel, hay, and shin. [. . .] In Yiddish the terms "fargle" and "varfl" are sometimes used to connote the dreidel. In Israel, the Hebrew term sevivon (from the root mean turn around or spin) is used. ◆

... Putting a New Spin on the Dreidel

And then there is this excerpt from an essay by Dr. Lee Ratzin, who works at the University for Medicine and Dentistry in Newark, NJ.

The dreidel is a traditional Chanukah toy. But, in fact, the dreidel has other symbolic meanings.

The dreidel is theology. The dreidel spins around a central point. It topples when it loses its connection to that point. So do we when we lose our Center. Spinning the dreidel is a symbol that life revolves about a Central Presence.

The dreidel is psychology. A case can be made that the human spirit has four primary attributes: self (soul, nefesh), body (guf), reason (sechel) and everything (by extension, evil, hakol). When the dreidel is spun the four sides can no longer be distinguished and blend into a harmonious oneness about a single infinite point. Spinning the dreidel is a symbolic act of striving for that harmony.

The dreidel is philosophy. The four sides represent four aspects of the human dimension: that which stands apart (nivdal) the wheel of life (galgal), humility (shafal) and human potential (hiuli).

The dreidel is mystical numerology. Gematria assigns meanings to the arithmetic value of a word. The letters of the dreidel sum to 358, which is the same as the Hebrew word mashiach (Messiah). Spinning the dreidel is a symbolic act of messianic hope.

The letters in the Hebrew word for snake (nachash) and by extension evil, also sum to 358. Spinning the dreidel is a symbolic act of faith that eventually evil stumbles and results in its downfall.

The dreidel is Kabbalah geometry. The typical six-sided dreidel is related to a three dimensional projection of a torus in four-dimensional space. Followers of the Kabbalah assign mystical meanings to this geometric shape and its associated symmetries. It is said that if the each letter of the Hebrew alphabet were placed on a different vertex then various folds reveal combinations of letters spelling significant words.

The dreidel is mathematics. Recently, there have been college mathematics seminars on the probability of winning a game of dreidel, the expected number of spins in a game of dreidel and whether the first player has a statistical advantage over the other players.

The dreidel connects holidays. The Chanukah dreidel spins from above. The Purim grogger spins from below. In the story of Chanukah, assistance and salvation came from above (Divine intervention). In the story of Purim, assistance and salvation came from below (ourselves).

Extreme dreidel: At the time of this writing the Internet search engine Google cites 803 dreidel references in its database. E-Bay contains over 150 dreidel entries. Astronaut Jeffrey Hoffman spun a weightless dreidel in zero gravity aboard the space shuttle Endeavor in December 1993. The largest number of simultaneous spinning dreidels (200) was set at the Mayer Kaplan Jewish Community Center in Skokie, Illinois in 1998. The largest dreidel may be the one located at Chabad House in New Brunswick, New Jersey (it is 16 feet tall).

There are needlepoint dreidels, dreidel comforters, digital dreidel simulators, dreidel clip-art, chocolate dreidels, inflatable dreidels, an unofficial "Dreidels For Dummies" book, dreidels for the blind, human dreidels, eco-friendly dreidels, Golden Dreidel awards, piñata dreidels, marzipan dreidel cookies, and a recipe for dreidel toast. Spell dreidel any way you wish, choose whatever interpretation you like. This year consider putting a new spin on your Chanukah dreidel. ◆

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