

Chanukah at KCT

Celebrating

5770



חנוכה



Friday evening December 11 - Saturday evening December 19



13 Kislev 5770
November 30, 2009

Chaverim,

Chanukah is based on a miracle that people cared about.

There were tough times. There was conflict, even conflict between Jews. There were shortages. There were shortages causing real hunger, and shortages that might have led to regrettable compromises. There was that small group that held out for the long run. They tried to keep as best they could the spirit of the place, the Holy Presence as best they understood it. Our Rabbis teach us that the way they went about caring made it Holy for our future.

Sometimes it seems like a miracle that people care. Looking forward, it's not always easy to know the steps you plan are right. It's not always clear that the caring you express leads to the *Kedushah* you seek. We have some challenges, and the next President and Trustees, and next year's Members of our little corner of the world, of KCT, will live with those results.

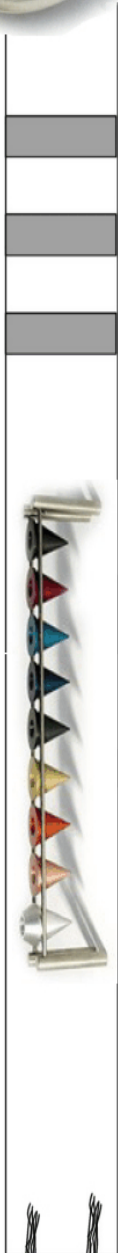
I'm looking forward to seeing everyone at our annual Congregation meeting January 10th. As important and as necessary, come down some Saturday morning, around 9:00 AM.

L'hitraot,

Jeff



Best wishes for a meaningful and joyous Chanukah to everyone at your home from the members and leadership of KCT, your congregational home!



KEHILLAT CHOVEVEI TZION

SHABBAT and CHANUKAH SERVICES and CHANUKAH LEARN-‘N-LUNCH

December 2009 Kislev-Tevet 5770

Shabbat Vayishlach

Friday	December 4	6:00 PM
Saturday	December 5	9:00 AM

Shabbat Chanukah (First Day of Chanukah)

Friday	December 11	6:00 PM
Saturday	December 12	9:00 AM

Shabbat Miketz (Eighth Day of Chanukah)

Friday	December 18	6:00 PM
Saturday	December 19	
Rashi Class		8:00 AM
Services		9:00 AM

Shabbat Learn-‘n-Lunch

with Rabbi Moshe Edelman
A Chanukah light lunch after services

Shabbat Vayigash

Friday	December 25	6:00 PM
Saturday	December 26	9:00 AM

Shabbat Vayechi

Friday	January 1	6:00 PM
Saturday	January 2	9:00 AM

Kehillat Chovevei Tzion
Route 25A at Nicolls Road P.O. Box 544
East Setauket, NY 11733
(631) 689-0257 www.kct.org

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 בְּזַמְנֵנוּ
הַזֶּה :

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מְלֶכֶת הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהַחֲזִינוּ
וְקִיַּיְמָנוּ וְהִגַּעְנוּ לְזַמְנֵנוּ
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
HaZeh. 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 אֲנִי מִדְּלִיקָן, עַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת, וְעַל
הַנִּסִּים, וְעַל הַנִּפְלְאוֹת, שְׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַיּוֹם, עַל יְדֵי כַהֲנֵיךְ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים. וְכֹל
שְׂמוֹנֵת יָמֵי חֲנֻכָּה, הַנֵּרוֹת הַלְלוּ קֹדֶשׁ הֵם, וְאִין לָנוּ
רְשׁוֹת לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בָּהֶן, אֲלֵא לְרֵאוֹתֵן 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 לֶךָ נֶאֱחָה לְשִׁבְחֵךָ.
תִּכּוֹן בֵּית תְּפִילָתִי וְשֵׁם תּוֹדָה נִזְבַּחֵךָ.
לְעֵת תִּכְיִן מַטְבַּח מִצַּר הַכְּנָבֵיחַ.
אֲז אֶגְמֹר 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. ◆

... Illuminating the Miracle

Excerpted from the extensive writings of Rabbi Yehudah Prero, an author and attorney, writing on-line for Torah.org

Chanukah, unlike the other Rabbinically-ordained observances (Purim, the Four fast days), is not mentioned explicitly at all in the Torah. Even in the Talmud, there is little discussion about Chanukah. The Gemora in the tractate of Shabbos (21b) writes: "What is (the reason for) Chanukah? For our Rabbis have taught 'On the 25th of Kislev, the days of Chanukah, which are eight (start), on which eulogies and fasting are not permitted.' - For when the Greeks entered the sanctuary of the Temple, they made all of the oil there ritually impure (and therefore unfit for use in the Temple). When the Hashmonean dynasty gained the upper hand and defeated them, they searched and found only one flask of oil on which the seal of the High Priest remained (which indicated it was not defiled). There was only enough in this flask to light (the Menorah in the Temple) for one day. A miracle occurred and they were able to light (the Menorah) with it for eight days. The next year, they established and made (these days) a holiday, with Hallel and expressions of thanks (to God)."

There are many commentators who elaborate on the Gemora. One of these is the Aruch HaShulchan. The Aruch HaShulchan (Orech Chayim 670) writes that: At the time of the Second Temple, during the reign of the wicked kings known as Antiochus, decrees were issued on the nation of Israel. These decrees had the effect of annulling the practice of the holy Jewish religion. The Jews were not permitted to study Torah or perform the mitzvot. The money of the Jews was confiscated, and the Jewish daughters were snatched. They went into the Temple where they performed improper acts and defiled the ritually pure. They pained the nation of Israel and pressured them immensely until the point where Hashem, the G-d of their forefathers, had mercy on them and saved them from the evil hands that were persecuting them. Hashem saved them through the hands of the holy and pure Hasmoneans, who were high priests, with Mattisyahu and his sons, who fought with Antiochus.

The victory occurred in a way that went against the laws of nature, as the Hashmoneans, with their righteous troops, were very small in number, while Antiochus fell upon them with a great number of people, with many elephants, and with horsemen and chariots. However, Hashem favored His nation of Israel and therefore let the strong fall into the hands of the weak, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, the impure into the hands of the pure. Furthermore, those who sided with Antiochus fell into the hands of those who studied Torah. Then, the name of God was elevated and sanctified in the world, and the name of the nation of Israel reached a level of great stature.

This miracle came to a completion on the 25th day of Kislev. There was, however, another miracle. When the nation of Israel entered the Temple to purify it, all of the people were ritually impure because they came into contact with the dead during the course of the battles. A person who is impure because of contact with the dead can only become pure through a process which takes seven days. It was only after these seven days that people were able to obtain a supply of pure oil. Furthermore, it took 8 days to make the round-trip needed to obtain pure oil. Only one flask of pure oil, which still bore the unbroken seal of the High Priest, was found in the Temple. Hashem performed a miracle, and this flask of oil which should only have lasted for one day was able to be used to light the Menorah in the Temple for eight days, until which time no additional pure oil was available. We therefore have eight days on which we praise and give thanks to Hashem. ◆

... 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 shorter recension of the work (ed. Mantua, c. 1480, 126f.) and the literature based on it continued to refer to her anonymously. 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. ◆

.... A Philatelic Recognition

According to the US Postal Service, the new 2009 Chanukah design features a photograph of a menorah with nine lit candles. The menorah was designed by Lisa Regan of the Garden Deva Sculpture Company in Tulsa, OK, and photographed by Ira Wexler of Braddock Heights, MD. Carl T. Herrman of North Las Vegas, NV, was the art director. 35 million 44 cent First-Class stamps will be produced.



The 2009 Chanukah stamp (above, left) is the third U.S. issuance to commemorate the holiday. The Postal Service issued its first Chanukah stamp (above, right), which featured a stylized illustration of a menorah, in 1996. A design featuring an ornate dreidel followed in 2004. ◆

.... 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, gimme*l, *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 . . .	<i>and so many more!</i>

 ♦

... 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 (ganz/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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