

Celebration!

CHANUKAH MAGAZINE | 5785 / 2024-25



Gelt: Chocolate or Cash?



CHANUKAH MYTHS P.13

THE GIFT OF GELT P.18

GELT COOKIES RECIPE P.19





THE OBLIGATION TO ILLUMINATE THE WORLD

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, recalls the victory—more than 2100 years ago—of a militarily weak but spiritually strong Jewish people over the mighty forces of a ruthless enemy that had overrun the Holy Land and threatened to engulf the land and its people in darkness.

The miraculous victory—culminating with the rededication of the Sanctuary in Jerusalem and the rekindling of the Menorah which had been desecrated and extinguished by the enemy—has been celebrated annually ever since during these eight days of Chanukah, especially by lighting the Chanukah Menorah, also as a symbol and message of the triumph of freedom over oppression, of spirit over matter, of light over darkness.

It is a timely and reassuring message, for the forces of darkness are ever present. Moreover, the danger does not come exclusively from outside; it often lurks close to home, in the form of insidious erosion of time-honored values and principles that are at the foundation of any decent human society. **Needless to say, darkness is not chased away by brooms and sticks, but by illumination. Our Sages said, “A little light expels a lot of darkness.”**

The Chanukah Lights remind us in a most obvious way that illumination begins at home, within oneself and one’s family, by increasing and intensifying the light of the Torah and

Mitzvos in the everyday experience, even as the Chanukah Lights are kindled in growing numbers from day to day. But though it begins at home, it does not stop there. Such is the nature of light that when one kindles a light for one’s own benefit, it benefits also all who are in the vicinity. Indeed, the Chanukah Lights are expressly meant to illuminate the “outside,” symbolically alluding to the duty to bring light also to those who, for one reason or another, still walk in darkness.

What is true of the individual is true of a nation, especially this great United States, united under G-d, and generously blessed by G-d with material as well as spiritual riches. It is surely the duty and privilege of this Nation to promote all the forces of light both at home and abroad, and in a steadily growing measure.

Let us pray that the message of the Chanukah Lights will illuminate the everyday life of everyone personally, and of the society at large, for a brighter life in every respect, both materially and spiritually.

With esteem and blessing in the spirit of Chanukah.

From a letter of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of Blessed Memory



Celebration!

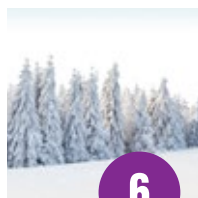
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They
Looked!

Do You Love
Winter?



The Gift
of Gelt

Chanukah
Myths



Chanukah
Gelt Cookies



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*Dedicated to the Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, OBM,
whose boundless love and teachings are an
endless source of inspiration and guidance.*

A BRIEF HISTORY

of the Happenings of Chanukah



The Jewish Rebellion Under Greek Rule

The events that led to the miraculous victory of Chanukah span a period of a hundred and seventy years, beginning at about 300 BCE. The Greeks, under Alexander the Great, conquered much of the known world, including the Middle East.

You would have thought that the Jewish people and the ancient Greeks would get along. After all, they had so much in common. Both valued wisdom and beauty. The Greek philosophers acknowledged a single, great Mind behind all the cosmos, similar to Jewish monotheism.

Well, they did manage somewhat – at first. The Jews tolerated Greek rule from the time of Alexander of Macedonia. Many Jews studied Aristotle and Plato and King Ptolemy had the Jewish Torah translated into Greek. But, when King Antiochus attempted to force Hellenism down their throats, the Jews rebelled.

Laws Against Judaism

Antiochus forbade ritual circumcision. Mothers openly circumcised their infant boys in defiance. Antiochus forbade keeping Shabbat. Jews were forced to leave Jerusalem because that day was so precious to them. Antiochus forbade the study of Torah. Jews found ways to teach classes to children and adults in secret. When the Greeks raised up idols in the cities and towns and demanded the Jews worship them, all-out war ensued.

The Maccabees

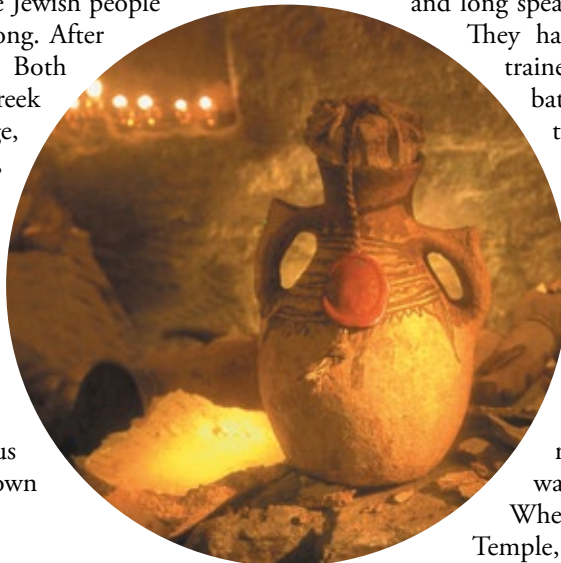
It was the first time in history that a people fought not for their country or their lives, but for their integrity and the rights of their spirit. The problem was, the Syrian-Greek army was the most powerful in the world. Their soldiers marched in a compact formation of overlapping shields and long spears, almost invincible in those times.

They had advanced weapons, were highly trained, and even brought elephants to the battlefield. The Jewish resistance, on the other hand, began with a handful of brothers of the priestly class, calling themselves the Maccabees.

The Miracle

There were many acts of courage, but the Maccabees' handful of warriors could never have beaten such a mighty army. In addition to the miraculous victory, they received a clear sign that their victory was all along a miracle from Above.

When they took back Jerusalem and the Temple, they searched and found a single flask of undefiled olive oil – just what they needed to light the Temple Menorah. Although the flask held only enough oil for a single day, it miraculously burned for eight full days, providing just enough time to prepare new oil. To the Jewish People, this was a nod from Above that, yes, the One G-d of Israel was with us all along.



The Chanukah Story

HAPPENING NOW!

Noting that one should spend time in close proximity to the Chanukah lights, the Previous Rebbe would say, “We must listen carefully to what the candles are saying.”

So what are the flickering flames telling us?

1. Never be afraid to stand up for what's right.

Judah Maccabee and his band faced daunting odds, but that didn't stop them. With a prayer on their lips and faith in their heart, they entered the battle of their lives—and won. We can do the same.

2. Always increase in matters of goodness, kindness and Torah observance.

Sure, a single flame was good enough for yesterday, but today needs to be even better.

3. A little light goes a long way.

The Chanukah candles are lit when dusk is falling. Perched in the doorway or window, they serve as a beacon for the darkening streets. No matter how dark it is outside, a candle of G-dly goodness can



transform the darkness itself into light.

4. Take it to the streets.

Chanukah is unique in that its primary mitzvah is observed in public. It's not enough to be a Jew at heart, or even at home. Chanukah teaches us to shine outwards into our surroundings with the G-dly glow of mitzvahs.

5. Don't be ashamed to be different.

Rather, be like a menorah, proudly proclaiming its radiant uniqueness for all to see.

Adapted from an article on Chabad.org



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Do You Love Winter?

I AM SORRY BUT I DON'T.

To all of the winter-lovers out there: I apologize in advance for the following post.

Yes, you have some good reasons to like the winter. Snow is beautiful, you say. It's so nice to cozy up with a warm blanket and a cup of hot cocoa in front of the fireplace.

You know what? I prefer an ice-cold cup of orange juice and a nice blasting A/C.

Sorry, but I really dislike winter.

I think one of the parts I dislike the most is the darkness.

It simply gets too dark, too early.

And then driving at night is no fun. Especially if you add rain, those new LED lights, and some inconsiderate drivers who leave their headlights on high beam even when they're behind you.

Darkness makes you feel small. It causes you to retreat, to prefer staying indoors and not venturing outside.

Come to think of it, it's not only darkness. Our surroundings really have an impact on our lives.

When it's rainy outside, we also feel gloomy on the inside.

When it's sunny and beautiful, we feel happier.

And with that in mind, please allow me to introduce you to a special Jewish holiday. It's called the "when-everything-goes-dark-you-go-light" holiday, AKA Chanukah.

Because what is Chanukah?

Chanukah is . . .

- *To wait until it gets dark outside, and then to light the candles.*
- *To stay positive even when those around you are negative.*
- *To keep to your values even if you're with others who have no values.*
- *To do mitzvahs even when others seem not to appreciate it.*
- *To smile even if you're the only one in the room smiling.*
- *To be proud of your Jewish identity even when others are mocking it.*

And if someone asks you, **Where do you get your courage to be different? How can you keep on being light even when it's dark outside?, just point to the menorah, the beautiful, flickering lights that keep on burning for so many generations.**

And you know what?

Light, positivity, G-dliness—they are all contagious. Slowly but surely, the darkness makes way for light. The light spreads and impacts others as well.

By Mendy Kaminker, author & Rabbi Chabad of Hackensack, NJ



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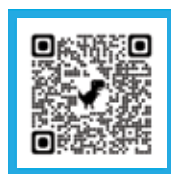
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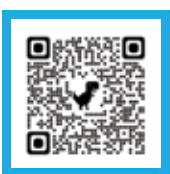
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THE MIRACLE OF Chocolate

MONDAY, DECEMBER 16 - 7:00pm
Chocolate Truffle Workshop

LOCATION: Chabad of Gurnee



MENORAH at the Mall

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26 - 5:30pm
Latkes, Doughnuts, Music & Entertainment

LOCATION: Gurnee Mills - 6170 W Grand Ave, Gurnee, IL 60031





Chanukah Parade

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28 - 7:00pm

LOCATION: Parade leaves from Chabad of Gurnee

Menorah car parade with police escort, followed by Menorah lighting at Chabad.



PUBLIC MENORAH LIGHTING at the **Gurnee Fire Department**

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29 - 4:00pm

Grand tour of fire station & equipment.

LOCATION: GFD Station 2 - 6581 Dada Drive, Gurnee, IL 60031



GIANT **Menorah** **LIGHTING**

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31 - 4:00pm

LOCATION: Warren Township Center; 17801 W Washington St, Gurnee, IL 60031





HOW TO CHANUKAH

THE MENORAH

Setting Up

All the lampholders of the menorah should be of even height and in an even line, except for the shamash (service candle), which should be at a distinctly different height than the rest.

Candles may be used. Because of its role in the Chanukah miracle, a menorah of oil is of special significance. The candles used must burn for at least 30 minutes.

A menorah which uses electric candles can be used as a Chanukah decoration, but does not achieve the mitzvah of lighting the menorah.

Where?

The optimum place for a menorah is in a doorway, opposite the mezuzah. You can also use a window that is visible from the street.

Who?

The Chanukah miracle is for everyone to share and all members of the family should be present at the kindling of the Chanukah Menorah. It is best that each one has its own menorah. A married couple is considered one unit. Children, too, should be encouraged to light their own candles. Students and singles living in dormitories or their own apartments should kindle Menorahs in their own rooms.

How?

On the first night, light the candle furthest to the right. Each day, add another to the left of the original. Always light the newly added candle first (from left to right).

Before lighting, say the appropriate blessing (see page 12). After lighting the candles recite Hanairos Hallolu (see page 11).

When?

The right time to light is at nightfall (about 30 minutes after sunset). Your



menorah should remain lit for at least a half hour past nightfall. You may light earlier, but make sure the candles are long enough to stay lit for the requisite half hour past nightfall.

Got home late? As long as someone's around to see the menorah, you can still light it with a blessing. After that, light the menorah without a blessing.

Shabbat

On Friday, we light the Chanukah candles before the Shabbat candles. (See schedule on following page.) The Chanukah flame should burn the required half an hour after nightfall. To achieve this, make sure to use extra long candles or more oil in the Menorah.

On Saturday, the Chanukah candles are not lit until the end of Shabbat (see schedule on following page), after the Havdalah prayer is recited.

Note: From the time the Shabbat candles are lit on Friday, until Shabbat ends (an hour after Friday's candle-lighting time) the Chanukah Menorah should not be re-lit, moved or prepared.

Sitting by the Lights

"Chanukah" means "dedication," and as we sing "Haneiros Hallolu," the Chanukah Lights are devoted to our spiritual celebration; thus, we are not to derive physical benefit from them, besides from the Shamash.

"Chanukah" also means "education" and it is customary to sit by the Menorah as the candles burn, telling stories and lessons related to the holiday.

Work should not be done in the proximity of the burning candles. Women, in particular, refrain from household work during the half hour that the Chanukah lights are burning, to honor the brave Jewish women who played a significant role in the Chanukah story.

CHANUKAH MONEY

Chanukah Gelt

Parents give their children Chanukah Gelt (money) on Chanukah. The fifth night is a special time for giving Chanukah gelt. The fifth night is significant, since on that night the majority of candles on the Menorah are lit. However, parents are encouraged to give gelt every night.



Additional Charity

The triumph of Chanukah is also celebrated by giving additional charity during each day of the festival. This shows that we are truly grateful to G-d Al-mighty for all that He has done for us. Chanukah Gelt comes in handy when you want to give a little extra charity.

Note: On Friday be sure to give the Chanukah gelt and charity before Shabbat candle lighting. Double the amount to account for Shabbos, when money is not handled.

CHANUKAH PRAYERS AND SONGS

Haneiros Hallalu

After the Chanukah lights are kindled, it is customary to recite or sing the Haneiros Hallalu hymn:


We kindle these lights (to commemorate) the saving acts, miracles and wonders which You have performed for our forefathers, in those days at this time, through Your holy Kohanim. Throughout the eight days of Chanukah, these lights are sacred and we are not permitted to make use of them in order to offer thanks and praise to Your great Name for Your miracles, for Your wonders and for Your salvations.

Chanukah Prayers

During the eight days of the Chanukah prayer we recite Al HaNissim in the Amidah (daily silent prayer) and in the grace after meals.

The complete Hallel prayer (see your prayerbook) is also said in the morning services.

A portion of the Torah is read daily in the Synagogue during morning services.



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THE BLESSINGS

5785/2024 Menorah Kindling Schedule



WEDNESDAY, DEC. 25
After Nightfall Blessings 1, 2 & 3



THURSDAY, DEC. 26
After Nightfall Blessings 1 & 2



FRIDAY, DEC. 27
Before Shabbos Candle Lighting
(See Times Below) Blessings 1 & 2



SATURDAY, DEC. 28
After Shabbos Ends (See Times Below) Blessings 1 & 2



SUNDAY, DEC. 29
After Nightfall Blessings 1 & 2



MONDAY, DEC. 30
After Nightfall Blessings 1 & 2



TUESDAY, DEC. 31
After Nightfall Blessings 1 & 2



WEDNESDAY, JAN. 1
After Nightfall Blessings 1 & 2

Shabbat Candle Lighting Schedule

For the Gurnee area

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27 Shabbat Candle Lighting Time 4:06

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28 Shabbat Ends 5:14



THE BLESSINGS

1 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוֵּנוּ: לְהַדְלִיק נֵר, חֲנֻכָּה.

Bo-ruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-sheer Ki-de-sho-nu Be-mitz-vo-
sov Ve-tzi-vo-nu Le-had-lik Ner Cha-nu-kah.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light.

2 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ, בְּיָמִים הָהֵם בְּזֵמַן הַזֶּה.

Bo-ruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom She-o-so Ni-sim La-avo-sei-nu
Ba-yo-mim Ho-heim Bi-z'man Ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.

3 The following is said only on the first evening (or the first time one kindles the lights this Chanukah).

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהִדְּוָנוּ וְקִמְּנוּ וְהַיִּיעָנוּ לְזֵמַן הַזֶּה.

Bo-ruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom She-heche-yo-nu Ve-ki-yi-mo-nu
Ve-higi-o-nu Liz-man Ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

MYTH: The Maccabees lit a Chanukah Menorah in the Temple

The commonly told, oversimplified version of the story is that the Maccabees (heroes of the Chanukah events) lit the same type of menorah in the Temple that we light on Chanukah, and they lit it in the same manner that we do. This confusion comes, in part, because the word menorah just means “lamp,” which can refer to several kinds of lamps.

FACT: The Temple Menorah Was Not a Chanukah Menorah

A seven-branched candelabra, called the Menorah, was lit **daily** in the Temple before the Chanukah story ever took place. When the Maccabees retook the Holy Temple from the Greeks, they only had enough pure oil to fuel the Menorah for one day. So they lit all seven lamps and trusted in G-d. G-d made a miracle, and the oil lasted for 8 days until new oil could be found.

To commemorate this miracle, we kindle flames every night for eight nights, adding another light each night, so that on the final night we have eight flames burning brightly. This eight-branched candelabra is also referred to as a menorah. Hence the confusion.

MYTH: Chanukah Is the Primary Jewish Holiday

Perhaps due to the time of year, many in the West believe Chanukah to be the main Jewish holiday.

FACT: Chanukah Is the Only Jewish Holiday Not Mentioned in the Bible

The Torah tells us to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and the three pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot. Purim came later, as recorded in the Book of Esther. Chanukah, which celebrates a miraculous series of events that took place after the closing of the Biblical canon, is a rabbinic holiday. Yet, neither would it be fair to refer to Chanukah as a “minor” holiday. The fact that the Maccabees placed their trust in G-d even when all the cards were stacked against them and were then rewarded with a miracle was major, and the echoes of their brave faith have major implications for us today. Miracles happen!

MYTH: Gelt = Chocolate discs wrapped in foil

Grocery stores and Judaica shops sell little sacks of wrapped chocolate coins, universally known as gelt.

FACT: Chanukah Gelt Is Cash

The authentic Chanukah custom is to distribute gifts of cash to children (and

others). Sometime in the 1920s, American chocolatiers had the bright idea of making edible gelt, and Chanukah has never been the same since.

A helpful Gelt tip: Most (but perhaps not all) manufacturers are particular to wrap their dairy gelt in gold foil, reserving silver-colored foil for parve chocolate. Since dairy gelt may not be eaten during or after a meat meal, if you'd like to serve chocolate coins after hot dogs, look for the silver wrapping—and double-check the label just to be sure.

MYTH: You Can Use an Electric Menorah

Not wanting to deal with wax drippings or purchasing extra supplies every year, people may be tempted to use an electric menorah. Light is light, after all, isn't it?

FACT: The Mitzvah of lighting the Menorah is observed with actual flames

The sages instituted that we kindle a ner, a flame, every night of Chanukah. This is defined in Jewish law as a fire created by fuel burning on a wick.

MYTH: We Play Dreidel Because Kids Did So While Hiding From the Greeks

On Chanukah, it is customary for children to play with dreidels, spinning tops emblazoned with the letters nun, gimme, hey and shin on its four sides. The top is a reminder that “a great miracle happened there [in Israel],” during the events of Chanukah.

The commonly told story is that children used these tops as a decoy when they would be secretly learning Torah during the Greek occupation. Whenever Greeks would discover their hideouts, they would hide their Torah scrolls and pretend to be playing an innocuous game of dreidel.

FACT: Dreidels Have Other Sources

While this reason is indeed brought in several works, the game is laden with inner significance, much of it mystical. Here is one beautiful insight (from among many others):

On Chanukah, we spin a dreidel from the top. On Purim, we swing a gragger from the bottom. On Purim, the miracle came about from “below”—the Jews fasted and prayed, while the miracle itself seemed to be hidden in events that unfolded within nature. On Chanukah, it was out of G-d's great mercy that He intervened from above with openly revealed miracles. Thus, on Purim, we swing the gragger from below and on Chanukah we spin the dreidel from above.



The Dreidel

The Dreidel is a four-sided spinning top. A Hebrew letter is written on each side: Nun, Gimmel, Hay and Shin, representing the phrase **Nes Gadol Haya Sham** – A Great Miracle Happened There.

The Dreidel dates back to the time of the Chanukah story. Since learning Torah was punishable by death, Jewish children would hide in caves in the hills to study with their teachers.

If found by Greek soldiers, they would pull out their Dreidels and pretend they were just playing an innocent game! Today, we remind ourselves of their courage by playing the game of Dreidel during the holiday of Chanukah.

How To Play:

1. Each player places some coins, candies or nuts into the pot.
2. Players take turns spinning the Dreidel.
3. If the Dreidel lands on:
 - נ "Nun," **Nothing** is won and nothing is lost. *Bang fist on table...*
 - ג "Gimmel" – the player **Gets all**. *Everybody cheers...*
 - ה "Hay" – the player wins **Half** the amount in the pot. *Everybody says, "Oooohhhh"...*
 - ש "Shin" – the player must **pitCH** in a penny, a candy or a nut from their individual pile into the pot. *Everybody says, "Aaawwww"...*
4. If the pot empties out, everyone contributes equally once again.
5. You can always raise the ante, asking everyone to match the amount agreed upon.

What does the Dreidel have to say?

Wouldn't it be more fun if the Dreidel would have gimmel on all four sides? Couldn't the Dreidel do without a shin? Then whichever way you would spin, you would win....

The answer is obvious. If you can't lose, you can't win.

We often ask, why is there so much darkness, so many challenges? Wouldn't it be great if all of life was bliss? Why are we always faced with difficulties in the workplace, in business, in relationships, in achievements, etc? Why do we find so many difficulties and obstacles when it comes to anything Jewish?

Herein is the answer. The fun lies in the opportunity to overcome adversity. If evil did not exist, if our world did not contain darkness, we would be like trees bearing terrific fruit, but there would be no appreciation for all the good. It is the challenge that creates the fun and makes the good stand out. Overcoming adversity is what makes our life so meaningful.



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Stop The Dreidel!

What color is the bar of soap sitting on your bathroom counter? What is the pattern on your socks? Floral? Plaid? Solid?

To many people, these questions are irrelevant. They purchase their preferred brand of soap (or the cheapest one on the store's shelf) regardless of its color. And in the morning they don the first pair of socks they fish out of the drawer.

But to others, those with an eye for design, the choice isn't so simple. Their lavatory has a motif, and every item displayed there has to match the unique décor. And socks aren't just to keep feet warm or shoes sweat-free; they complete the thematic ensemble, complementing the wardrobe du jour. No part stands on its own; every component is just one piece of a large picture.

Every Jewish holiday is comprised of many components: its history, laws, customs, traditional foods, etc. Each component was put in place by the Master Designer, or individuals whom He inspired, in accordance with the particular holiday's singular message. Some of the components are obvious expressions of the holiday's motif, while others require thought to uncover their profound relation to the holiday's unique message.

So, where does that leave the traditional dreidel game? How does the dreidel embody the Chanukah message?

What's striking about the dreidel is that its "religious" aspect isn't always apparent. In other words, the four Hebrew letters that form the acronym for the phrase "A great miracle happened there" are not discernible while it's spinning. At that point it looks entirely letter-less, no different than any other spinning top available at your local dollar store.

Life is eerily reminiscent of a dreidel game. In the course of our dizzyingly hectic day-to-day existence we are often too preoccupied to notice the "letters," the small and big miracles that accompany us every day.

Every once in a while we have to give the spinning dreidel a break and reflect on its message: "A big miracle transpired there."

And that's precisely what Chanukah is all about. Some 2,100 years ago our nation's collective dreidel came to an abrupt halt, and the divine letters that animate and direct all of creation came into plain view. For eight days, the glow of the Temple's menorah illuminated a reality that the Greeks had attempted to obscure: there is a hand that controls every event and occurrence.

Two millennia later, the message of Chanukah remains the same. As we sit by the menorah, or even while we indulge in the game that is our national Chanukah pastime, it is time for us to find the miracle letters in our own lives.

One more point:

When the dreidel comes to a rest, When the letters come into focus, it is time to react: there's little time to sit with your mouth open there isn't too much time to ponder; the game has got to continue. You have to give or take, depending on the letter the dreidel is now displaying. Only if you are (un)lucky enough to have landed a nun do you get to meditate a bit longer. . . . When the letters come into focus, it is time to react: there's little time to sit with your mouth open.

Give: G-d gave you miracles; it's time now to contribute back to the cause. Now it's your turn to make a miracle in someone else's life

Take: Take upon yourself to introduce an added dose of spirituality in your life—a Torah class or an additional mitzvah.

Or, you can think a bit longer. But not too long. The Maccabees didn't accomplish their feat through prolonged meditation sessions . . .

By Naftali Silberberg. Copyright and reprinted with permission of Chabad.org



THEY LOOKED!

WHEN IT COMES TO JOBS THAT PRESENT SERIOUS OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS, PUBLISHING MIGHT SEEM LIKE A LOW-RANKING INDUSTRY ON THE DANGER SCALE.

No loose wires, no scaffolding, no operating heavy machinery, unless you count the few times I was called upon to switch the massive bottle that rested atop the office water cooler. However, when I worked as an editor of children's history books, I found there was one professional hazard that occasionally made my work unbearable: utterly depressing subject matter.

We weren't intentionally trying to upset the poor junior high school students who made up our demographic. It's just that there's no real way to whitewash history. Wars are fought, and then they are taught. The most gruesome details are left out, but the main thrust of historical conflicts—the patterns of violence that are continually repeated, the senseless killing of innocents, mankind's capacity for evil—all come across, no matter how delicately you document the events.

I remember one particularly harsh week: on Monday I was handed an anthology on World War II, Tuesday I was given a collection of essays on September 11, and on Wednesday the subject was Vietnam. I don't remember Thursday, but chances are good I spent the day slouched over in my chair, chin resting on a stack of papers, staring at my blank computer screen and wondering if depression might qualify me for worker's comp. The icing on this layer cake of misery was that I spent my breaks surfing news sites, most of which reported on the latest violence in Israel, Iraq and Sudan.

I knew I had to find some answer to all of these questions circulating in my head, or at least had to find a new job. But it all seemed so hopeless. The old question of "Why do bad things happen to good people?" seemed almost quaint in comparison to some of the new ones I had darting around my brain: Why do good people so often stand by and watch when bad things happen to good people? Why do we keep saying "Never Again" to genocide, when one humanitarian disaster after another keeps proving us wrong? What kind of morality can exist in war if both sides are brought up to believe they're right, and a great many of the soldiers are probably fighting against their will anyway?

I don't have all the answers to these questions, but I think I've finally found some meaning in the midst of the apparent meaninglessness. Of course, like all profound moments, my epiphany came when I least expected it, during a perfectly ordinary conversation.

I was discussing the story of Chanukah with my husband, who often likes to take

the opinion less traveled when it comes to religion. We were arguing about what the true miracle of Chanukah was. The traditional line is that we aren't really celebrating the military victory of the Maccabees, because their success in battle was short-lived. Rather, we are reveling in the discovery of the flask of oil, along with its astounding eight-day burning power, because that miracle has timeless spiritual significance.

But my husband disagreed. Finding one pure flask of oil in the midst of an impure Temple just seemed like kind of a small thing to base an entire holiday around. We argued back and forth, when finally he said:

"You know what? I think the miracle isn't that they found the flask of oil. It's that they even searched for it to begin with."

And there it was: the flash of understanding that had eluded me all this time. By all logical standards, when the Jews returned to the Holy Temple after battle to find that it had been desecrated by the Greeks, they should have simply given up. When one is surrounded by impurity, the easy thing to do is accept the "reality" and move on. But, rather than resign themselves to waiting eight days to make pure oil for the Temple's menorah, the Jews searched through every storeroom and crevice till they found that one flask with an unbroken seal, a tiny vestige of holiness in the midst of impurity.

That is the real miracle of Chanukah: that the Jews still scoured the Temple for something sacred, despite the overwhelming odds against finding anything untouched by the Greeks' defilement. The wonder of it all is not so much that the Jews found it, but that they had faith that there was anything, any small amount of goodness, left to be found.

And that is the miracle of our generation, too. We live in a seemingly incomprehensible world. History and current events are teeming with countless examples of mankind's cruelty. But instead of growing numb to the suffering, we persist in asking "Why?!" We demand answers. We search for some kind of meaning in what could easily be written off as a random series of events with no logical conclusion or design. Above all, we believe that there's something out there, some answer that will grant us peace of mind during these harsh times.

And we will keep searching for that solace, until we find our little flask of oil with which to illuminate the darkness.

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THE GIFT of Gelt

It's Spending Season!

Every shop-front is plastered with huge banners begging us to just come in and spend money; in fact, retailers reckon that they clear 25% of their annual turnover just in these few weeks.

In my house, we choose to be the exception. While the kids next door will be waking up next week to a pile of decorated presents, my children will be receiving my Chanukah largess in a much simpler form.

There is a longstanding Jewish tradition to give "Chanukah gelt" (money) to our young ones. Some parents hand out money every night of Chanukah, others only as a once-off. I'm not talking about the ever-popular fake-coins-with-chocolate version, but cold, hard cash. Some of the money is given to charity right away, and the kids can decide for themselves what to do with the rest. In many families they play dreidel with the coins they receive, but when I was a child the highlight of Chanukah was spending our gelt on a visit to the local Jewish bookstore.

Honestly though, is there any real difference between the rest of the world and us? They give presents, we give cash. So what? Isn't Chanukah gelt just a scaled down version of the conspicuous consumption going on all around us?

The distinction between receiving money and a present is subtle but oh-so real. When you get a present, you receive a fully formed fact-on-the-ground. Take it or leave it, that's all there is to it. A present is a symbol of a relationship predicated on an unequal balance of power; I give, you take. I had, you have.

Money, by contrast, is simultaneously embryonic and enabling. The recipients can transform it into anything they wish, spending it on their heart's desire; and the giver demonstrates his or her trust that the receiver will spend it purposefully.

The story of Chanukah is one of **transformation** and **renewal**. We re-inaugurated the Temple in face of all opposition and brought holiness back to a place where evil had reigned. We could have settled for lighting with impure oil, but insisted on illuminating the night with the fires of faith and purity.

I give my children Chanukah gelt in the hope that they affect their own Chanukah transformation; taking that which was physical and rendering it spiritual, bringing light to the shadows and changing the world for the better.

Giving Chanukah gelt is a gift of faith. I trust you to use this money for good and I'm confident that the effects will be positive and permanent. I am filled with pride when my children take their newfound wealth and run off to deposit it in a charity box, and there can be no greater nachas than observing the childish excitement as they pick out Jewish books to buy with their own money.

A present is a short-term statement of affection; its effects may last no longer than the paper it came wrapped in. Giving Chanukah gelt to our children and teaching them to use the money wisely and responsibly is a gift that keeps giving forever.

Adapted from an article by Elisha Greenbaum on Chabad.org

Chan·u·kah

noun
/ˈhɑːnə.kə/



Ed·u·ca·tion

noun
/ˌɛdʒ.əkeɪ.ʃən/

A friend of mine related the following anecdote. When his son was 2, he took him to a Jewish doctor. For whatever reason, during the visit the doctor went through his pocket and pulled out a dollar bill. Immediately, the child pointed to it and said, “tzedakah (‘charity’)!”

The doctor later related to the parent: “Since the day I saw that your child’s concept of money is charity, my entire view of money changed.”

Talk about a financial education!

Interestingly, the word “Chanukah” is connected to the Hebrew word for education: “Chinuch”.

In keeping with the theme of education on Chanukah, many parents traditionally give their children gifts of money, and with it, a Jewish financial education. We teach our children to give a tenth of the money they’ve received to Charity (as prescribed by the Torah), demonstrating to them that money is a tool- entrusted to us for the purpose of using it to help others and make the world a better place.

And it’s not just about our children - Chanukah is about educating ourselves as well! The tradition of Gelt-giving on Chanukah reminds us to refocus on the true purpose and special power in our money: to use it to change the world (no pun intended), and to make it a better, kinder, more giving place.

Adapted from an article by Yael Trusch on Chabad.org

Peanut Butter Chanukah Gelt Cookies

INGREDIENTS

½ cup unsalted butter (or non-dairy substitute), softened
½ cup smooth peanut butter
½ cup white sugar
½ cup brown sugar
1 egg, room temperature
1 ½ cups flour
1 tsp baking powder
Pinch of kosher salt
12 large or 24 small chocolate coins (dairy or non-dairy)
Additional white sugar for coating

DIRECTIONS

Take the chocolate coins out of their wrappers. Set aside.

Pre-heat oven to 350°F (180°C).

You do not need a mixer for this recipe. A strong spoon works just fine.

Mix the butter, peanut butter, white sugar and brown sugar. Add the egg and mix until incorporated.

Add the baking powder, salt, and flour. Add the flour in a few small increments. Dough should come together easier into a smooth soft dough.

Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper.

This recipe makes either 12 large cookies or 24 small ones, depending on which size chocolate coins you have. You can also do a mixture, but make sure to baking them separately—large cookies on one pan, smaller cookies on a separate pan, because they will

require different amounts of time in the oven.

Roll the dough into balls. For smaller cookies, use a 1-tablespoon measuring spoon to scoop the dough. For larger ones, use 2 tablespoons (which is the same as an ½-cup measuring cup).

Roll the dough into balls and then roll each ball in white sugar. Place on parchment paper, leaving space for the cookies to spread. Do not flatten.

Bake for 12 minutes (or 8 minutes for smaller cookies).

Remove from oven and press a chocolate coin in the center of each cookie. Return to oven and bake for another 3 minutes (2 minutes for the smaller cookies).

Let cookies cool before trying to move them from the baking sheet.

Yields: 12 large or 24 small gelt cookies

By Miriam Szokovski, used with permission from Chabad.org



HERE'S my STORY

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EXTENDED FAMILY

ISRAEL DRAZIN

Rabbi Doctor Israel Drazin has served for over three decades in the US Army, finishing his career as Assistant Chief of Chaplains of the US Army, where he held the rank of Brigadier General. He authored numerous articles and 38 books on philosophy and the Bible. He was interviewed in March of 2011.

My name is Israel Drazin, and I am a rabbi, biblical scholar, and a lawyer. My name is rather well-known in the military because I defended the chaplaincy of the US armed forces in court against two lawyers who claimed it was a violation of the establishment of religion clause of the US Constitution. I won and, as a result, President Ronald Reagan elevated me to the rank of brigadier general.

The story I will relate here happened in 1986, when I had the privilege of meeting the Lubavitcher Rebbe. At the time, I was living in Columbia, Maryland, and because the only Orthodox synagogue in the area was the Chabad House, I began an association with the young rabbi there – Rabbi Hillel Baron. It was he who suggested that I might like to attend a farbrengen in New York and meet the Rebbe.

So I put on my uniform and went there. During the farbrengen, one of the chasidim came over and said that the Rebbe wanted me to join him on the dais. When I came up, the Rebbe spoke to me in a mixture of English and Yiddish, which I understood. He blessed me to be “a chaplain in God’s army” and then he said something startling:

“May the Almighty bless you ... to influence the gentile soldiers, as well, in fulfilling the Seven Universal Noahide Laws. Certainly the other chaplains will not be upset that you are mixing into their affairs, because you will actually be helping them. And all this will help bring our righteous Mashiach.”

“I will try to do that,” I responded, but it was a non-committal statement. I was thinking to myself, “It’s absurd that the Rebbe would expect me to stand before non-Jews and speak to them about the Seven Noahide Laws.”

While I knew, of course, about that these basic



commandments for all of humanity to live by – prohibiting blasphemy, idolatry, adultery, murder, theft and cruelty to animals, and mandating the establishment of courts of law – I could not imagine myself preaching this as a general in the armed forces. As far as I was concerned, it was a “no go” right from the very beginning.

But, when I had a chance to think about it some more, I said to myself, “Those things that seem to be the most difficult in life are the very things that one should try and do.” So I decided to try and do it.

After some thought, I developed a speech, which I tried out first on a small Christian audience – and they liked it. The biggest compliment I received was that they wanted to invite me to address the Easter service!

In my speech, among other things, I asked the question: Why is the commandment not to tear a limb from a living animal the seventh commandment? If there’s a ladder going up from the bottom to the top, this would be the final rung,

Why is this so important? Why is this command the goal?

I pointed out that this is teaching us to have respect – not only for all human beings and all religions – but for animals as well. And, in fact, we should not even take one step forward without being careful not to tread on the ants on the ground.

That’s a profound thought. It is the goal of all of the commandments. If we showed respect for all living beings and all that God created, wars would cease, and the world would be at peace.

After I had given this speech many times, I thought that I should inform the Rebbe about my success – which had come as a result of his recommendation – so I wrote a letter to him. In my letter I said that, although I’m not a follower of Lubavitch but a follower of Maimonides, “nevertheless, I have followed your advice. And I want you to know that I have now spoken all over the world about the Seven Noahide Laws, and my speech has been very well received.”

I went on to enumerate the venues where I had spoken – to 30 Christian chaplains and 40 commanders in Los Angeles, to 600 Christian clergy in Atlanta, to 300 Christian clergy in Salt Lake City. I ended by saying that “I hope the Rebbe is pleased with my initial effort to comply with his request.”

He wrote back, making it a point of saying that he was also a follower of Maimonides, and that Maimonides would have surely approved of my effort since he saw the dissemination of


the Seven Noahide Laws as an obligation of every Jew.

He went on: “May G-d grant that the declaration of our Sages, ‘He who has one-hundred desires two-hundred and so forth,’ be fulfilled also in connection with your said activities. Namely, that you should continue using your good influence in a manner that would be doubly effective and then doubly again, from two-hundred to four-hundred, and not merely by another increment of one-hundred.” He concluded by wishing me again “the utmost success in all my good efforts.”

He also recommended that I publicize my speech “in a suitable publication that would serve as a source, as well as an inspiration for others to disseminate these seven commandments.”

At first I dismissed the idea of publishing the speech entirely, until I received a call from Wellspring Magazine, a Chabad publication. They said that the Rebbe had told them to print what I wrote and would I please send it over. Of course, I did.

I am not mystical at all, and not Chasidic at all. I am a rationalist, a follower of Maimonides, as I wrote to the Rebbe. Yet I have read all the books the Rebbe had written, especially those in Hebrew and Yiddish, and I have a profound respect for his teachings. His immense wisdom was getting all people to recognize the importance of justice and respect for one another. As it should be.

 An oral history project dedicated to documenting the life of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory. The story is one of thousands recorded in the 900 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. mystory@jmedia.org

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This publication is in loving memory of Mrs. Henya Federman and her daughter Shterna Sara Federman.