

Chanukah, Oh Chanukah

BY DR. DAVID GEFFEN

My first experience with a dreidel was as a lad of four living near an army camp in Mississippi where my father was then stationed as a judge-advocate. I came home one day to our one - room flat and found my mother busily shinning a Hannukah menorah. She had also taken out a couple of ancient looking lead tops which were, in actuality, dreidels made by her father when she was a young girl.

Inquisitive as to what they were, I looked them over carefully, made out the Hebrew letters nun, gimmel, hei, shin, and then tried to turn them. I began to play in earnest. When I finally got tired and let them rest a bit, my mother looked at me and said, "If my father were only alive to see his grandson playing with dreidels he had lovingly fashioned. Today you have become the newest spinner in our family chain."

The name dreidel derives from the German word "drehen," meaning to spin. According to game historians, the four sided top was a well known toy quite popular in medieval Germany. That top had a N for nichts (nothing), G - gantz (all) H - halb (half) and S - shtehl (put). These four letters were transformed into Hebrew characters on the Jewish dreidel. This game, possibly as long as five hundred years ago, became a highlight of the Hannukah festivities since the celebration emphasized all types of joyous activities, even gambling to which the dreidel readily lent itself.

The late Professor Sidney Hoenig explained the inclusion of the dreidel into the Hannukah observances in another fashion. "Symbolically, the top recalls the "turnover" of events when Judah the Maccabee's few forces vanquished and toppled the many in Antiochus' army. The natural sequence of events was overturned, the strong were spun into the hands of the weak."

Practically since its inception the letters on the dreidel were assumed to be the initials of

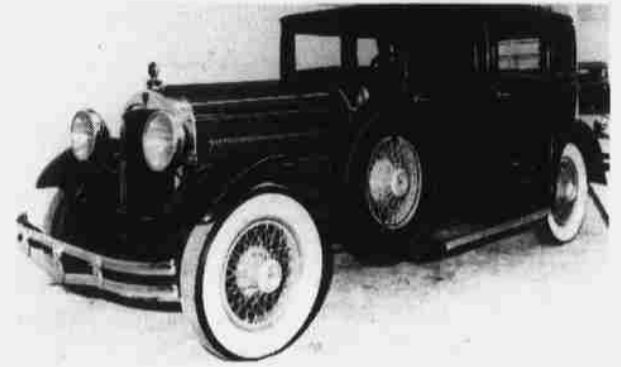
the four words which best describe the great event: "Nes Gadol Hayah Sham" - "a great miracle happened there." In Israel one letter is changed and a 'peih' appears in place of the 'shin.' The peih stands for 'po' (here) referring to the fact that here in Jerusalem, at the site of the ancient Temple the miracle of the oil occurred.

The letters on the dreidel form the basis for the well known Hannukah gambling game of put and take. A nun spin means you take nothing. With gimmel you get it all. A hei gives you half and a shin requires you to put something in the pot. It has even been suggested that since Jews were, at times not allowed to study, they used the dreidel game as a subterfuge. While playing they were, in reality, orally studying the Torah. Some have noted that the dreidel is spun from above indicating that it is God who spins all worldly events to their rightful conclusion.

Prior to World War II, before the age of synthetics, most dreidels were either cast in lead or carved from wood. Today, however, most mass produced dreidels are made from plastic. Inflation has also had its impact on the dreidel market. Ten years ago 100 plastic dreidels were sold in New York for \$1.75. Today for those same 100 dreidels it will cost \$9.00, a five - fold increase in the last decade.

The two largest producers of dreidels are to be found in Jerusalem and in Japan. This year the Jerusalem dreidel manufacturer exported a half million dreidels to the United States. Each one has the shin and not the peih, because they are to be used outside of Israel. The dreidel market will be especially good this year I was told, because of the overlapping of Christmas and Hannukah. For that reason the Jerusalem dreidel producer was asked to supply for the U.S.A. 150,000 more dreidels in 1981 than in 1980. Hopefully in time, all dreidels will come forth from Zion and build yet another bridge between Israel and Jews the world over.

IMPERIAL PALACE HOSTS CLASSIC CAR MUSEUM



Two antique automobiles will be given away to persons submitting the winning entry forms at the Imperial Palace Hotel for the month of December.

As part of the Imperials's grand opening of the multi-million dollar classic and antique Car Collection, open to the public, on December 1, the two cars to be given away via the drawings will be a 1917 Ford - T Roadster and a 1929 Hudson 4 - Door Sedan.

Winners will be chosen by random drawings from one of two drums. In the Imperial Palace Auto Collection area (on the 5th level of the Imperial parking fa-

cility) will be the drum for the Hudson. The drum for the entries in the Ford Roadster drawing will be located in the Imperial Casino. Winners need not be present at the drawings to be held on December 28.

The Imperial Palace Auto Collection, which contains cars formerly owned by such notables as General Douglas MacArthur, Adolph Hitler, Al Capone, Howard Hughes, Cecil B. DeMille, Mrs Henry Ford I, and several others, will be open daily 9:30 A.M. to 5:30 P.M., seven days a week. Special half price admission will continue throughout the month of December.

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4910 E. TROPICANA AT NELLIS LAS VEGAS OPEN 24 HOURS	232 N. JONES AT FREMONT LAS VEGAS OPEN 24 HOURS	2021 CIVIC CTR. NEAR LAKE MEAD LAS VEGAS OPEN 24 HOURS	6115 W. TROPICANA AT JONES LAS VEGAS OPEN 24 HOURS
350 N. NELLIS AT STEWART LAS VEGAS OPEN 24 HOURS	850 S. RANCHO AT CHARLESTON LAS VEGAS OPEN 24 HOURS	3750 FLAMINGO AT SANDHILL LAS VEGAS OPEN 24 HOURS	1941 N. DECATUR AT LAKE MEAD LAS VEGAS OPEN 24 HOURS

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