

Hannukah Customs The World Over

Children in Yemen clad in blue would pretend they are Hasmonean soldiers fighting the ancient Greeks, at the same time as the smell of shortbread cookies made with goose fat fills the air of a home of Czechoslovakian origin on Hannukah night. And in Israel itself, a torch relay lights up Modi'in, the site where the Jewish revolt against the Greeks began. Throughout the world, Hannukah, the festival commemorating the triumph of the Jews over the religious and national persecutions imposed by the Greeks, is marked by a wide variety of games, festivals, food and folk tales.

While traditional observances such as lighting the menorah and eating foods made with oil are almost universal, several customs unique to each Jewish ethnic group have been incorporated into the holiday celebration.

As children in most countries spin the dreidel - a form of Hannukah gambling which

recalls the Maccabean miracle - children in Iran play other games of chance such as tachte-ner, similar to the game of shesh-besh which is popular in Israel. Yemenite children make their dreidels out of nutshells, but the dreidel may come in lead, wood, plastic or glass.

Foods are cooked with oil to recall the miracle of the one small cruse of oil found in the Temple which lasted eight days. Potato pancakes abound in American homes as well as in other countries. Doughnuts are also usually eaten in Israel and all over the Jewish world. Many East European homes cook their food with goose fat instead of conventional oil. As the Czechoslovakian mother bakes her shortbread cookies with the poultry fat, many other East European families use it to fry turnips, radishes, olives and onions for a salad known as retakh. The ingredients are used because they were popular in the Maccabean period. Since the carrot season in Yemen coincides with Hannukah, most Jewish families there feast on

lahis gizar, a type of carrot stew.

The custom of giving Hannukah gelt (money) is non-existent in Moslem countries, but seems very common in countries where Christianity is the dominant religion. It is believed that this custom may have been transferred from Purim to Hannukah to compete with the Christmas presents that Christian children received, according to Dr. Eliezer Marcus, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Jewish Folklore Institute. He also noted that the Hannukah candles are usually lit on window sills, although some ethnic groups light them outside the house to advertise the miracle of the festival. A giant menorah is lit in Israel on top of the Knesset and on other prominent buildings.

Folk tales differ as told by each ethnic group during the festival. Egyptian children hear about a poor widow with seven children who has no money to even make pancakes. She doesn't tell them and instead leaves the house to wash the pots in the river. An old man suddenly appears and asks if she could take him in for the holiday. She readily agrees. The man disappears and the widow continues to worry, since she has no food in the house. When she returns home, her children greet her, shouting that an old man came by and gave them Hannukah money, oil and flour for pancakes. The widow rejoiced and called it a miracle. Their money never ran out and the dough was never used up. And the little jar of oil kept the candles lit for a full eight days.

This is surely a tale which, like the Hannukah story itself, Jews can tell their children and grandchildren from generation to generation.

UNITED NATIONS (WNS) -- The Security Council approved a six month extension of the United Nations Disengagements Observer Force (UNDOF) separating Israeli and Syrian armies on the Golan Heights. The vote was 14-0 in favor and no abstentions. The People's Republic of China, which opposes UN peace-keeping operations, did not take part in the vote.

TORAH CROWN ON DISPLAY



THIS 200-YEAR-OLD TORAH CROWN FROM WARSAW, OF SILVER AND GILT WITH SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES, IS ONE OF SOME 150 EXAMPLES OF JEWISH ART AND ARTIFACTS -- SOME DATING TO THE 12TH CENTURY -- LOANED BY INSTITUTIONS IN POLAND TO THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS AS PART OF AN UNPRECEDENTED CULTURAL - SCHOLARSHIP EXCHANGE PROGRAM. TOGETHER WITH OTHER TREASURES FROM THE LOAN COLLECTION, THE TORAH CROWN WILL BE DISPLAYED AT HARVARD COLLEGE'S WIDENER LIBRARY DECEMBER 2 - 17 IN CONNECTION WITH THE 56TH BIENNIAL MEETING OF THE UNION. NEXT YEAR THE ENTIRE COLLECTION WILL BE SHOWN AT MUSEUMS THROUGHOUT THE U.S. SOME OF THE ITEMS WERE THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN DESTROYED DURING THE NAZI ERA, AND ONLY A FEW OF THEM HAVE EVER BEEN SEEN OUTSIDE OF POLAND.

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