

(continued from back panel)

Rabbi Joseph Dweck of the S&P Sephardi Community of London recently pointed out that Jews are often the repository of the world’s cultures and traditions. As we traveled through the exile we picked up various cultural items, whether food, music, intellectual pursuits, languages, or games, and we incorporated them into Judaism. Then, even when those traditions are lost in their places of origin, they remain alive through the Jewish people. That is an amazing insight about the Jewish people and can be seen in many different cultural areas. Sephardic Jews, in fact, played an incredibly important role in restoring philosophy to Christian Europe after the Dark Ages, via Muslim Spain where it had been preserved.

Hanukkah marks the fight against the Greeks and the Greek culture, called Hellenism. Many therefore hold up Hanukkah as the Jewish banner for rejecting all things deemed non-Jewish. It is therefore incredibly ironic, that one of the customs most associated with Hanukkah, is in fact gentile in origin! But that of course so acutely conveys a central lesson. Judaism does not reject Gentile culture. What we reject is totally discarding Judaism for the prevailing culture, as some did during Greek times. Rather, as Jews we are always keen to learn from the world around us. When we find elements that we value and are in consonance with Judaism, we gladly incorporate them into our tradition. We find a way to transform them and to make them fit into Judaism. In so doing, we take the best of the world and preserve it, recognizing that there is goodness all around us. Hanukkah then is not about rejecting ‘Greek culture,’ but about finding ways to incorporate positive elements of that culture into Judaism. Perhaps then, there is something particularly ‘Jewish,’ Sephardic and Ashkenazic alike, about the dreidel.

A Note About Our Weekly Dibrei Torah

Our Debar Torah this week is written by **Rabbi Shalom Morris**, CSI’s former educational director and current rabbi of the Bevis Marks Synagogue in London. Over the course of this year, in addition to our Shearith Israel cast of writers, we will expose you to guest Debar Torah contributors from other Spanish and Portuguese communities around the world.

Thank you Rabbi Morris for this week’s excellent Debar Torah!

Parnas Office Hours

Louis Solomon would be delighted to meet with you. Please schedule a visit at parnas@shearithisrael.org.

Our next public tour is:
Wednesday, January 11 at 11:00 am

The Sephardi Origins of the Dreidel
Rabbi Shalom Morris, Rabbi of the Bevis Marks Synagogue

Whilst visiting Portugal, I was given a gift. It appeared to be a dreidel, though I was told that it was actually a Rapa, a Portuguese top used by children during Christmas. The store’s website though, claims that it is based upon the dreidel, a traditional Jewish game. The Sephardic origins of the dreidel have also been asserted by some in the American Southwest. There are Spanish individuals in that region who posit Jewish Sephardic ancestry. They claim that hundreds of years ago they arrived in the farthest northern reaches of what was then Spanish Mexico to escape the Inquisition. Some researchers have attempted to prove this Jewish ancestry based upon dreidels that have been found in some of their homes.

The word dreidel is of course yiddish (a Judeo-German language spoken by Ashkenazim). The word is likely from the Yiddish word drei, to spin, as in ‘to drei a kup’ which basically means to drive someone crazy. The letters on the sides are nun, gimmel, hey, and shin – which may stand for nes gadol hayah sham (a great miracle happened there). It was in 1887 that the Hebrew word sevivon was first created by Itamar Ben-Avi, the son of the great Hebrew revivalist Eliezer ben Yehuda. The story goes that he was five at the time, playing with the dreidel. He took the Hebrew word for turning, saviv, and created the word sevivon, for a spinning top. Later in Israel the shin (for sham – there) was changed to a peh (for po – here).

The game of dreidel is today widespread throughout the Jewish world. A player spins the top, and depending on how it lands, they win or lose part or all of the pot of coins (or gelt in Yiddish), in the middle. The origins of this game are said to date back to Hanukkah times (165 BCE), when Jews would play dreidel as Greek soldiers entered their homes,. They did this to hide the fact that they had actually gathered to study Torah, an act prohibited by the Syrian-Greek king, Antiochus. Significantly though, according to the Seforim Blog, this dreidel origin story only first appeared in print in a book published in Pittsburgh, PA, in 1890! The author, Rabbi Eliezer Hershovitz, came from Kovno, Lithuania.

So, is it possible that the dreidel is in fact a pan Jewish custom, dating back to ancient times, and perhaps even Sephardic in origin? Probably not. Not only is dreidel a yiddish word, and not only does the origin story only appear in the late 19th century, but similar tops are found across Europe, and in some places are even traditionally played at Christmas time. In Portugal it is called a Rapa, in other European cities it was a called a teetotum. Depending on the country and language, the letters appearing on the four sides are different. In Yiddish the Hebrew nun, gimmel, hey, and shin actually stood for nisht, ganz, halb, and shtetl arayn (nothing, everything, half, and give one).

The dreidel therefore is a cautionary tale, wherein we sometimes mistakenly project back in time, something which we know from the present. Because Jews today so famously play with a dreidel, some mistakenly assume that any four-sided spinning top must have come from the Jews, even the Sephardic Jews. There is, however, a lasting message and value contained within the dreidel.

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CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Mikkets-Hanukkah

December 30-31, 2016

Hertz Pentateuch: Mikkets: p. 155, Hanukkah: p. 599 ;
Haftarah p. 987
Kaplan Living Torah: Mikkets: p. 200, Hanukkah: p. 696 ;
Haftarah: 1360

CANDLE LIGHTING | 4:20 pm
MINHAH | 4:15 pm | Main Sanctuary
FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS | Following evening services | Rabbi Soloveichik gives a talk on the topic “Light and Enlightenment: A Painter’s Perspective” | *2016-2017 season sponsored by the Julis Family*

ZEMIROT | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary
SHAHARIT (NISHMAT) | 9:00 am | Rabbi Soloveichik delivers a shiur on the topic “Totally Headless Holofernes: A Hanukkah Story?”
TOT SHABBAT WITH LIZ AND SHANADE | Ages 0-4 | 10:00 am | Levy Auditorium
YOUTH GROUPS WITH RACHEL | Ages 5-12 | 10:00 am | Elias Room
JR. CONGREGATION | Ages 5-12 | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue
KIDDUSH | Levy Auditorium

SEUDAH SHELISHIT AND PIRKEI ABOT AFTERNOON SHIUR | Rabbi Soloveichik on the topic “The Most Missed Haftarah: The Story of Solomon” | 3:30 pm | Levy Auditorium | *Fall semester sponsored by Lewis Lipsey*

MINHAH/ARBIT | 4:15 PM
HABDALAH | 5:05 pm

Weekday Service Times

Mornings: Sunday– Monday: 8:00 AM, Tuesday-Friday: 7:15 AM,
Evenings (Arbit Only): Monday - Thursday: 6:30PM

Schedule Changes

- Sunday Morning Classes will not meet on January 1st.
- Rabbi Soloveichik’s Monday class will NOT meet on January 2nd. Follow our emails for the next class.
- The Synagogue Office will be closed on Monday January 2nd.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

SAVE THE DATE:

**Rabbi Shlomo Riskin Returns
to Congregation Shearith Israel**

Shabbat Morning, January 14 | Following morning services

We are delighted to announce that Rabbi Shlomo Riskin returns to Shearith Israel to kick off an important lecture series in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem.

Rabbi Riskin is one of the founders and the first spiritual leader of the Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York, which he led for 19 years. In 1983, at the peak of his profession, he left New York to become the rabbi of Efrat, a new Israeli city 8 miles south of Jerusalem, which he helped found and establish. Efrat is now a flourishing community of close to 12,000 people. Rabbi Riskin founded and serves as Chancellor and Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone Institutions, a network of over 3,000 students ranging from junior-high schools to post-graduate programs preparing the leaders for world Jewry.

**Shabbat Dinner For Teens and Their Entire Families
with Rabbi Soloveichik**

Friday night, January 20 | Following Friday Night Lights

Teens and their families are invited to a special Shabbat dinner with Rabbi Soloveichik and his family.
Register at shearithisrael.org/teens-Hollywood.

**Special Dues Offer and End of Year Gifts
Through Midnight, THIS Saturday, December 31**

Now is the last chance to support Shearith Israel and our special funds (e.g. Rabbi's Discretionary Fund, Sisterhood, Hebra, etc.) with an end of year gift. If you have any outstanding balances, now is also a good time to take care of those. Finally, don't miss out on our special offer to pre-pay you 2017-2018 membership dues at current rates. Please refer to your inbox for emails from us with details. If you have questions about your account, you may also contact our bookkeeper, Ruth Yasky, at 212-873-0300 x 228. To pay, go to shearithisrael.shulcloud.com/payment.php, log in and make a donation.

Back By Popular Demand!

Spaces are going fast! We expect to sell out again soon.

**Exclusive Tour of "The First Jewish Americans:
Freedom and Culture In The New World" Exhibit
Rabbi Meir Soloveichik**

**The New-York Historical Society
170 Central Park West (At 77th street)
Sunday, January 29 | 11:00 am**



Back by popular demand, Rabbi Soloveichik will lead an additional tour of this fascinating exhibit, which is directly connected to the history of our community and congregation and showcases several important objects from our collection as well as extensive loans from the private collection of our newest member, Leonard Milberg. As spaces are highly limited, for now registration is open to sponsors ONLY. Register at shearithisrael.org/The-First-Jewish-Americans

**Incredible Kids Mega Challah Bake
Super (Challah) Bowl Sunday, February 5 | 10:30 am
At the New York Grand Hyatt in Midtown**

Shearith Israel is a proud sponsor of the upcoming Incredible Kids Mega Challah Bake. CSI Youth are invited to join Jewish children from all over New York City to get together for the Incredible Kids Mega Challah Bake. The event is the brainchild of a diverse group of Jewish moms of every style, observance, and denomination, all with one common goal: unity. The event will host approximately 1,000 Jewish children, all ready to roll up their sleeves and make their very own challah loaves. Last year, the Guinness Book of World Records was on hand to declare it the world's largest baking event. Want to help be a part of trying to break a new record? Register at kidschallahbake.com/rsvp.

WEEKDAY JUDAIC EDUCATION

For details go to: shearithisrael.org/judaic-education

Sunday

◇ **Saadiyah Gaon's Book of Beliefs and Opinions** | Sjimon den Hollander | 8:45 am | **NO CLASS THIS WEEK**

Monday

◇ **Monday Night Learning: A Series on Early America and The Jews** | Rabbi Soloveichik | 7:00 pm | Select Mondays | **NO CLASS THIS WEEK**

Tuesday

◇ **Katzap Class and Breakfast** | Following Morning Services
◇ **Feasts and Fasts: The Festivals in Jewish Thought - A Class for Women** | Rabbi Soloveichik | 9:00 am
◇ **Talmud Class: Tractate Sanhedrin** | Rabbi Soloveichik | 7:00 pm | **NO CLASS THIS WEEK**

Wednesday

◇ **NEW: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Shearith Israel: A Monthly Q & A** | Z. Edinger | 7:00 pm | On select Wednesdays | **Next class on January 25** | Email questions to zedinger@shearithisrael.org.

To sponsor a single class or an entire semester, go to shearithisrael.org/sponsoraaclass

To find out when your favorite class is held, canceled or for special topics, go to shearithisrael.org/join-our-mailing-lists to select which emails you'd like to receive.

Hard time remembering RSVP deadlines?

We can remind you by text. Enroll at:
shearithisrael.org/text-message-notifications

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Condolences to **Susan Hertog** on the passing of her mother, Marilyn Gorell.