

The Path To Follow

Miketz

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The Secret of the Dreidel: Falling Seven Times and Getting Back Up

On Chanukah Jews traditionally play with dreidels, upon which four letters are displayed: *nun*, *gimel*, *hei*, and *shin*. Since this tradition has spread to all the Jewish people, it must certainly originate from a sacred source, and there is obviously a hidden reason for the appearance of these letters.

How do we play with a dreidel? We take it in one hand, placing our fingers on its top, and spin it with great force. Due to the power of the hand, the dreidel begins to spin quickly, until little by little it begins to lose speed. It eventually slows to such a point that it cannot stay upright, and so it falls to one side. We then pick it up and spin it again, and once again it falls, and so we pick it up and spin it once more.

We learn of the Hasmoneans' tremendous devotion from the dreidel, for the wicked Antiochus wanted to turn Jews away from their religion and teach them Greek wisdom by making them forget the holy Torah. What did the Hasmoneans do? They prayed to Hashem for success in fighting Antiochus and saving the Torah, in order that it should never be forgotten. Although the Hasmoneans understood the power of Greece, they still risked their lives in order to save the holy Torah. Despite falling at times, they got back up and did not lose hope. This is how the righteous act: They get up despite falling down, as it is written: "Though the righteous may fall seven times, he will arise" (*Mishlei* 24:16). This is just like the dreidel, for at first we make it spin with great force, and although it eventually falls, we spin it once more.

When we examine the numerical values of the letters inscribed on the dreidel (*nun*, *gimel*, *hei*, and *shin*), we see that they add up to 258. This comes to 7 by the method of *Mispar Katan*, teaching us that these *tzaddikim* were only starting things. When they grew weak and fell, they arose – be it seven times over – until they defeated the forces of Antiochus and saved the holy Torah.

Furthermore, in the Hebrew alphabet the letters preceding those found on the dreidel are *mem*, *beit*, *dalet*, and *resh*. This tells us that they were only able to defeat the Greeks by completely devoting themselves and becoming a desert (*midbar*): Just as there is neither food nor drink in the desert, the *tzaddikim* devoted themselves completely to their task without any ulterior motives, solely to save the Torah and Jews from assimilation.

Neirot D'Zechariah

Just as this miracle occurred for our ancestors in those days, each person has the ability to act in a similar way today. Although the evil inclination makes a person fall numerous times, he is forbidden to lose hope. He must get up again and again, until he succeeds in chasing the evil inclination away.

I say that this is the reason behind the divergent opinions of Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel: "Beit Shammai maintains: 'On the first day eight candles are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced,' but Beit Hillel says: 'On the first day one is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased' " (*Shabbat* 21b). Beit Shammai says that we

light eight candles on the first day because the Hasmoneans reinstated the Divine service and maintained a constant war against Antiochus, with the same fervor as at the beginning and without losing hope. When they fell, they got back up to fight again, and so we light the Chanukah candles in the same way: We initially light them all in memory of their fortitude in war, and then we diminish their number, for although they diminished in number, they eventually won.

Beit Hillel states that on the first day we light one candle. We then increase the number of candles as the days progress, for in the end the *tzaddikim* renewed their service of G-d each day, to the point that they eventually conquered the Greeks and those who supported assimilation, the wicked among the Jews. The Hasmoneans relit the Menorah in the Temple, the light of the Torah shined, and Greek wisdom was defeated.

Since the entire basis for the miracle of Chanukah rested on the fact that they arose without losing hope, the Sages instituted the reading of *Neirot D'Zechariah* for the *haftarah* of Shabbat Chanukah. There it is written, "He showed me Joshua, the *Kohen Gadol*, standing before the angel of Hashem, and the Satan was standing on his right to accuse him. [The angel of] Hashem said to him, 'May Hashem denounce you, O Satan! May Hashem, Who chooses Jerusalem, denounce you! Indeed, this [man] is like a firebrand saved from a fire.' Now Joshua was dressed in filthy garments as he stood before the angel. He answered and spoke to those standing before him, saying: 'Remove the filthy garments from upon him!' Then he said to him, 'See, I have removed your iniquity from upon you, and dressed you with clean attire'" (*Zechariah* 3:1-4). Further on we read: "Listen now, O Joshua, the *Kohen Gadol*: You and your companions who are sitting before you, for they are men [worthy] of a miracle – for behold, I am bringing My servant Zema" (v.8).

As a result, although Joshua was stained with sin, G-d said: "Remove the filthy garments from upon him!" He then told him, "See, I have removed your iniquity from upon you, and dressed you with clean attire," immediately followed by: "Listen now, O Joshua, the *Kohen Gadol*." He could have said, "Listen now, O Joshua," but He did not express Himself as such. Instead He said, "Listen now, O Joshua, the *Kohen Gadol*," teaching us that every Jew is great, capable of greatness even when stained with sin. The Holy One, blessed be He, helps a person, rebukes the Satan, and removes his sin. In the Gemara our Sages say, "Man's evil inclination grows in strength from day to day and seeks to kill him, as it is said: 'The wicked one watches for the righteous and seeks to kill him' [*Tehillim* 37:32]. Were it not for the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, was his help, he would not be able to withstand it, as it is said: 'Yet Hashem will not forsake him to his hand' [v.33]" (*Kiddushin* 30b). The Holy One, blessed be He, helps a person confront the evil inclination. He must then face it himself, and although he may fall seven times, he will arise.



In Those Days, At This Time

The Chanukah Miracle in Poland

It was the year 5680, a difficult time for our Jewish brothers in Poland. The atmosphere was saturated with suspicion and hatred. From time to time, the non-Jews of the region would launch vicious pogroms against the Jews.

In the atmosphere of fear and terror that surrounded the Jews of Poland, nobody dared to venture out into the streets without good reason, even in plain daylight, and even more so at night. When darkness fell, all the Jews of Poland would shut themselves in their homes, lock their doors, and close their shutters. It was on such a night that the festival of Chanukah began.

It was also the night that the Bolsheviks invaded Poland. Copious tears and supplications were heard from Jews on that night, as they lit the Chanukah candles. They fully realized that they were risking their lives by lighting these candles, for a national decree had absolutely forbidden homes from being illuminated at night in any way. Hence contrary to usual, in that year the Jews of Poland lit candles from behind closed shutters.

Not everyone, however, for one Jew was ready to risk his life. For him, the lights of Chanukah and Torah *mitzvot* were more precious than life. He therefore put himself in danger and lit the Chanukah candles as he usually did, by his widow sill. When the Poles saw this, they accused him of aiding enemy forces, which were encamped on the other side of a river, by signaling to them with the light of his candles. Hence after a few hours, they brought him before a military tribunal.

It was overcast and raining on that day. Despite the cold, however, a crowd gathered at the marketplace, which was completely filled. All eyes turned to the long table at which generals, army commanders, and high-ranking figures were seated, waiting to hear what would emerge from their mouths. The crowd pushed and pressed, and from it emerged various shouts: "Shame to the Jewish spy!" "Death to all Jews!" "They're all spies!"

Police officers and soldiers cracked their whips above the crowd, thereby clearing a path for the Jew who was being led forth in chains. His face was calm and relaxed as he was being led to his execution. Despite the shouts of anger and scorn that surrounded him, the gleam in his eyes was not affected.

Numerous Jews looked on in terror from their homes. Yet what could these poor people do for a Jew who was about to die for the sanctification of G-d's Name?

He was placed next to the long table, a signal was given, and word spread through the crowd. One official arose and began to read a long document aloud: "You have been condemned to death by firing squad. May G-d forgive your great sin. You have betrayed your beloved homeland, trying to give it to the enemy with your light signals."

The Jew was immediately taken and placed with his face towards the wall. The bloodthirsty crowd began to make a great noise. All the church bells rang out, and rifles were pointed at the Jew. Everyone held their breath as they waited for the order to fire.

Suddenly, the sound of galloping horses was heard in the distance, and they were advancing quickly. The governor general of the province arrived, exclaiming in a loud voice: "I have brought you other Jews from another city." The rifles were lowered, and there

was silence. The governor general then pointed to the two Jews that his soldiers had brought with them, and he said: "Tell us, you Jews, did you light candles last night at your windows? Yes or no?"

"Yes governor," they replied.

"Why?" he asked.

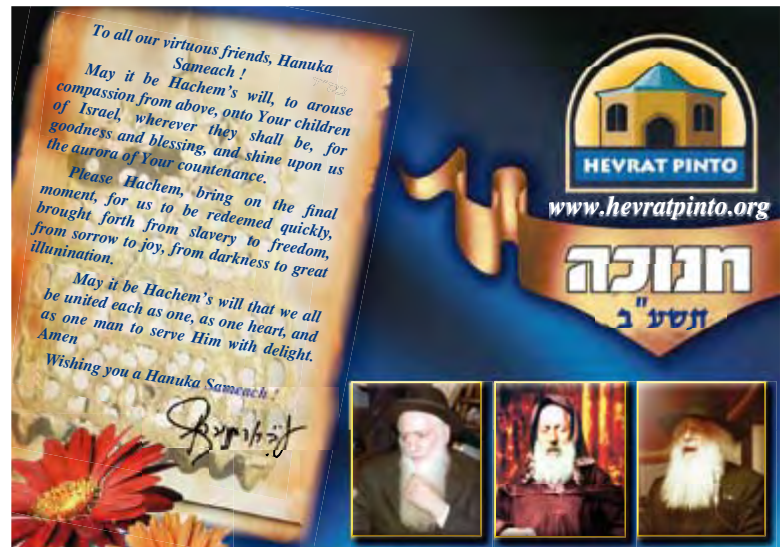
"We have a sacred custom each year, in memory of the miracles and wonders that G-d performed for our ancestors in those days, at this time."

"When did those miracles occur?" asked the governor with curiosity.

"Governor, they took place more than 2,000 years ago."

"That's not true!" said the governor. "It's not only for your ancestors that G-d performed miracles. Last night, He performed a great miracle and wonder for us! We were surrounded by our enemies in the darkness of the night, in a dangerous environment. We didn't know where to flee, and our lives were in very serious danger. It was only thanks to the candles that shined from your windows that we were saved."

The governor then gave the signal, and the Jews were released, to the great disappointment of the bloodthirsty crowd. Our friend, who was about to be executed, now emerged as a victor, to the great joy of the Jews of the city. Hence this miracle was added to the chain of miracles that Hashem performed for us at the time of Chanukah.



Guard Your Tongue!

Hearing Lashon Harah

Everything that we have said up to now in regards to avoiding *Lashon Harah* pertains to not speaking it. However we are also prohibited from taking any action whatsoever – or to cause any harm or shame to anyone in this regard, be it little or much – as a result of hearing *Lashon Harah* from an honest witness who has testified before the *Beit Din*. Apart from the oath that he took, this changes nothing. Furthermore, just hating someone in our heart as a result of the *Lashon Harah* that we hear is also forbidden by the Torah.

Two Famines

It is written, "The seven good ears are seven years...and the seven ears, empty, blasted by the east wind, will be seven years of famine" (*Bereshith* 41:26-27).

Why does this passage first state that the seven good ears "are seven years" (present tense), but then states that they "will be seven years" (future tense)?

Rabbi Shaul Katsenelboigen of Vilna asked this question and provided an answer to it: The Sages have said, "The famine lasted two years, for as soon as Jacob went down there, it came to an end. When did [the remaining years] return? In the days of Ezekiel" (*Bereshith Rabba* 89:9).

This is what the Torah is hinting to us by the future-tense expression "will be seven years." That is, there will be a second famine. When? In the days of Ezekiel.

For Joseph's Sake

It is written, "Now let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt" (*Bereshith* 41:33).

The question usually asked is why Joseph himself asked for someone to be put in charge of collecting the wheat. After all, Pharaoh only asked him to interpret his dream, not to give him advice!

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Ferber explains this by means of a parable:

Two prominent figures (who, as is usually the case, sought personal honor) arrived at a train station and discovered an orchestra there. One said, "They have come for my sake," while the other said: "It was for my sake that they came." They finally agreed to ask a local Jew to settle the matter.

Living near the train station was a poor Jew who had nothing for the Passover holidays, which were soon approaching. Suddenly, the two prominent figures arrived at his home and asked him to decide the argument they were having. As per custom, the man asked for 50 rubles to settle the matter, money which he received. He then said to them, "The musicians came neither for your sake nor for yours. They came for my sake alone, so that I could have money to cover the costs of the holidays."

Thus Joseph said that the dream came neither for the sake of Pharaoh nor his magicians, since Hashem could have brought a famine without dreams. It only occurred for Joseph's sake, to release him from prison and grant him royalty and greatness.

Hence Joseph said, "Now let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt." In fact Pharaoh accepted this advice, saying: "No one is as intelligent and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace" (*Bereshith* 41:39-40).

Reminders

It is written, "Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, for 'G-d has made me forget all the hardship.' ... The name of the second son he called Ephraim, for 'G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.'" (*Bereshith* 41:51-52).

The Malbim, Rabbi Meir Leibush, explains this as follows:

In choosing names for his sons, Joseph gave himself signs so as not to forget, in good times, his days of poverty and misery. It is in this way that the righteous act. For the same reason, we have been commanded to eat *matzah* and bitter herbs on the night of Passover, in memory of the exile, so as not to forget it during times of freedom. For the exile was the cause of our redemption, and evil led to good.

The Desire for Food

It is written, "Joseph's brothers went down – ten – *lishbor* [to buy] grain from Egypt" (*Bereshith* 42:3).

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Ger *Zatzal* explains that the term *lishbor* connotes a desire for food. In fact there is no virtue in wanting to abstain from eating when food is lacking. It was only in Egypt, where there was food in abundance, that it was a virtue not to desire it.

The Way of the Tzaddikim

It is written, "And so they did" (*Bereshith* 42:20).

The *tzaddik* Rabbi Shalom of Belz *Zatzal* said the following:

This is the way of the *tzaddikim* who serve Hashem. When they see or hear something good, or a praiseworthy custom of another person, they put an effort into cleaving to that virtue as well.

Since the tribal fathers heard Joseph, whom they believed was an Egyptian, saying the words: "I fear G-d" (*Bereshith* 42:18), they immediately emulated him and strengthened their fear of G-d. They examined their deeds and confessed, "Indeed, we are guilty" (v.21).

In the Light of the Parsha

The Holy Torah Protects the Entire Jewish People

When the royal house of the Hasmoneans fought against Greece, they were fighting against Greek foreigners and Hellenized Jews who had become like foreigners because they were only interested in Greek wisdom. Yet these two battles were not the same. The Hasmoneans killed Greeks who tried to render them impure and make them forget the Torah, but they could not do the same to the assimilated Jews, for it is written: "As I live – the word of Hashem G-d – I do not desire the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked returns from his way, that he may live. Repent, repent from your evil ways! Why should you die, O house of Israel?" (*Ezekiel* 33:11). Hence the Hasmoneans did not try to kill them, but instead they led them to repentance.

How did the *tzaddikim* lead the wicked into doing *teshuvah*? It was by teaching them the holy Torah, not Greek wisdom. After having killed the Greek foreigners, they immediately entered the Temple to light the Menorah, which alludes to the Holy Torah, as the Sages have said on the verse, "For the *mitzvah* is a lamp and the Torah is light" (*Mishlei* 6:23): "The verse identifies a *mitzvah* with a lamp and the Torah with light. The *mitzvah* [is identified] with a lamp in order to tell you that just as a lamp only protects temporarily, likewise a *mitzvah* only protects temporarily. The Torah [is identified] with light in order to tell you that just as light protects permanently, likewise the Torah protects permanently" (*Sotah* 21a).

As soon as the wicked began returning to the Torah, the light of the Torah immediately drew them closer to the right path, and assimilated Jews became fewer in number each day, to the point that none remained. This is because the light of the Torah led them to repentance, and Greek wisdom no longer enticed them.

This is why Beit Shammai said that the essence of the miracle was that the wicked did *teshuvah*, the *tzaddikim* overcame the Greeks, and the holy Torah conquered Greek wisdom. Since this miracle occurred on account of the holy Torah, and because the Menorah alludes to the holy Torah, they believed that a fewer number of candles should be lit as the days progress, alluding to the fact that the impurity of the Greeks decreased until it eventually disappeared. They believed that the Hasmoneans should light candles on the following year to recall the fact that due to the light of the Torah, the wicked repented and the flask of oil purified their hearts.

As for Beit Hillel, since the Sages said that we must ascend in holiness, not descend in it, they applied this principle to the lighting of the Menorah. Just as the wicked were increasingly drawn towards holiness, with more people rallying around the Torah each day, likewise the number of candles should increase each day as well. This is because the light of the Torah increased from day to day until it illuminated everything, completely removing Greek wisdom from among the Jewish people by the power of the Torah.

I Don't Have Time to Eat!

Our teacher Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto wrote, "For one who wishes to take his meal with complete relaxation and repose, and to sleep without being disturbed and to walk only at a leisurely pace, and so forth – such a person will find it extremely difficult... to go out and perform a *mitzvah* if the time does not suit him. How much more reluctant will he be to rush himself for a *mitzvah* or for Torah study! ... A person must realize that he is not in this world for repose, but for labor and exertion. He should conduct himself according to the manner of laborers who work for hire, as it is said: 'We are day laborers' (*Eruvin* 65a); and according to the manner of soldiers at the battlefield, who eat in haste, sleep only at irregular intervals, and are always poised for attack. In this regard it is said, 'For man is born to toil' (Job 5:7)" (*Messilat Yesarim*, ch. 9).

In this context, it is said that Rabbi Moshe Yechiel Epstein *Zatzal*, the Rebbe of Ostrova, used to eat very quickly. When his brother-in-law asked, to his great surprise, why he was eating so quickly, the Rebbe explained: "I don't have time to eat!"

It was not only on weekdays that he acted like this, but on Shabbat as well. In his advanced years, the meal and *zemirot* of Friday night, from *Shalom Aleichem* to the end of *Birkat Hamazon*, lasted no more than 20 minutes. He would then enclose himself in his room to study the Zohar, usually while standing, until well after midnight.

To the Rebbetzin who was astonished at this custom and asked, "How is it that every other Jew has time to sit down at the Shabbat table?" he replied: "The more valuable time is, the less time I have."

Even at the End of Yom Kippur

The verse, "You shall mediate upon it day and night" (Joshua 1:8) takes on special meaning with Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor *Zatzal*. He studied Torah day and night with phenomenal diligence, in times of poverty and want, as well as in times of prosperity.

His disciple, Rabbi Yaakov Lipschitz, stated that Rabbi Yitzchak Spektor would sometimes leave the Beit HaMidrash to relax from his in-depth learning. Yet he did not stop learning even then, for his mouth silently uttered words of Torah or *Tehillim*. He always had the Torah on his lips, both in lying down and getting up. Even when in bed at night, his mind never stopped thinking of Torah, for it was his sole joy in life.

So great was Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan's love for Torah that he paid no attention to his material needs. When he went for a meal at the home of his father-in-law, Rabbi Eliezer Yazarski, he did not wait to be served the dishes that had been prepared for him. Instead, as soon as he entered the house, he would immediately wash his hands, take a piece of dry bread, and eat it alone. When he felt that he had appeased his hunger, he would recite *Birkat Hamazon* and quickly return to the Beit HaMidrash to learn!

At the end of Yom Kippur, after all the services of the day had left Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan exhausted, as soon as the fast ended he would taste something to regain his strength, then immediately return to the Beit HaMidrash. He would stay there for most of the

night, studying with great diligence and a pleasant voice, without giving himself any rest from that exhausting day.

During the years in which Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan ate at the home of his father-in-law in the town of Velkowitz, his father (the *gaon* Rabbi Israel Isser, who lived in the city of Rosh) once paid him a visit. Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan rejoiced when his father arrived, for he had not seen him in a long time. After the joy of their reunion, he said: "Father, please excuse me for not being able to stay longer, for I have to go and study Torah."

Rabbi Israel Isser, who fully understood the delicate soul of his son – who was attached to the Torah like embers to a flame – agreed, and they departed in peace. Thus Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan headed off to his usual place of study in the Beit HaMidrash.

I Eat Quickly

The amazing story that follows comes from *Sefer Chassidim*:

A man found himself in a house where three people were eating at the same table. They said to him, "Eat with us, and you'll be able to recite *Birkat Hamazon* with a *zimun*."

He replied, "You're taking too much time to eat and chatting about useless things. I eat quickly and immediately go to learn Torah."

I Already Ate

The *gaon* Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz *Zatzal*, the Rosh Yeshiva of Mir, would usually eat his meals as he studied with his *chavruta*. He never spent more than three to five minutes eating. Even during that time, he would listen to his *chavruta* and make remarks in between mouthfuls, or he would be thinking with great concentration.

During the meals of Shabbat, he was also deeply immersed in thought. Every Shabbat, it would take several minutes from the time that prayers ended until his family gathered to eat. During that time, Rabbi Chaim had a *chavruta* with whom he studied until everyone was seated at the table.

In the year 5700, when the Mir yeshiva was exiled from the town of Keidan, one of the local *ba'alei batim* invited himself to Rabbi Chaim's home for a Shabbat meal. At the end of *Shacharit*, the man lingered to speak with someone for a few minutes. Fifteen minutes had not yet passed, and yet Rabbi Chaim was seen returning to synagogue. The man thought that he was coming back to summon him for the meal, and so he excused himself by saying: "I'm sorry to be late. I'm coming right away."

"The meal is waiting for you," Rabbi Chaim calmly replied. "However you'll only be able to eat the third meal with me, for I've already eaten."

His Torah Will Then Endure

Just how correct are the Maharal's sanctified words in *Netivot Olam*!

"If there is a study session, he should rush not to eat, to the point that his food will cause him harm. He should also not take all his time eating, for if he does not want to turn away from Torah, he should not linger to eat. His Torah learning will then endure, and in this way he demonstrates his wisdom."