

The Month of Kislev:

The Secret of the Dreidel, the Four Kingdoms and the Dimensions of the Human Psyche

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Introduction

Playing the dreidel (top) on Chanukah is much more than a children's game, but where does the *minhag* (custom) come from, and what does this game have to do with Chanukah? Here is one answer: During the Greek exile when Torah study was outlawed, the Jews would gather in caves to study. When Greek soldiers came, they would spin the dreidle, making believe they were gambling rather than learning.¹

It is interesting to note that both the Chanukah and Purim customs revolve around a spinning toy. On Chanukah, we play with a dreidel, while on Purim we spin the noisemaking *ra'ashan* or grogger. While the dreidel is spun from above, we turn the grogger from below. The reason for the different directions of spinning during Chanukah versus Purim is that on Purim G-d saved us "from below" – disguised within Nature, while on Chanukah He saved us "from above" – through the miracles of the victory of a small group of Torah scholars, unskilled in war over the mightiest army, and through the miracle of the jug of oil that burned for eight days. While Purim is about hidden miracles within nature, Chanukah celebrates our connection with Hashem which transcends nature.²

The four-sided dreidle has multilayered significance, on each of the sides is a Hebrew letter. Traditionally the letters on the dreidle are: *nun, gimel, heh, shin* the acronym of *נשגדול היה שם* / *nes gadol haya sham* – a great miracle was there. In modern day Israel, this sentence has become "a great miracle was here" by exchanging the *shin* with the letter *pei* standing for *פה* / *po* – here. Little do most people know that there are deeper reasons for the original letters on the dreidel, which add up to the numerical value of 358 = Mashiach! When you read on you will learn how these letters also correspond to the four animals in Daniel's dream, the four kingdoms and the four dimensions of our psyche...

The Four Kingdoms of Ya'acov's Dream

There are four archetypical kingdoms who have exiled the Jewish people from the time of the destruction of the Temple until today. These kingdoms are particularly four, as they reflect the world of separation to the four extremities. The four kingdoms arise through the power of the *klipot* (spiritual shell) against Israel and desire to prevent Hashem's oneness and unity from being revealed to the entire world. Because Israel is one nation who is cleaving to the unity of G-d, these

¹ Rabbi Avraham Eliezer Hirschowitz, *Otzar Kol Minhagei Yeshurun* 19:4.

² Based on Rabbi Y.Y. Jacobson, *A New Twist on the Dreidel*.



Midreshet
B'erot Bat Ayin

Holistic Torah Study for Women

(011-972-2) 993-4945

info@bzerotbatayin.org

www.bzerotbatayin.org

kingdoms desire to nullify Israel.³ Before the formation of Israel, Ya'acov dreamed about the protecting angels of these kingdoms in his well-known ladder dream. Hashem showed him the angel of Babylon ascend the ladder seventy rungs, and descend. The angel of the Empire of Persia and Media then climbed up the ladder fifty-two rungs, followed by the angel of the of Greece, who climbed hundred and eighty rungs. Finally, the protecting angel of the Roman Empire climbed up the ladder, without coming down. At that moment Ya'acov feared that this final exile would never end, until Hashem promised him, Don't fear Israel, even if you see him dwell with me, from there I will bring him down...⁴ We are still in that final exile, in the softly smothering embrace of Rome's spiritual heirs.

The Four Dimensions of our Psyche

The four Global Kingdoms represent the four dimensions of the human psyche: Ego, bodily desires, intellect and a negative destructive drives. *Nefesh*, meaning "self" or "identity," reflects the human ego. *Guf* – body, represents the bodily desires. *Sechel*, which means reason, corresponds to the intellect. Finally, *Hakol*, meaning everything, symbolizes the evil force, which covers itself in anything to reach its ugly destructive goal. Beyond these four, is our 'higher' or 'inner self' – the spark of G-d within us that reflects Hashem's goodness and drives us to seek truth and idealism. Through awareness of our Divine essence within, we can utilize our ego, physical desires and intellect for spiritual growth. We can even channel our impulse to destroy to eradicate the evil. However, it can be dangerous if any of these four elements are detached from our higher divine self. A self-serving ego can drive us to destroy all who stand in our way. Our bodily urges and temptations can plunge us into the abyss. Our power of reason may rationalize any type of behavior and breach moral boundaries. Finally, our evil impulse can cause suffering and devastation to innocent human beings.⁵

The Four Kingdoms Come to Destroy the Four Parts of our Being

Each of the four kingdoms tried to nullify Israel in their way. They attempted to detach one of the four aspects of our being from our higher Divine selves. Babylon strove to destroy our *nefesh* – the connection between body and soul. The Babylonian Kingdom was the first to nullify the worship in the Temple – the sacrifices (mainly including the blood which is the *nefesh*).⁶ The sacrifices are the rectification of the *nefesh* as it states, (ספר ויקרא פרק ב:א) *v'nefesh ki takriv* – "a *nefesh* which will bring an offering..."⁷ The Babylonians destroyed the first Temple – our unique pipeline to Hashem. The destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, therefore, severed the connection between the cosmic soul – Hashem, and the cosmic body – the world. The letter *nun* in the dreidel stands for נפש/*nefesh* – the vital soul, which represents the kingdom of Babylon who desired to dominate and rule. This corresponds to the 'Lion' in Daniel's dream⁸ – the king of the animals.

³ Based on Rav Tzvi Elimelech of Dubno, *B'nei Yissaschar*, Kislev/Tevet 2:25.

⁴ *Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishit* 25:121.

⁵ Based on Rabbi Y.Y. Jacobson, *A New Twist on the Dreidel*.

⁶ *Devarim* 12:23.

⁷ *Vayikra* 2:1.

⁸ *Daniel* 7:4.

The exile of Persia and Media represents the threat to the **guf** – the body of the Jewish People, the physical threat of annihilation. Haman wanted a final solution of the Jewish problem. Therefore, Persia decreed “to destroy, to kill and to annihilate.”⁹ The letter *gimel* in the dreidel stands for גוף/*guf* – the body, which represents the kingdom of Persia and Media. This corresponds to the ‘Bear’ in Daniel’s dream¹⁰ – as the Persians are compared to the bear in their indulgence in materialistic pleasure – “Persians eat and drink like a bear.”¹¹

The exile of Greece worshiped the human mind and beauty. With their exterior philosophical wisdom they desired to destroy the spiritual core of Judaism – the Torah. They weren’t interested in the physical destruction of the Jewish People; rather they wanted to contaminate our **sechel** – intellect. The letter *shin* in the dreidel stands for שכל/*sechel* – the intellect, which represents the Greek kingdom. This corresponds to the ‘Leopard’ in Daniel’s dream¹² – known for its beauty.

The fourth kingdom is worse than any other kingdom on earth because it includes all their powers and connects them. It is opposed to body, *nefesh* and intellect. In the beginning the Romans, like the Babylonians, stopped the sacrifices in the Temple – the aspect of the **nefesh**. Then, they destroyed the second Holy Temple and inflicted unthinkable bloodshed on the **guf** – the body of Jewish People. Afterwards they opposed us through their opposition of the Torah with the exterior wisdom of their **sechel** – intellect. The letter *heh* in the dreidel stands for הכל/*hakol* – all, which represents the Roman kingdom which includes the aspects of all the exiles. This corresponds to the ‘multi-horned animal’ in Daniel’s dream – “which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots; and in the [fourth] horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.”¹³

Goshna – The Meeting Point of Yehuda & Yosef

The mission of Israel is to unify all the four aspect of the human psyche to the Divine. Therefore, the kingdom of Israel stems from Yehuda, whose name includes the letters of Hashem’s name with the addition of the letter *dalet*. Hence, Israel has the power to reveal the unity of Hashem in the entire world. This unification is enacted by unifying the separation of the world from Hashem caused by the kingdoms that dwell in the four extremities of the earth.¹⁴ For this reason Ya’acov “sent Yehuda before him to Yosef, to show the way before him וגשנה/to Goshen.”¹⁵ Immediately at the beginning of our exile to Egypt – the root of the four exiles, “he sent Yehuda before himself to Yosef” – to bring the two Mashiach’s together,¹⁶ specifically in *Goshen* because this place correspond to the four kingdoms, which Mashiach will overcome. The word וגשנה/to Goshen consists of the four letters of the dreidle that correspond to the four kingdoms that are opposed to the four aspects of our psyche: **Gufani** (Bodily), **Sichli** (Intellectual), **Nafshi** (Soul), **Hakol** (All).

⁹ Esther 3:13.

¹⁰ Daniel 7:5.

¹¹ Babylonian Talmud, Kidushin 72a.

¹² Daniel 7:6.

¹³ Daniel 7:7-8.

¹⁴ Based on Rav Tzvi Elimelech of Dubno, *B'nei Yissaschar*, Kislev/Tevet 2:25.

¹⁵ Bereishit 46:28.

¹⁶ Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David who descends from Yehuda.

משיח/Mashiach who shares the *gematria* (numerical value) of גשנה/Goshna – 358 will completely nullify all of them. Thereby, he will accomplish eradicating the impurity of the נחש/snake that also shares the *gematria* of 358. Only by nullifying the power of the primordial snake, from which the four kingdoms draw their power, can the complete unification of “Hashem is one and His name is one” take place.¹⁷

The Secret Unification of the Wooden Dreidel

Now we understand why most of *gedolei Yisrael* continued using dreidels with a *shin* rather than a *pei* even while living in *Eretz Yisrael*. The custom of the Belzer Rebbe was to twirl a wooden dreidel a few times on one of the days of Chanukah, and say in the name of the B’nai Yissascher: “if we twirl the dreidel below – it turns things around up Above.” “The *minhag* of our fathers is Torah” – the *minhag* during the days of Chanukah – the *chinuch* (education) for the future *geula* – is to play with a four cornered piece of wood, spun on its central point, to show that the four kingdoms alluded to in the word גשנה/Goshna are opposed to holiness by way of separating from the Divine Unity to the four corners. This *minhag* was always a custom in Israel, particularly using a wooden dreidel, as it states in the *haftarah* of *parashat VaYigash*: “You, son of man, take a wooden stick and write upon it, for Yehuda... then take another stick and write upon it for Yosef... and join them together to make one stick of wood...”¹⁸ This is done particularly by means of wood (from a tree) “for a person is compared to the tree of the field,”¹⁹ and because the four lettered name of Hashem is in the *gematria* of tree – עץ/etz – by multiplying the letters with each other.²⁰ The four kingdoms who are inherently opposed to the oneness of Hashem, and to His reflection in this world – the Jewish People, all spin around the center – the middle point corresponding to Israel who unifies all directions. When the extremities of the dreidel spin around and become nullified to the center, it alludes to the time when “...the nations will be transformed into [one] pure language to call upon the name of Hashem...”²¹ When you spin the dreidel, you will notice that its four corners become blurry and turn into a circle. This circle is the reflection of the small point at its center, representing the unity of Israel within the oneness of Hashem.²² By spinning the dreidel during Chanukah – the education for the redemption – we get a glimpse of the rectified world when all the kingdoms and dimensions in our psyche become unified with the one and only G-d.

17 *Zecharia* 14:9; Based on Rav Tzvi Elimelech of Dubno, *B’nei Yissaschar*, Kislev/Tevet 2:25.

18 *Yechezkiel* 37:16-17.

19 *Devarim* 20:19.

20 *Yud* times *Heh*=50, *Heh* times *Yud*=50, *Vav* times *Heh*=30, *Heh* times *Vav*= 30 50+50+30+30 =160. The *gematria* of *Etz* עץ (90+70)=160

This is also the *gematria* of כסף/silver. *B’nei Yissaschar*, Kislev/Tevet 2:25.

21 *Tzefania* 3:9.

22 Based on Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, *The Secret of the Dreidel*.