

THE
SCOUNDREL
& SCAMP
THEATRE

TEACHERS GUIDE



HERSHEL · and the · HANUKKAH GOBLINS

ADAPTED BY
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FROM THE BOOK
BY **ERIC A. KIMMEL**

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Using the Guide

Welcome, Teachers! This guide is intended as a supplement to the Scoundrel and Scamp's production of *Hershel & The Hanukkah Goblins*. Please note that words bolded in the guide are vocabulary that are listed and defined at the end of the guide.

The Holiday of Hanukkah

Introduction to Hanukkah

In Hebrew, the word *Hanukkah* means **inauguration**, dedication, or **consecration**. It is a less important Jewish holiday than others, but has become popular over the years because of its proximity to Christmas which has influenced some aspects of the holiday. Hanukkah tells the story of a military victory and the miracle that happened more than 2,000 years ago in the province of Judea, now known as Palestine. At that time, Jews were forced to give up the study of the **Torah**, their holy book, under the threat of death as their synagogues were taken over and destroyed. A group of fighters resisted and defeated this army, cleaned and took back their synagogue, and re-lit the **menorah** (a ceremonial lamp) with oil that should have only lasted for one night but that lasted for eight nights instead. Today Hanukkah is celebrated by lighting eight nights of candles, playing the game of **dreidel**, eating dairy and food fried in oil, and telling the story of the great miracle that happened there.

The History of Hanukkah

In 168 **B.C.E.** the land that is currently known as Israel and Palestine came under the control of the Greco-Syrian Empire and its Emperor Antiochus IV. Many Jews who lived in larger cities had adopted **Hellenistic** (ancient Greek) culture and traditions, adopting new Greek names, wearing **togas**, and leaving the study of Torah to pursue other roles in Greek society. Antiochus wanted to unify all of his kingdom under this Hellenism and the worship of **Zeus**, and was promised by some high ranking Hellenistic religious and political Jewish leaders that all Jews would welcome this change and willingly abandon their study of Torah and old ways. When this turned out not to be true, Antiochus decided that studying Torah would be punishable by death and sent his army into towns and cities to enforce these new rules. Soldiers set up altars to Zeus, forcing Jews to publicly worship this new God, eat pork, and other things **prohibited** in the Torah. Some Jews went along with these demands, some were killed for disobeying, and others **fled** the cities altogether.

In 166 B.C.E. soldiers arrived in the village of Modi'in, and a soldier entered the temple and began to sacrifice a pig on the altar. Furious at this action, Matityahu the **Kohen** ("priest") tore down the altar and attacked and killed the soldier along with a fellow Jew who had been supporting the soldier. This act officially started the rebellion and Matityahu and his five sons fled into the hills and began their resistance.

When Matityahu died he named his son Judah as the new leader of this group of **guerrilla fighters**. Judah became known as Judah Maccabee, and eventually the whole group of fighters became known as The Maccabees. Some people believe that the name Maccabee comes from the Hebrew word *makav* meaning hammer, saying that Judah was a hammer of God. Others think it references his former job as a **blacksmith**.

Questions:

1. What comes to your mind first when you think about Hanukkah?
2. Have you ever participated in a Hanukkah celebration? What do you remember the most about it?
3. It is traditional on Hanukkah to eat cheese and foods fried in oil. Do you eat cheese or fried foods? If so, what are your favorite kinds?
4. What is something important to you that you want to dedicate or rededicate yourself to?
5. There are religious and **secular** rituals all around the world that involve lighting candles. Why do you think this is? Do you have any traditions that involve lighting candles that are important to you? Can you remember a time when you lit candles, either by yourself or with a group of people, and what it felt like?

After two years of fighting both the Hellenized Jews and Antiochus' soldiers, Judah and the Maccabees arrived in Jerusalem and took back the temple there. They began to clean the **synagogue**, removing all Greek statues and signs of rituals that had taken place there. Hanukkah means dedication, and on the 25th day of **Kislev** in the year 165 B.C.E. they rededicated the temple. However, when they went to light the menorah, a deeply important religious symbol found in every temple, they found that there was only enough oil to last one night and not enough time to find or make more holy oil without the flame going out. But, as the legend goes, the light burned for eight nights. A miracle! Today Hanukkah is also known as The Festival of Lights, The Feast of Dedication, or The Feast of the Maccabees. It is an opportunity for Jewish people to recommit to the things that matter and remember the great miracle that happened there so long ago.

Rabbi Thomas A. Louchheim, email message to author, June 15, 2020

Dreidel



Spinning tops have been found all over the world for thousands of years, used for fun and gambling with symbols printed on the sides that tell the rules, just like today's dice. During the rule of Antiochus IV in the time of the Greco-Syrian Empire when studying the Torah was forbidden, it was said that Jews would secretly gather in caves to study Torah but would bring coins and a top so that if soldiers came by it would look like they were just gambling.

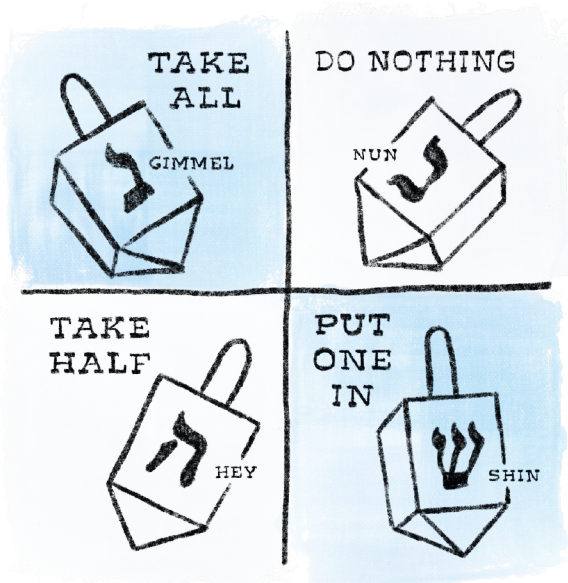
A few thousand years later in Ireland and England, a popular Christmastime game emerged called *totum* or *teetotum*, the name deriving from the Latin word *totum* which means "all".

All four sides of the top were represented by a letter which gave instructions about what to do. This game made its way across Europe to Germany where the words and letters became the German (**N**)ichts = nothing, (**G**)anz = all, (**H**)alb = half, and (**S**)tell ein = put in.

Yiddish speaking Jews living in Germany adopted this game calling it *Dreidel*, the Yiddish word for top, changed the German letters to the Hebrew letters *nun*, *gimmel*, *hay*, and *shin*, and came up with the sentence "**Nes gadol haya sham**" which means "A great miracle happened there." These are the letters that are on the dreidel in most of the world. In Israel dreidels are called *sivivon*, the letter *shin* is replaced with the letter *pey*, and the sentence is "**Nes gadol haya poh**" which means "A great miracle happened here".

Additional religious meaning has made its way into the game of dreidel by way of **gematria**. Gematria (pronounced Guh-MAH-tree-uh) is a form of **numerology** with a Greek origin where every Hebrew letter corresponds with a number. Jewish mystics use this system to find numerical value to letters and words in a search for deeper meaning. *Nun*, *gimmel*, *hay*, and *shin* add up to the number 358, the same number as *meshiach* (**messiah** or savior). 358 is also equal to *nahash* the Hebrew word for serpent or snake, with some scholars believing that spinning the dreidel is a way to call upon God to usher in a new era for Jews while banishing evil.

In Yiddish, *gelt* means money and there are many different Hanukkah money giving traditions from Jews around the world, as well as stories about how this came to be. The word Hannukah also shares a root with the Hebrew word for education, and many use Hannukah as a time to teach children about the Torah, using money as a way to sweeten the deal. There are also traditions of giving money to those with less so that they can buy Hanukkah candles, or giving money to children to give to their teachers. Nowadays when you hear the term *Hanukkah gelt* it is often not referring to actual coins or money, but the popular chocolate coins created in the last few centuries by **chocolatiers**.



Let's play!

1. Everyone starts out with 10-15 coins, raisins, buttons, or any other small object you'd like to play with.
2. Put one game piece into the center "pot".
3. Take turns spinning the dreidel and follow the instructions based on the letter you get.
4. Everyone puts one piece into the pot at the beginning of each round, when the pot is empty, or when there is only one game piece left in the pot.
5. You are out of the game when you have no more game pieces left to bet (unless someone lends you one.)

Questions:

1. Can you remember what each of the letters on the dreidel tells you to do? In the play some of the characters are playing dreidel and it will make more sense if you understand the rules!
2. Would you rather have a gift of money or a gift of chocolate?
3. What country and celebration is our modern dreidel modeled after?
4. Where did the great miracle happen, here or there?

Judaism and the Jewish Diaspora

What is Judaism?

Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are all religions that stem from the same people and place thousands of years ago in the Middle East, branching off to become separate religions at different times with Christianity being the youngest of the three.

The Hebrew Bible, also called The **Tanakh**, is made up of three sections: **Torah** (Teachings), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). The word *Tanakh* is an **acronym** of these three sections, TaNaCh. There are 24 total books or chapters in the Tanakh, written down by many different authors over a period of about 850 years.

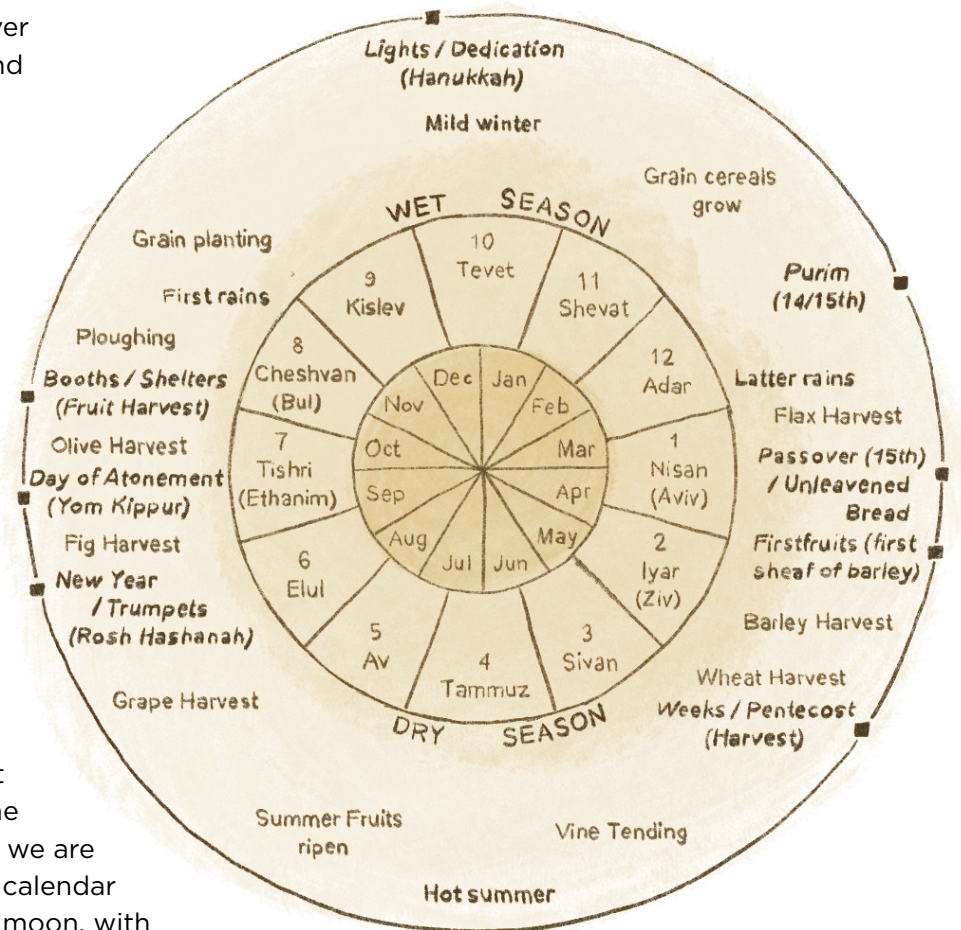
Within the Torah are what are called the five books of **Moses**: Bresheit (Genesis), Shemot (Exodus), Vayicra (Leviticus), Bamidbar (Numbers), and Devarim (Deuteronomy). These stories are believed to have been told by God to Moses who wrote them down. These five books are written on **parchment** and rolled up into a large **scroll**, also called The Torah, which is considered the most important ceremonial object in Judaism and is treated with great care and respect. Since the word Torah means "teachings" sometimes people use the word Torah to refer to all 24 books of the Tanakh and, in general, to refer to a large body of Jewish wisdom.

One of the most important prayers in Judaism, says “Hear us oh Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.” Jews believe that God is singular, and that there is no one or nothing that is like God, a being with many names. Jews believe in praying to God directly, in studying and wrestling with the meaning of the Torah, and in striving to live an honorable and **ethical** life. In Judaism there is little emphasis put on the afterlife; what is considered important is what we do in the here and now, and the work we do to seek justice and bring about **Tikkun Olam**, the “repair of the world”.

The Jewish Calendar

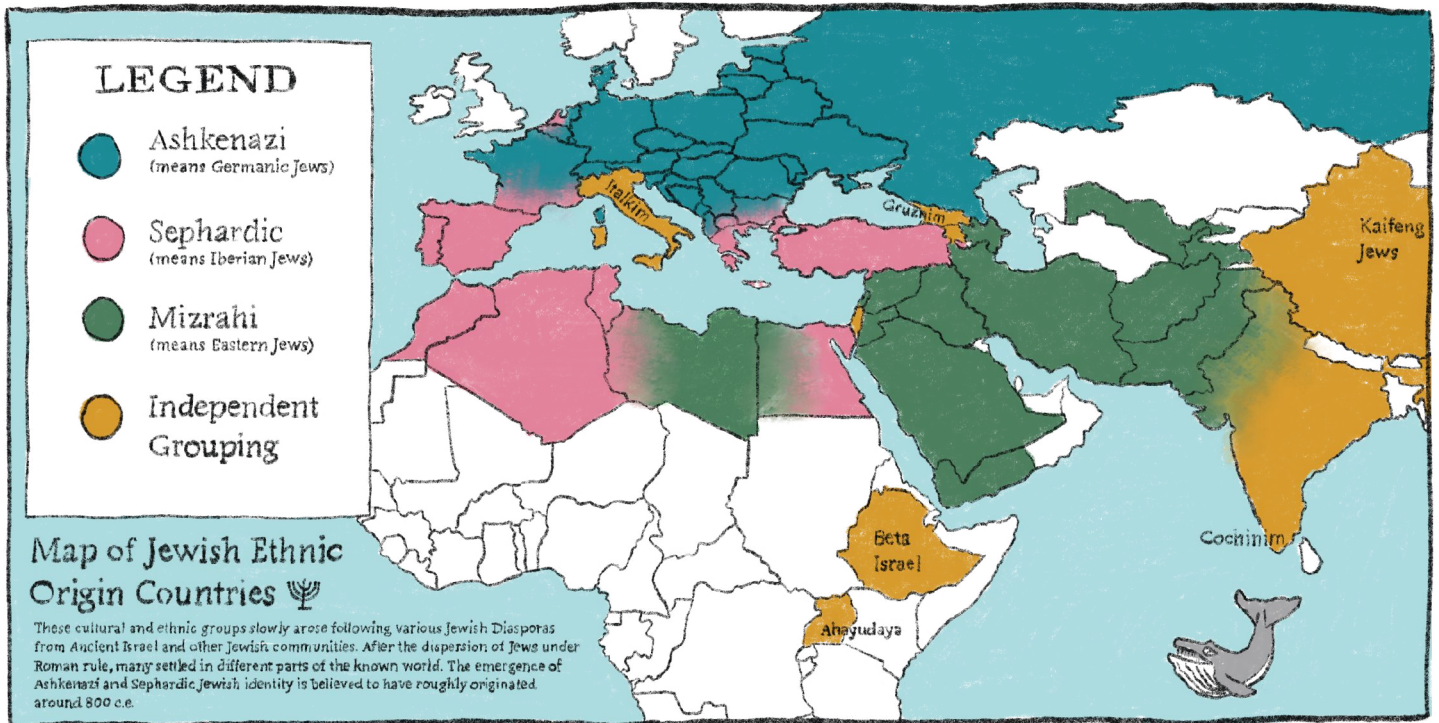
Different countries and religions all over the world have their own calendars and ways of measuring and marking time. The calendar that is most commonly used today is called the **Gregorian Calendar** which is centered around the life of Jesus Christ. Dates are marked B.C., meaning Before Christ and A.D., Latin for “Anno Domini nostri Jesu Christi”, which translates to “in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ”. In more recent times the term **B.C.E.**, Before the Common Era, or C.E., Common Era, has been adopted to be more religiously neutral and inclusive of other religions. According to the Gregorian calendar we are now in the year 2020.

The Jewish calendar begins with what Jews consider to be the creation of the world, and according to that calendar we are currently in the year 5781. The Jewish calendar is lunar, based off of the cycles of the moon, with some Jewish holidays being based in agricultural cycles and practices in the Middle East where ancient Jews lived. Take a look at the names of the months and holidays in the Jewish calendar shown in the graph to the right.



The Jewish Diaspora

Jews have spent much of their nearly 4,000-year-old history in the **diaspora**, which means away from their traditional homeland, bringing with them their study of Torah, holidays, and rituals, adapting them as needed based on the places they find themselves. Judaism is not just a religion or something that you are only considered a part of based on your beliefs and religious practices. Since Judaism is passed down to children born of Jewish parents, Judaism can be thought of as a people and a culture. It is possible to convert to Judaism, but it is not a religion that actively seeks converts.



There are different names for groups of Jews based on where in the world they live, their **lineage** and migration path, the languages they speak, and the way they read Hebrew, the way they interpret the teachings of the Torah, and their distinct cultural practices. Because of this, there is no one way someone who is Jewish looks, or just one way of practicing or experiencing Judaism. *Sephardic* comes from the word for Spain in Hebrew, and describes Jews who were expelled from Spain and the **Iberian Peninsula** in 1492, migrating both to Northern Africa, inland Europe, and the United States amongst other places. *Mizrahi* is the Hebrew word for “eastern” and refers to the large number of different types of Jews with Middle Eastern ties. A Jewish community with ties to modern day Ethiopia is known as *Beta Israel*, which means house of Israel. How a person identifies or is identified by others is both personal and political, and these are only some of the different kinds of Jews in the world. Many of these terms and categories have changed their meanings since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.



Ashkenazi Jews and Yiddish

Ashkenazi comes from the Hebrew word for Germany and refers to Jews who lived in Western Germany and Northern France along the Rhine river during the **Middle Ages**. These Jews spoke Yiddish, a largely German language mixed with **Slavic** languages and the Hebrew and **Aramaic** of the Torah that Jews brought with them. After the **Crusades** Ashkenazi Jews migrated to Poland, Lithuania, Russia, and other countries in Eastern Europe, taking Yiddish with them.

Yiddish is written using Hebrew letters, the same letters that the Torah is written in. Eastern European Jews came to the United States in large numbers in late 19th and early 20th century fleeing the anti-Jewish violence present in the Russian Empire. Although Sephardic Jews had been in the United States for hundreds of years before this, today Ashkenazi Jews are the large majority of Jews who live in the United States. Before the Holocaust there were as many as 16 million Jewish Yiddish speakers worldwide as it was the shared language of Ashkenazi Jews, while today the number is closer to 150,000. It is still spoken in some **Hassidic** Jewish communities and cultural institutes dedicated to teaching Yiddish language and culture. Yiddish language and culture are lively, expressive, and filled with music and humor. Many Yiddish words have found their way into everyday speech in the United States.

Have your teacher ask you these words and see if you can define them. You probably know more than you think! Can you use them in a sentence?

Kvetch - literally to press or squeeze, to complain (“She never stops kvetching!”)

Mensch - A good, honorable person (“He helped me in the kitchen all day, what a mensch!”)

Glitch - To slip, skate, or nosedive. Where the modern technology term comes from!

Nosh - To eat or nibble. (“Stop noshing! You won’t be hungry for dinner!”)

Oy vey - An expression of grief or exasperation (“Oy vey! Will the troubles never stop?”)

Schlep - To drag or carry something or yourself (“We schlepped all over and now I’m exhausted!”)

Schmooze - Chat or make small talk (“They’ve been schmoozing for hours”)

Klutz - A block of wood, used to describe a dense or clumsy person. (“What a klutz”)

Schmutz- A little dirt or grime (“Go to the bathroom and wash yourself off, you’ve got schmutz all over your face!”)

Tuches - Butt or behind, where the word “tush” or “tushy” came from.

Yiddish Curses

Zolst vaksen vi a tsiba’le, mit kop in d’rerd!

You should grow like an onion, with your head in the ground!

Zolst farlirn alle tseyner achuts eynem, un der zol dir vey ton!

All your teeth should fall out except one, and that one should hurt!

A zissen toyt zolstu hob’n - a trak mit tsucker zol dich ibberforen!

May you have a sweet death; a truck filled with sugar should run you over.

Zalts im in di oygen, feffer im in di noz.

Throw salt in his eyes, pepper in his nose.

Latkes!

One Hanukkah tradition is to eat foods fried in oil to remember the miracle of the oil in the temple lasting eight nights. *Sufganiyah* or *Sufganiot* are donuts filled with jelly or custard that are popular in Israel. It is also customary to eat dairy on Hanukkah to celebrate and remember the High **Priestess** Yehudit (Judith).

In the ancient book of Yehudit we learn of the story of a Greco-Syrian General named Holofernes who had taken control of the food and water in the town of Bethulia. The Jews of the town were on the brink of death when Yehudit, a beautiful widow, went into the enemy territory and asked to speak to Holofernes. Holofernes was taken by her charm and beauty and invited her to dine with him. She didn't eat his food as it was not **kosher**, but had brought her own wine and cheese that she offered to Holofernes. The salty cheese made him thirsty and she continued to feed him and give him wine until he passed out. It was then that she took his sword and cut off his head, bringing it with her back to the village and successfully driving out the army.

For many, many years fried cheese pancakes have been the traditional Hanukkah food to honor Yehudit's bravery, the victory of the Maccabees, and the miracle of the oil. Potato pancakes are a more recent invention, as potatoes were introduced to many European countries and grew to be a **staple** food there, including amongst Jewish communities. Potatoes were cheap, **abundant**, and stored easily. Additionally, the oil that was cheapest and most available in Eastern European Ashkenazi communities was *shmaltz* (Yiddish for animal fat) and because the Torah forbids cooking meat and dairy together an alternative to the cheese pancakes had to be found.

Latkes (the Yiddish word for pancake) are made from potatoes, egg, flour and onion and today we often eat them topped with applesauce, sour cream, or honey. When we eat these delicious pancakes we can admire the way that traditional foods bend, flex, and change based on where we are, what is available, and the needs of the time.

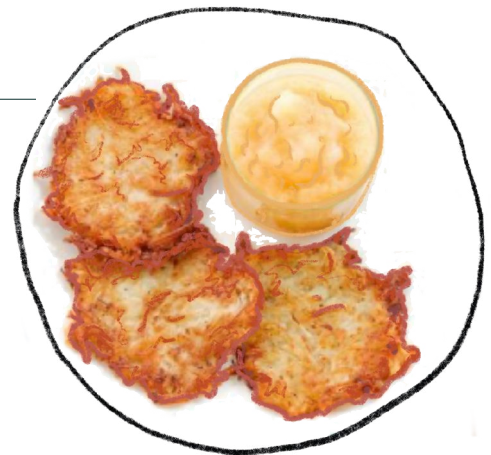
Traditional Latke Recipe

Ingredients

- 1 pound potatoes, grated (455 grams)
- 1 medium onion, chopped or grated
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup all-purpose flour or matzo meal (65 grams)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- oil

Instructions

1. Place the grated potatoes in a colander. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit for half an hour.
2. Strain the liquid that has accumulated. Cheese cloth works well for this.
3. Move the potatoes in a mixing bowl. Add onions, eggs, flour or matzo meal, and salt. Mix until everything is well incorporated.
4. Add 1/4 inch or ½ centimeter of oil and heat in a frying pan.
5. Add the potato mixture to the frying pan at the same size you want your latkes and ½ inch or 1 centimeter high. It should be about half the height of the latkes.
6. Fry until crispy. Flip and repeat. If you need to add more oil, let it heat before making more latkes.
7. Serve with sour cream, cottage cheese, applesauce, honey, or sugar.



Pickles!

What do you do when you find yourself in a pickle? You dill with it.

In ancient times you could find pickled food in India, Egypt and all over the Middle East! Cucumbers (which were then likely turned into pickles) are even mentioned in the Torah. After the Jews left Egypt in 1313 **B.C.E.**, they thought back on the food that they left behind:

“We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic” -Book of Numbers 11:5

Smoking, salting, and pickling are all forms of storing, transporting, and preserving food. For the Jews living in Eastern Europe pickling vegetables was an important element to surviving the long winters as pickling kills most harmful bacteria while at the same time creating good bacteria thanks to fermentation. For many Eastern European Jews, the vinegar used for pickling was too expensive to use, and so they turned to a **brine** made from water and kosher salt, adding garlic and dill and giving birth to the “Kosher Dill”.



Kosher Dills

Ingredients

- 1/3 cup kosher salt
- 2 lbs. pickling cucumbers, washed and halved or quartered lengthwise
- 5 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 large bunch of fresh dill, washed thoroughly

Instructions

1. Combine the salt and 1 cup boiling water in a large bowl. Stir to dissolve the salt. Add a handful of ice cubes to cool the mixture, then all the remaining ingredients.
2. Add cold water to cover. Use a plate slightly smaller than the diameter of the bowl and a small weight to keep the cucumbers immersed. Set aside at room temperature.
3. Begin sampling the cucumbers after 4 hours if your quartered them. It will probably take 12-24 hours or even 48 hours for them to taste pickled enough to suit your taste.
4. When they are ready, refrigerate them, still in the brine. The pickles will continue to ferment as they sit, more quickly at room temperature and more slowly in the refrigerator. They will keep well for up to a week.

Body Mapping

In the play, Hershel listens to his brain, heart, stomach and feet who all have different message for him. He also asks the audience for help.



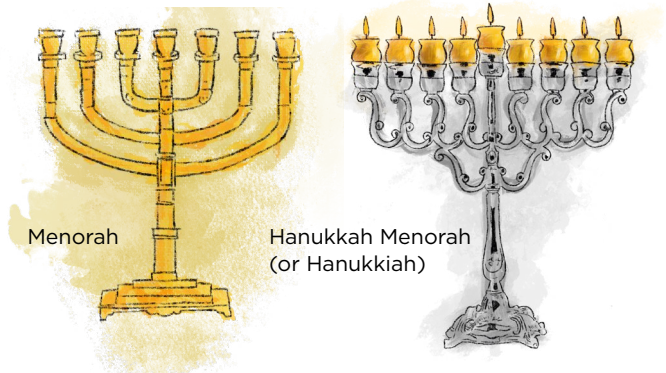
Exercise:

Draw a picture of yourself or use the example below and write the “messages” you hear from your body and where they come from. Map them onto the body.

Hershel also calls on the people around him to help him solve problems. Who or what do you call on outside of yourself that helps you when you’re feeling scared or stuck? Draw them on the paper around your body.

Becoming the Light

A menorah (“lamp” in Hebrew) is a traditional, seven branched **candelabra** made from gold that was ceremoniously lit in the ancient Jewish temples. A Hanukkah menorah, sometimes called by the modern Hebrew name *Hanukkiah*, is different because it has nine branches instead of seven. One of the branches is slightly higher, or stands apart from the other eight, and is called the *shamash* (“servant” or “helper”). The Shamash is used to light the other candles, one candle for each night of Hanukkah.



Exercise:

1. Find a comfortable position standing. Now begin to rub your hands together, faster and faster until you can feel the heat in your hands, arms, and whole body.
2. Stop rubbing your hands and then slowly move your hands towards each other and away from each other without touching them together, as if you're clapping in slow motion. Can you feel the heat and energy between your hands?
3. Now imagine that you're holding one ball of light in your hands. Is it big or small? Light or heavy? Does it have a color? Now move the ball between your hands or up and down. Try throwing it up in the air and then catching it. Now make it small again because you're about to swallow it!
4. Swallow the ball of light and feel it traveling all around your body, notice how your body responds as it moves through you. Imagine that the ball of light stops somewhere in your body. Imagine it shining out through that part of your body like a flashlight that someone else can see.
5. Now shake the light loose and let it travel to a different place in your body until it stops, shining bright like a flashlight. Try this a few times.
6. Now shake the light loose but imagine the ball of light explodes and fills your whole body, shining out of your mouth, eyes, fingers, toes, shining out of every part of your body and filling the room. Walk around slowly. How does this feel?

Questions:

1. What did you notice in that exercise? How did it feel?
2. All of us have a unique light or gift to bring to the world. What do you think is the light or gift inside of you?
3. What makes you feel whole, purposeful, or joyful?
4. Sometimes we take our gifts for granted or assume it's not valuable because it comes so easily to us. We don't realize it might not be so easy for someone else. Is there something that comes easily to you that you enjoy doing?
5. How can we bring our gifts to our friends, family, and our community?
6. What do our communities need to feel good and healthy for everyone? What factors make a community good? What gets in the way of this happening?
7. What do the Goblins represent? Why do you think they act the way they do? Where do you see examples of this in our world?

The Nigun

The 18th century in Eastern Europe saw the birth of **Hasidic** Judaism, a form of mystical Judaism whose followers moved away from the traditional Torah study as they looked to connect directly with God in new, dynamic, and joyful ways. *Nigun* (plural *Nigunim*) means song, melody, or tune in Hebrew. The founder of Hasidic Judaism was Israel ben Eliezer, otherwise known as the Ba'al Shem Tov (meaning "Master of the Good Name"). The Ba'al Shem Tov was said to walk into the woods seeking to connect with God, singing nigunim as a way to raise his consciousness and have his soul soar free without the limitations of words.

There are various types of nigunim, ranging from slow, personalized prayer to God to lively celebratory nigunim sung in large, dancing groups. Nigunim are often long and repetitive in order to give the people singing them the time that it takes to truly connect to themselves, one another, and to God. Often, they have repetitive sounds, such as "yai dai dai" or "bam bam bam". Some nigunim involve people all singing the melody together, and other times you hear harmonies. It was often common for *Hasidim* (the plural of Hasidic Jews) to adapt popular songs in the style of the nigun. You can hear a modern Star Wars version of that here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lirCAN0OXNs>

Some nigunim are sung around a table as in this example from The Nigun Ladies (singing begins at the 15:54 time stamp):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vle8bGMOLAc&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1fpPIR9dzSC51NK2q0KOqC8c7yVigtgt8IDapz7dinyXtm03ctCFhTMIU>

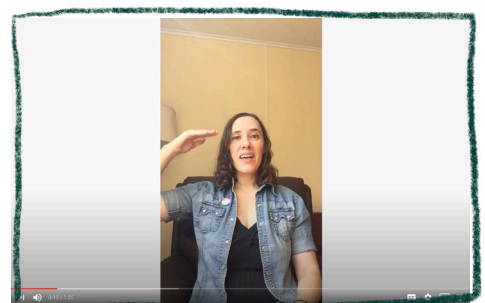
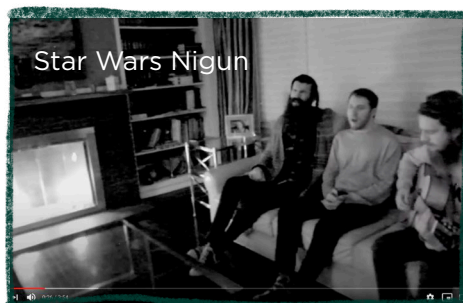
Sing a Nigun

To learn one of the nigunim sung in *Hershel and the Hannukah Goblins* visit the links below. So relax, listen, join in when you're ready, and find your way into the song in a way that makes sense or feels meaningful to you.

The Light Inside Nigun-Slow
<https://youtu.be/9DkE3SWObYk>

The Light Inside Nigun-Normal Speed
<https://youtu.be/zGg7Hrz8r90>

The Light Inside Nigun-Possibilities
<https://youtu.be/GkRLkEIxPY4>



Reflections with playwright Shari Aronson



Shari Aronson

How do you take a beloved children’s book from the page to the stage? First, dive into the pages with your whole heart.

One of the best ways to dive into a book is aloud, with someone fun, maybe even more than one someone (and all of you making sound effects and helping figure out how each character would sound). In between reading the words on the page, you stop and point to a tiny detail that you notice in the illustrations and find out, did they see it, too? Then, you start asking each other questions, sharing what you all see and hear and even smell in your imaginations. If no one fun is around, you can do it all by yourself.

Example: “What makes Hershel brave enough to go to that scary synagogue and stay there for all those nights when everyone in the village is too afraid?”

“The Goblins come each night. But what happens for Hershel in the synagogue between each night?”

“What does Hershel say to himself when he thinks no one is around?”

When I wrote the script for the play *Hershel & the Hanukkah Goblins*, I asked myself all these and more questions. The play is how my imagination answers. Then, this gets mixed in with the how imaginations of the good people of this Scoundrel & Scamp respond to the questions. And, finally, we mix in how you in the audience see, hear, smell, taste and feel the questions and answers while you are watching it.

Each time the play travels to a different theater and a different audience, the questions and answers look and sound a little different. Just like every time you open Eric Kimmel’s book, the world and story of Hershel swirls into being the way you see and hear and smell it right then.

The story of Hershel of Ostropol started with a real man who lived a long time ago (1757-1811, to be exact). He was known to not have much in the way of wealth nor possessions but got himself in and out of trouble using his wits. People started telling each other the stories of his adventures. Were they all true?

Or did each teller of a story, each listener mix in some of their imagination?

Stretching through all those years and all those tellings of Hershel’s stories, all the way through Eric Kimmel’s books and this play to you is what I imagine to be one of Hershel’s favorite questions, even when facing problems as big and fierce as goblins:

Would it be so bad to have a little fun?

Shari Aronson

www.zpuppets.org

Behold! The power of playfulness.

“

One of the best ways to dive into a book is aloud, with someone fun (and all of you making sound effects and helping figure out how each character would sound).

”

Interview with author Eric Kimmel



Eric Kimmel, image credit: Amazon.com

“Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins” written by Eric Kimmel and illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman was first published in 1989 and was awarded the prestigious Caldecott Honor in 1990. It has since become a beloved Hanukkah classic as children and adults alike delight in the hauntingly beautiful illustrations and the way Hershel uses his light to outwit the Goblins.

In the afterward of the book Kimmel says “I started with a Ukrainian story, *Ivanko, the Bear’s Son*. Ivanko fools a goblin who lives in a lake. Why not multiply that goblin eight times and use a Jewish folk character, Hershel of Ostropol, as the hero?”

In 2017 Alex Gordon from Pittsburgh City Paper sat down with Eric Kimmel to talk about the inspiration for the book and its lasting impact. Excerpts from the interview are included below:

What type of stories did you like as a child?

I’m a kid of the ‘50s. And I had an interesting upbringing because I loved the folk and fairy tales; an uncle of mine gave me a copy of Grimms’ Fairy Tales and I read it over and over again until the book fell to pieces. My grandma lived with us, she was an old-country grandma; she came to the States when she was in her 30s and never really liked the U.S. She was always homesick for her old hometown in Eastern Europe. She was a good storyteller, so she told lots of traditional tales from Europe, and most of them were scary, full of devils and demons and spirits and things like that. The moral was usually “listen to Grandma or bad things will happen to you.”

That was in the era of the great classic horror movie. The Creature From the Black Lagoon and Godzilla. I just loved those, they scared the pants outta me! But I came back for more and more and more. I’d look at the ads in the paper, and my hair would stand up on edge. So I love creepy stuff, I love to be scared. And I must say, the scary things back then were nothing like what they are today. You never saw any blood, there was never gore, chainsaws, organs, limbs scattered all over the place. It was all in your imagination, which made it all the more terrifying. So I always liked creepy stuff, and I thought that creepy stuff made for an interesting story.

Years I spent as a storyteller in the parks when I was working as a graduate student at Illinois, you know, I learned [that] you gotta keep the kids interested. And what the kids want is “tell me a story,” so tell them a story, make it good. Kids, once they get to a certain age, absolutely love scary stories, dark, creepy tales. So that’s the kind of book I always loved and the kind of book I liked to write. What I say to every beginning writer is “write what you love, write the kind of story you’d want to read as a kid.” I’m still doing that.

Do you have a favorite illustration in the book?

I have a lot of favorite pictures there, but the one I have that I actually bought from [illustrator] Trina [Schart Hyman], is the one with the pickle jar! The big fat green goblin’s trying to get his hand out of the pickle jar, and Hershel is laughing at him. Saying, “Can I tell you how to free yourself? Let go of the pickles! Your greed is the only spell holding you prisoner.” I loved that picture so much I bought it from Trina. I should have bought some more. But we have that framed over our mantle. That would be my favorite. But I love all of it.

I think my favorite image in the book is the first time you see the King of the Goblins in the doorway.

Oh yeah!

I remember that really clearly. The first few goblins are kind of fun, but they do get more intense each night, and I just remember the sight of that goblin, it's titillating, it's scary.

Oh yeah, well, that's part of the storytelling craft. You build towards the climax, and the climax is the confrontation between Hershel and the King of the Goblins. And Hershel has nothing — he is not a superhero, he has no special powers, he's on his own. He says, "Master of the universe, stand by me now!" Because without some supernatural power behind him, he's gonna be squashed flat. It's sort of like giving yourself up, "I've done all I can, God, now it's in your hands." You build to that, because the previous goblins are stupid and Hershel can outwit them.

The King of the Goblins is no fool. And what is Hershel gonna do when he shows up? That's why nothing happens on the seventh night. "You're not supposed to come until tomorrow." "Don't worry, Hershel, I can see you and speak to you, I'm on my way, my friend. Tomorrow night I will come for you."

It's building that tension ... the King of the Goblins is a bully, a sadist. "I'm gonna let you stew in your own fear for a whole day until I finish you off." And that's also his undoing! Because "I want to see you sweat, I want to see you suffer, I want to see you crawl on the ground and beg." He's a bully! His real satisfaction comes from pushing people around, and the way you deal with bullies is you don't back down, you don't show any fear. Hershel laughs at him. "I don't believe you are who you are, Prove it to me!" And that's the King's undoing, that's his weak spot. Once he lights the candles, he's finished. So that was my thinking, when I was creating the story.

It's pretty classic, it fits a pattern that you find in any number of folk tales, and the reason it's lasted through the centuries is because it works. That's how you tell a story.

And that's one problem that you find with so much of what's offered in films today, and a lot of books. They're very predictable, they follow a formula, and you don't feel that tension. It's like, "OK, how are they gonna solve this problem? But I know that the superheroes are gonna come back for another adventure." With Hershel, you don't know that. There's never been a sequel and there's never gonna be one.

(Reprinted with permission from Alex Gordon's family and colleagues at Pittsburgh City Paper. Thank you all. May his memory be for a blessing.)

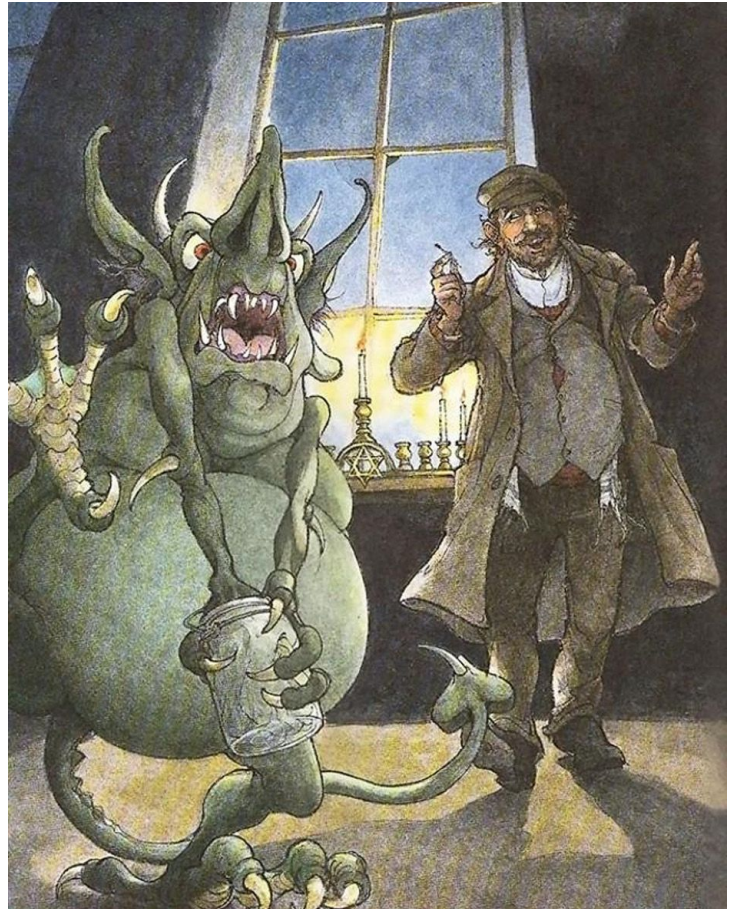


Illustration by Trina Schart Hyman from *Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins*



Glossary

Abundant-existing in large quantities, plentiful

Acronym- a shortening or abbreviation using the first letter from a group of words to form a new word

Aramaic-A language originating in ancient Syria

B.C.E.- B.C. means “Before Christ” and B.C.E.

means “Before the Common Era” a different way of expressing B.C., also based on the Gregorian Calendar.

Blacksmith-Someone who makes objects out of metal

Brine-Highly concentrated salt water

Chocolatier-A maker or seller of chocolate

Consecration-The act of making or declaring something sacred

Crusades-A series of religious wars initiated by the Latin Church in the Middle Ages that lasted from 1095-1492

Diaspora-The dispersion of a group of people from their original homeland

Dreidel-The Yiddish word for a four-sided spinning top.

Ethical-Morally good or correct

Flee (past-tense Fled)- To run away from danger

Gematria-A way of interpreting letters and words through the use of numbers to find deeper meaning

Gregorian Calendar-The calendar introduced in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII, as a modification of the Julian calendar

Guerilla Fighter-Small groups of informal fighters who rely on surprise attacks

Hassidism- A form of mystical Judaism that developed in 18th century Poland in reaction to the rigid and academicism of the rabbinical Judaism at the time

Hellenistic-The culture of the country of Greece, especially ancient Greece

Iberian Peninsula-A peninsula in Southwestern Europe where Spain and Portugal are located

Inauguration-A ceremony to mark the beginning of something

Kosher-Meat that is killed, or food that is prepared, sold, cooked, or eaten according to Jewish law.

Kislev- The ninth month of the Jewish calendar. The twelve months are Tishrei, Cheshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shvat, Adar, Nissan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, and Elul.

Lineage-Tracing the line back through ancestors

Menorah-A Jewish ceremonial candle holder made of gold with seven branches going back to ancient times

Messiah-A savior described in the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh

Middle Ages- A period of European history from 1100 to 1453

Moses-An important leader and prophet in Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Baha'i religion amongst others

Numerology-A divine or mystical relationship with numbers

Parchment-A stiff, flat, and thin piece of animal skin used to write on in ancient times

Priestess-A female priest or religious leader

Prohibited-not allowed, forbidden

Scroll-A roll of paper often made from parchment

Secular-Ideas, people, or activities that are not based in religion or spirituality

Slavic-The Indo-European language family that includes Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Sorbian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian, and Slovene

Staple-An important element of something, especially related to diet

Synagogue-The same as a temple, a Jewish place of worship

Tanakh-Another name for the Hebrew bible and its 24 chapters, an acronym based on the three sections: Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim

Tikkun Olam-A phrase meaning “the repair of the world”, how we can make the world whole through our actions


Toga-A garment of ancient Rome worn draped over the body

Torah -A word that means “teachings”, the scroll that contains the five books of Moses, revealed to him by God. Also can refer to the study of the other 19 books of the Hebrew bible, or the Tanakh.

Zeus-The God of the sky, thunder, and lightning in the ancient Greek religion

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