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## 6. A HANUKKAH EVENING AT MY PARENTS' HOUSE

All year round my father, a rabbi in Warsaw, did not allow his children to play any games. He would say, "Why lose your time on such nonsense? Better to recite the Psalms instead." Often when I got two pennies from my father and I told him I wanted to buy chocolate, ice cream, or colored pencils he would say, "You would do a lot better to find a poor man and give your pennies to him, because charity is a great deed."

But on Hanukkah, after Father lit the Hanukkah candles, he allowed us to play dreidel for half an hour. I remember one such night especially.

It was the sixth night and in our hanukkah menorah six wicks were burning. Outside, a heavy snow had fallen. My brother Joshua, who was eleven years older than I, already a grownup, was saying to my sister, Hindel, who had dark hair and blue eyes, and was even older than Joshua and already engaged to be married, "Do you see the snow? Each flake is a hexagon; it has six sides like a star of David with fancy little designs and decorations - each one a perfect jewel and slightly different from the others."

When Father heard what Joshua had said about the snow, he promptly said, "It's all the work of G-d Almighty, who bestows beauty on everything He creates."

"Why must each flake of snow be so beautiful, since people step on it or it turns to water?" Hindel asked.

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<sup>1</sup> Elena Flerova, *Family Time*

"Everything comes easily to nature," Joshua answered. "The crystals arrange themselves in certain patterns. Look at the frost trees that are forming on the window panes - every winter they are the same. They actually look like fig trees and date trees."

"Such trees don't grow here in Poland but in the Holy Land," Father added. "When the Messiah comes, all G-d-fearing people will return to the land of Israel. There will be the resurrection of the dead. The Holy Temple will be rebuilt. The world will be as full of wisdom as the sea is of water."

The door opened and Mother came in from the kitchen where she was frying the Hanukkah latkes. "Children, who is winning the dreidel game?"

"Little Moishe!" Hindel said. "He's cleaned us all out, the darling." Mother nodded, smiled, and returned to the kitchen, and we continued our game.

The tin dreidel, which I had bought before Hanukkah, had four Hebrew letters engraved on its sides: *nun*, *gimel*, *hei*, and *shin*. According to Father, these letters were the initials of the words: *Nes Gadol Hayah Sham*; which means, "A great miracle happened there." This alluded to the war between the Maccabees and the Greeks in 170 B.C. and the victory of the Maccabees. It is for this victory and the purification of the Temple that Hanukkah is celebrated. Moishe and I took the game seriously, but Joshua and Hindel played only to keep us company. They always let us, the younger ones, win.

Suddenly Joshua asked a question. "Why did G-d work miracles in ancient times and why doesn't He work miracles in our times?"

Father pulled at his red beard. His eyes expressed indignation. "What are you saying, my son? G-d works miracles in all generations even though we are not always aware of them. Hanukkah especially is a feast of miracles. My grandmother Hindel - you, my daughter are named after her - told me the following story.

'In the village of Tishewitz there was a very clever child named Zaddok. He was five years old, but when he was three years old he could already read the Bible. He was very goodhearted to both people and animals. A mouse lived in their house and each night Zaddok would leave a piece of cheese and a small saucer of milk at the hole where it was hiding.

One day - it happened to be the sixth day of Hanukkah - little Zaddok overheard a neighbor tell of a sick tailor in the village who was so poor that he could not afford to buy wood to heat his hut. Little Zaddok knew that in the forest near the village there were a lot of fallen branches that could be picked up for nothing, and he decided to go and gather as much wood as he could carry and bring it to the sick man. He was so eager to help that he forgot to tell his Mother where he was going. It was already late in the day when he left their house and by the time he reached the forest it was dark.

The little child lost his way and would surely have died in the cold when suddenly he saw in the darkness six Hanukkah lights. For a while they lingered before his eyes, and then they started to move slowly. Little Zaddok went after them, and they brought him back to the village to the hut where the poor man lived with his family. When the lights reached the door they fell to the ground and turned into gold coins. The sick man was able to buy food and clothes for his family, fuel to heat the oven, as well as oil for the Hanukkah menorah. Soon he got well and was able to earn a living.”

“Daddy, what happened to Zaddok when he grew up?” I asked.

“He became a famous rabbi,” Father said. “He was known as the saintly Rabbi Zaddok.” It became so quiet that I could hear the spluttering of the Hanukkah candles and the chirping of the house cricket. Mother came in from the kitchen with two full plates of crispy latkes. They smelled delicious.

“Why is it so quiet? Is the game over?” she asked.

My brother Moishe, who had seemed to be half asleep when Father told his story, suddenly opened his big brown eyes wide and said, “Daddy, I want to give the money I won to a sick tailor.”

“You were preaching to them, huh?” Mother asked half reproachfully.

“I didn’t preach, I told them a story,” Father said. “I want them to know that the miracles G-d could do two thousand years ago He can also do in our time.”