

Emphasis on minor holiday

Hannukah competes with Christmas; commercialism intrudes on celebration

By Mona Koppelman Browne
Special to the Daily Nebraskan

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Five pairs of brown eyes anxiously watch five plastic tops spin furiously on a piano bench. Five small boys guess which side their top dreidel will land on. The 'winners' slap each other on the back.

giving is involved in both, but he emphasized that the similarity ends there.

"Christmas celebrates the birth of God, or part of God," he said. "Hannukah celebrates the first rebellion of religious freedom in recorded history."

Hannukah is widely regarded as one of the more minor holidays in the Jewish year. White said it has seen a "major" emergence come about in proportion to Christmas.

"There is really no philosophical reason to make it (Hannukah) a major holiday," White said. "Jews don't normally celebrate military victories. That's why we focus more on the miracle of the lights."

"My daughter knew she wanted a Barbie doll," he said. "Any old Barbie doll wouldn't do, it had to be a certain kind... obviously a result of Christmas advertisements."

Gerald Grant, Lincoln certified public accountant, said individuals in a society take on the aspects of the environment around them.



Rabbi Ian Jacknis of the Tifereth Temple, said there is one "sort of positive effect" of Christmas commercialism on Hannukah. "It does encourage the observance of the holiday," Jacknis said. "Jews have to make Hannukah seem really great. It's no one's fault; it's not all bad. It just puts more emphasis on a traditionally minor holiday."

"As a rabbi, I kind of wish the whole congregation would join in this much the rest of the year. Now, sometimes I feel that they come to the synagogue for Hannukah because their kids are feeling so bad about not having a Christmas," he said.



"Thank God we have a holiday in December," said Jacknis, with a twinkle in his eye. "But really, even if gifts aren't intrinsic to Hannukah, I don't mind. We have to make special times to give gifts, or we might overlook people we really appreciate."

Allen, an 18-year resident of Lincoln, said Christmas has become such a major social event that Jews have tried to construct a holiday to be "psychologically competitive to Christmas."

"Christmas is an overpoweringly beautiful time," he said. "The decorations are nice, the music is wonderful. I enjoy the lights... but it's not my holiday."

Harry Allen, UNL director of instructional research and planning, said he thinks there is more emphasis on Hannukah among families with children.

"I think parents want to make Jewish kids feel they have something," said Allen, a member of the Tifereth Israel Synagogue, 3219 Sheridan. "It started in the late 1950s and 1960s, with mass media commercialization."

Sheldon Schuster, UNL associate chemistry professor, said he thinks Hannukah tries to compete with Christmas.

Schuster, a member of the South Street Temple, said it was important to keep the perspective that Hannukah "really isn't that big of a deal."

"The commercial effect is too bad," he said, "but it's probably true that if Jews were in the majority, there would be an incredible commercialization of Hannukah."

"Dreidels are OK, but I can hardly wait 'till next Hannukah," one boy said. "I'm going to get a Snow Speeder."

Hannukah is a Jewish holiday which bears little resemblance to Christmas, but the difference between the two is often misunderstood. The issue is further clouded by what some Jews view as the encroachment of Christmas commercialism on Hannukah.

Hannukah commemorates the successful Jewish revolt against the Seleucid Greeks and their king, Antiochus, in 165 B.C.

"Antiochus tried to Hellenize the Jews," said Rabbi Kenneth White of the South Street Temple, 20th and South streets. "People who studied Torah or women who circumcised their children were put to death. The Temple in Jerusalem was defiled."

Jews kindle lights for eight days in December. Other traditions include dreidels, special songs, prayers, food — and presents given out each night.

"The idea of presents started out in a minor way," White said. "Then, as Christmas became a major holiday, presents started playing a bigger part."


White said people tend to equate Christmas and Hannukah because gift-

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