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## Blind Croton boy gets Braille dreidel

By [BRUCE GOLDING](#)

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CROTON-ON-HUDSON - As children sat on the floor spinning four-sided holiday tops throughout the Jewish [Temple Israel of Northern Westchester](#), one toy was still - a custom-made version with raised dots instead of Hebrew letters on its sides.

That's because 7-year-old Daniel Parker, blind since birth, was home yesterday with a sore throat and fever that kept him from his weekly religious class.

The special top was marked in Braille, a language code that lets blind people read with their fingers, and was the brainchild of Rachel Katz, Daniel's second-grade Hebrew school teacher.

Katz, a 59-year-old retired nursery-school teacher, said she began working on the top - called a "dreidel" in Hebrew - two months ago in preparation for Hanukkah, the eight-day Jewish holiday that began at sundown Friday. She took a small wooden top and customized it with clear plastic labels provided by the Jewish Braille Institute in New York City.

"Last week he played with it," she said. "I miss having him here terribly, because I wanted to watch his joy."

Daniel was born with Norrie disease, a rare genetic disorder that causes abnormal development of the retina - the part of the eye that detects light and color - and leads to blindness in male infants.

His mother, Victoria Parker of Croton, said Daniel was disappointed he couldn't make it to Hebrew school yesterday.

"But he really doesn't feel well, so he's sick enough he didn't want to go," she said by telephone.

Also at the synagogue yesterday, teens from the Hebrew school's Pray With Your Feet class held a Hanukkah carnival featuring food, games and gifts to raise money for the Noontime Meal Program in Peekskill. The free lunch program for the poor was set to run out of money in October, but donations from various houses of worship have kept it afloat. Organizers said they hoped yesterday's event would raise \$3,000, enough for one month's operation.

"We heard that the soup kitchen was closing and we wanted to help save it," said Sarah Appelbaum, 14, of Yorktown.

### Hanukkah celebration

The dreidel (pronounced DRAY-dul) is a four-sided top used to play a children's gambling game associated with the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, the eight-day Festival of Lights. Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 165 B.C. after the successful revolt led by Judah Maccabee against the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Greek king of Syria and overlord of Palestine. Each side of the dreidel is marked with a Hebrew letter that begins one of four words meaning "a great miracle happened there," in reference to a legend about how one day's worth of oil for the Temple's candelabrum lasted eight days. (In Israel, one letter is changed and the words mean "a great miracle happened here.")

Wagers are often made using coin-shaped, foil-covered holiday chocolates called "gelt." The players ante up and take turns spinning the top. Wins and losses are decided by which letter comes up:

"Nun" - nothing is won or lost.  
 "Gimmel" - the player wins the entire pot.  
 "Hey" - the player wins half the pot.  
 "Shin" - the player adds to the pot.

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The food program is run by the Peekskill Area Pastors Association, whose president, the Rev. Douglas Leonard of the Reformed Church of Cortlandtown, attended the festivities.

"I think it's amazing that this came from the kids," he said. "I think we underestimate what kids can do and what they're capable of."

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