

Dreidel

Children often play **Dreidel** during Hanukah.

נֶס גָּדוֹל הָיָה שָׁם (פה)

A Great Miracle Happened There (Here)

ן - Nun - Nothing

ג - Gimmel - Get the whole pot

ה - Heh - Get half the pot

ש (פ) - Shin (Peh) - Put in one



Q. What is the source of the dreidel?

From Lisa Katz, <http://judaism.about.com/od/chanukah/f/dreidel.htm>

A. A dreidel (also spelled dreidl or draydel) is a four sided spinning top with a different Hebrew letter on each side. The game of dreidel is traditionally played during the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

The Ancient Connection

Some people maintain that the dreidel game goes back to the time of the Greek-Syrians, and thus is integrally connected to the Hanukkah holiday. Since the Greek-Syrians prohibited the Jews from studying Torah, the Jews needed a way to hide their Torah learning. They used the dreidel as a decoy. When they saw the Greek-Syrians coming, the Jews would hide their books, take out their dreidels, and trick the Syrians into thinking they were just playing a game.

The European Connection

While the above story is a wonderful way to link the holiday's history to its modern celebration, the true source of the game is probably European.

In Europe, a gambling game with a spinning top has been played for centuries by various people in various languages. In England and Ireland, the game of totum or teetotum, first mentioned in approximately 1500, was especially popular at Christmastime. The Germans also liked to play a gambling game with a spinning top.

It is believed that the Jewish game of dreidel is a Judaicized version of the German gambling game. The Yiddish word *dreidel* derived from the German word *drehen*, which means "to spin."

The letters on the faces of the gambling toy, which were mnemonic for the rules of the game, varied in each nation. The letters on the English spinning top were: T for Take, H for Half, P for Put, N for None. In the German game, the letters were: N for Nichts (nothing), G for Ganz (all), H for Halb (half), S for Stell (put). The Hebrew letters on the dreidel seem to have come directly from the German gambling toy: Nun for Nichts (nothing), Gimel for Ganz (all), Hay for Halb (half), Shin for Stell (put).

In an effort to link the game to the celebration of Hanukkah, the Hebrew letters nun, gimel, hay and shin were said to stand for the phrase *Nes Gadol Haya Sham*, which means "a great miracle happened there."

Official Dreidel Rules

Approved by the Committee of Referees
assembled in Kislev 5773



Before beginning, each player starts with a set number of coins, and then each player puts one in the pot.

Before spinning the dreidel each player deposits one coin into a "kupah" or kitty.

One of the players spins the dreidel.

The dreidel stops and lands with one of the symbols facing up and the appropriate action is taken:

נ Nun - nischt - "nothing" - the next player spins

ג Gimel - gantz - "all" - the player takes the entire pot

ה Hey - halb - "half" - the player takes half of the pot, rounding up if there is an odd number

ש Shin - shtel - "put in" - the player puts one or two in the pot

Each player is given a turn to spin the dreidel.

A player wins the game when the other player no longer has any coins left **after a spin** of the dreidel.

If a player has no more coins **before the spin of a dreidel and has already put a coin in the kupah**, the game is not over.

In Song:

The Maccabeats, "I Light It - NCSY Chanukah Musical" Remix (Music by Six13) Hanukkah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvY337zKttA&list=PL2788ACD07F9B1C71&index=4>