

How to Play Dreidel (Sevivon)



What Is a Dreidel?

The classic *dreidel* is a four-sided spinning top made of wood, plastic, or the proverbial clay. On the four sides of the *dreidel* appear four letters from the Hebrew alphabet—*nun* (נ), *gimmel* (ג), *hey* (ה), and *shin* (ש). These four letters are an acronym for "*nes gadol hayah sham*"—"a great miracle happened there."



In Israel, the actual setting of the Chanukah miracle, the last letter, *shin*, is substituted with a *pey* (פ), which stands for "*po*"—"here."

Getting Your Dreidel Game Started

- In addition to *dreidels*, you'll need the the currency—nuts, pennies, nickels, chocolate coins, or just about anything else...
- All players sit around the playing area.
- The currency is equally divided amongst all players.
- Everyone takes a turn at spinning the *dreidel*; the one with the highest spin has first turn. (*Nun* is highest, then *gimmel*, *hey*, and *shin*.) If there is a tie for highest, those who tied spin again.
- Everyone puts one unit of the currency (penny, nut, etc.) into the pot.
- The one who has first turn is followed in clockwise direction by all the others.



How to Play Dreidel

If the *dreidel* lands on a...



Nun Absolutely nothing happens. *Nun* stands for the Yiddish word *nul*, which means zero. It's time for the player to your left to take a spin.



Gimel You get to take the whole pot! *Gimmel* stands for *gantz*, which means whole. Everyone, including you, now puts another unit into the pot, and the person to your left tries his luck at spinning.



Hey You get to take half of the pot. *Hey* stands for *halb*, half. If the pot has an odd amount of units, don't try to split that penny, nut, or piece of chocolate in half. Leave the odd item there.



Shin You put a unit into the pot. *Shin* is for *shenk*; yes, that means "give."

You can speed up the game by upping the ante, raising *shin* and post-*gimmel* contributions to two, three or even four units.

Any player that cannot contribute after landing on a shin or after a fellow player lands on a gimmel, is out of the game. The game ends when there is one player left.

Why People Play Dreidel on Chanukah



The traditional Chanukah *dreidel* is a throwback to the times when the Greek armies of King Antiochus controlled the Holy Land, before the Maccabees defeated them. The powerful regime passed a series of laws outlawing the study of Torah and many of the mitzvot. The Jews were compelled to take their Torah learning “underground.”

Jewish children resorted to learning Torah in outlying areas and forests. It is said that if a Greek patrol passed by they would quickly pull out and play with small tops. Our Chanukah *dreidel* games are a salute to these Jewish heroes of yore.