

How to Play Dreidel: The Traditional Game



Dreidel is the traditional game played to celebrate Hanukkah. The letters on the dreidel—*nun*, *gimel*, *hei*, and *shin*—are interpreted to stand for the first letter of each word in the Hebrew statement “*Neis gadol hayah sham*,” which means, “A great miracle happened there” and refers to the defeat of the Syrian army and the re-dedication of the Temple in the story of Hanukkah.

In Israel, one letter on the dreidel differs from those used in the rest of the world. Instead of a *shin*, you will find the letter *pei*, transforming the Hebrew statement into *Neis gadol hayah po*, which means, “A great miracle happened here.”

So light your *hanukkiyah*, eat some latkes and *sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts), exchange gifts, play some Hanukkah music, and enjoy a game of dreidel!


What You’ll Need

- Playing pieces (plastic chips, pennies, small candies, buttons, peanuts in the shell, etc. may be used) for each participant.
- A dreidel for the group.

How to Play

Distribute an equal number of playing pieces to each person. Begin by having each person put one or two pieces into a common pot. Take turns spinning the dreidel and taking the actions determined by the letter you spin:

 *Gimel*: The player takes all.

 *Hei*: The player takes half.

 *Nun*: The player takes nothing.

 *Shin*: The player puts in.



The winner is the person who collects all the playing pieces.

You may also try playing the dreidel game with a charitable twist: Everyone puts some money in the kitty, and the winner gets to choose where to donate it.



How to Play Dreidel: A New Spin for Your Family

For a change of pace, your family may wish to try a new spin on the dreidel game.

What You'll Need

- Eight (8) sheets of construction paper or copy paper
- Scissors
- Markers, pens or crayons

How to Play

Cut a large dreidel shape from each of the eight sheets of construction paper.

Write one of these discussion starters (or your own eight discussion starters) on the dreidels so that each dreidel has a different discussion starter on it:

- Togetherness is part of our family when...
- Sharing is part of our family when...
- Loving is part of our family when...
- Fun is part of our family when...
- Celebration is part of our family when...
- Mitzvot are part of our family when...
- Learning is part of our family when...
- Tradition is a part of our family when...

Draw eight blank lines below each discussion starter.

Together with your family, come up with eight answers for one of the discussion starters on the first night of Hanukkah. Choose one family member to record the answers on that dreidel. When you're finished, add the dreidel to your Hanukkah decorations. Use a different discussion starter dreidel (and a different family member to record the answers) for each of the subsequent nights of the holiday.

