



The Hanukkah Game of Dreidel

How to Play the Dreidel Game

One of the fun traditions of Hanukkah is the Spin the Dreidel game. A dreidel is a four-sided spinning top that families play with on Hanukkah. Each side is imprinted with a Hebrew letter. These letters are an acronym for the Hebrew words נס גדול היה שם (Nes Gadol Haya Sham), "A great miracle happened there", referring to the miracle of the oil that took place in the Temple in Jerusalem.

The dreidel game is played to commemorate the time when Judaism was outlawed by King Antiochus from 168- 165 B.C. and the reading and teaching of Scripture was forbidden. Yet, legend has it that faithful Jews continued to teach God's Word in small groups. When Greek soldiers would pass by, the Jews would hide their Torah scrolls and begin spinning the dreidel so that it would appear that they were gambling and not studying Scripture.

The game is played using a dreidel and chocolate coins (gelt). Each player starts out with 10 or 15 coins and places one coin in the "pot." The first player spins the dreidel, and depending on which side the dreidel falls on, either wins a coin from the pot or gives up part of his stash. The code is as follows:

- Nun—"none"—the player gets none and the next player spins
- Gimel—"all"—the player gets all the coins in the pot. Each player then puts one coin in to replenish the pot.
- Hey—"half"—the player takes half of the pot, rounding up if there is an odd number
- Shin—"put one in"—each player puts one coin in the pot

Play continues until one player wins the entire pot of coins. After the game is over, all the coins are divided up evenly so each player has their own chocolate coins to enjoy.

Dreidels can be purchased online at www.bargainjudaica.com.

