

Four Fascinating Dreidel Facts

Before you start spinning the dreidel, check out these four fascinating facts. It will infuse you with high spirits and improve your game!

1 The dreidel, or in Yiddish ‘spinning top’ or ‘Sevivon’ in Hebrew, originates from the time of the Greek-Syrian rule over the Holy Land—which set off the Maccabean revolt that culminated in the Chanukah miracle. Learning Torah was forbidden by the enemy, and if one was found practicing it he risked punishment by death. Jewish children resorted to studying the Torah in caves, and hiding. When a Greek patrol would approach, the children would pull out their tops and pretend to be playing a game. The dreidel reminds us of their courage and inspires us to use the privilege we have these days to study the Torah without fear and reason to hide.

2. The classic dreidel is four sided. On the four sides of the *dreidel* appear four letters from the Hebrew alphabet—*nun*, *gimmel*, *hey*, and *shin*. These four letters are an acronym for *hes gadol hayah sham*—"a great miracle happened there." But, in Israel the letter shin is replaced with pey, for ‘po’-here.

3. On a deeper level the four-sides represent the four kingdoms—Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome spinning around the center, once threatening the center, the Jewish People. A hand from above spins the dreidel, serving as an extenuation of the higher Hand, controlling all, and the four empires that spin no more around the Jewish nation.

4. While the four Hebrew letters remind us of the courageous Maccabees fighting Antiochus and the oil miracle lasting for eight whole days in the Temple, a closer look will reveal that the combination of letters, equals in Gematria 358, the numerical value of Mashiach! So, now you are all set to spin the dreidel and pass this wisdom on to the next generation.