The dreidel or sevivon is perhaps the most famous custom associated with Hanukkah. Indeed, various rabbis have tried to find an integral connection between the dreidel and the Hanukkah story; the standard explanation is that the letters nun, gimmel, hey, shin, which appear on the dreidel in the Diaspora, stand for nes gadol haya sham—"a great miracle happened **there**," while in Israel the dreidel says nun, gimmel, hey, pey, which means "a great miracle happened **here**."

One 19th-century rabbi maintained that Jews played with the dreidel to fool the Greeks if they were caught studying Torah, which had been outlawed. Others figured out elaborate *gematriot* [numerological explanations because every Hebrew letter has a numerical equivalent] and word plays for the letters *nun*, *gimmel*, *hey*, *shin*. For example, *nun*, *gimmel*, *hey*, *shin* in gematria equals 358, which is also the numerical equivalent of *mashiach* or Messiah!

Finally, the letters *nun*, *gimmel*, *hey*, *shin* are supposed to represent the four kingdoms that tried to destroy Israel, Judah and Jerusalem [in ancient times]: N = Nebuchadnetzar = Babylon; H = Haman = Persia = Madai; G = Gog = Greece; and S = Seir = Rome.

As a matter of fact, these elaborate explanations were invented after the fact.

The dreidel game originally had nothing to do with Hanukkah; it has been played by various people in various languages for many centuries.

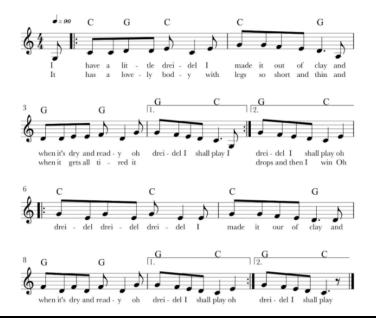
In England and Ireland there is a game called *totum* or *teetotum* that is especially popular at Christmastime. In English, this game is first mentioned as "totum" ca. 1500-1520. The name comes from the Latin "totum," which means "all." By 1720, the game was called *T-totum* or *teetotum*, and by 1801 the four letters already represented four words in English: T = Take all; H = Half; P = Put down; and N = Nothing.

Our Eastern European game of dreidel (including the letters *nun*, *gimmel*, *hey*, *shin*) is directly based on the German equivalent of the *totum* game: N = Nichts = nothing; G = Ganz = all; H = Halb = half; and S = Stell ein = put in. In German, the spinning top was called a "torrel" or "trundl," and in <u>Yiddish</u> it was called a "dreidel," a "fargl," a "varfl" [= something thrown], "shtel ein" [= put in], and "gor, gorin" [= all].

When Hebrew was revived as a spoken language, the dreidel was called, among other names, a *sevivon*, which is the one that caught on.

https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-origin-of-the-dreidel/

Dreidel





I have a little dreidel I made it out of clay And when it's dry and ready Then dreidel I shall play. Oh, dreidel, dreidel I made it out of clay Oh, dreidel, dreidel Now dreidel I shall play. It has a lovely body With legs so short and thin And when it gets all tired It drops and then I win. Oh, dreidel, dreidel I made it out of clay Oh, dreidel, dreidel Now dreidel I shall play. My dreidel is so playful It loves to dance and spin A happy game of dreidel Come play now, let's begin. Oh, dreidel, dreidel I made it out of clay Oh, dreidel, dreidel Now dreidel we shall play.