



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

SIMCHAT TORAH 5777 • 2016

Prepared By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

October 25, 2016
Simchat Torah

Why Dance? Because I Dance



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart 5777”*

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ABSTRACT

Simchat Torah, the celebration of the Torah, is really no time to speak, no time to sermonize, to give long-winded - or even short-winded - talks.

Indeed, on *Simchat Torah* we don't celebrate by opening up and studying the Torah. Rather, we dance with wrapped Torah scrolls. With exuberant joy our dancing legs carry the Torah scrolls around and around. *Simchat Torah* is all about joy - hence its name, *Simchat Torah* meaning "Joy of Torah." And joy transcends the mind. Try studying Torah while dancing!

The unbridled joy of *Simchat Torah* is not about words. It's about reaching a place in our souls which is beyond words, ideas, feelings and any form of conscious expression. On *Simchat Torah* we reach a place that is beyond time and space.

There is no day quite like *Simchat Torah*. No nation or culture has a day like this. *Simchat Torah* carries the secret to Jewish eternity: that we are all in it together!

Simchat Torah is thus a day when all energy should be spent on dancing with the Torah, not studying (or listening to a rabbi talk). All energy should be channeled to our legs, not our ears.

The only reason to speak before the joyous dancing of *Hakafot* commences, is to express the true meaning of *Simchat Torah* and to inspire us all to dance and dance knowing that on this day all are one. There is really nothing like being part of one family; feeling that we are all in it together...

Here are two stories that capture this theme and help set the tone for dancing the night and day away knowing that we are all bound together in an immortal dance that goes beyond all time and space.

One story connects the *Vidui* confession of Yom Kippur with *Simchat Torah*.

The second relates the simple beauty of a Jew, who dances because...

WHY DANCE? BECAUSE I DANCE

1. Don't Talk, Dance

Simchat Torah, the celebration of the Torah, is really no time to speak, no time to sermonize, to give long-winded – or even short-winded – talks.

Indeed, on *Simchat Torah* we don't celebrate by opening up and studying the Torah. Rather, we dance with wrapped Torah scrolls. With exuberant joy our dancing legs carry the Torah scrolls around and around. *Simchat Torah* is all about joy – hence its name, *Simchat Torah* meaning “Joy of Torah.” And joy transcends the mind. Try studying Torah while dancing!

The unbridled joy of *Simchat Torah* is not about words. It's about reaching a place in our souls which is beyond words, ideas, feelings and any form of conscious expression. On *Simchat Torah* we reach a place that is beyond time and space.

There is actually no day quite like *Simchat Torah*. No nation or culture has a day like this. *Simchat Torah* carries the secret to Jewish eternity: that we are all in it together!

Simchat Torah is thus a day when all energy should be spent on dancing with the Torah, not studying (or listening to a rabbi talk). All energy should be channeled to our legs, not our ears.

The only reason to speak before *Hakafot*, before the joyous dancing commences, is to express the true meaning of *Simchat Torah* and to inspire us all to dance and dance knowing that on this day all are one. There is really nothing like being part of one family; feeling that we are all in it together...

Here are two stories that capture this theme and help set the tone for dancing the night and day away knowing that we are all bound together in an immortal dance that goes beyond all time and space.

2. Partners In Crime, Partners In Sublime

It was in the midst of the swirling *Hakafot* dancing, that the chief justice – the *dayan* – of the Eastern European town walked over to a simple shoemaker, who was kicking up his heels with all his heart and all his soul.

A bit smugly, and more than a little sanctimoniously, the judge asked the simple shoemaker: “What is this dancing? We, Torah scholars, study Torah all year round, and you think you can come here and celebrate it with dancing?” The judge was implying that only Torah scholars, who spend every waking hour studying Torah have the right to dance and celebrate with it on *Simchat Torah*, while those who don’t – like the simple shoemaker – have no business doing so.

Replied the simple but witty shoemaker: “On Yom Kippur, in the *Vidui* confessional prayer, we ask forgiveness for the sin of accepting bribes. Have I, a simple shoemaker, ever taken a bribe? Who would ever bribe me and for what purpose? What connection do I have to this sin?”

As the judge paled, the shoemaker went on: “Yet I ask forgiveness for this sin because we Jews are all responsible for one another, as the Talmud teaches.¹ But if I must confess the sin of a judge – if I am a partner in your sin, surely I am also a partner in your study of Torah!”

3. We Are In It Together

Yes, my friends, we are all in it together... And on *Simchat Torah* we dance with that knowledge. We dance with the Torah that connects us all. We dance with the Torah as our parents, grandparents and ancestors have danced.

Generations dance together knowing that we are one, and as one we are indestructible!

There is something awesome about the fact that we have been dancing like this for thousands of years. That despite our differences, we are connected at the core.

4. I Am Happy Because You Are Happy

Once dancing on *Simchat Torah*, the great 18th century Chassidic Master, Rabbi Naftali Zvi of Ropshitz was struck by an inspirational sight. Out of the corner of his eye, he glimpsed one of the peddlers of town – a simple Jew who didn’t even know the difference between an aleph and a bet – dancing as if the world was on fire. Out of this Jew’s mouth poured the most heartwarming song of praise, like honey it flowed, like wine it intoxicated. Not for a second did his feet cease to move, not for a moment did his legs tire.

The Rebbe of Ropshitz walked over to the dancing Jew and inquired about the source of his immense joy. Was it possible that the illiterate Jew learned much Torah over the past year, and that is why he was so happy to celebrate now?

¹ Shavuot 39a.

The man replied: “As a matter of fact, I did not learn a word of Torah over the past year; moreover, I didn’t even know that everyone in *shul* was dancing to celebrate the joy of Torah. All I know is that my brothers are happy, so how could I not be happy as well? My fellow Jews are dancing, so how can I not dance along with them?”

5. Time To Dance

We are all gathered together in this room, in this sanctuary. Some of us dance with the Torah because we truly appreciate its gift and cannot help but celebrate its joy. Some of us may not fully appreciate it.

Yet, we are all one family. And when someone you love dances, you also dance.

May we indeed appreciate Torah in such a way that we are compelled to dance with it all night and all day.

But for those of us who need another reason to dance, who perhaps do not feel the revealed external connection (for internally it is there in each and every one of us) and need a compelling argument to be joyous, to drop all inhibition and just let it fly on the dance floor, just remember that we are all in it together, and when those you love are dancing you too have good reason to dance.

Both abovementioned stories drive the point home:

When you prayed on Yom Kippur, and recited different combinations of sin, even though you probably didn’t transgress most of them, it was because the confessional, though done privately, was also for another Jew, perhaps someone whom you never physically met.

Indeed, the *Vidui* is written in the plural (we have sinned), demonstrating that we are all responsible for one another’s perceived or real shortcomings.

If we are responsible for and feel another's pain, how much more so are we responsible for and feel another's joy. Whether or not individually we have delved into the Torah is not the question; on *Simchat Torah*, the question is: Since collectively we have studied, celebrated, delved into, taught, learned, and kept the Torah – so how can we, as unique individuals in this divine collective, not dance?

If you see another fellow Jew dancing, how can you not dance? Whether you know it is *Simchat Torah* or not, whether you can't tell the difference between *Hakafot* or a wedding – if you see a room full of Jews dancing, how can you not dance along with them?

Nu, enough talk. It is time to dance. Enough moving of the lips. It is time to move our legs.

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