



Simchat Torah -

Rejoicing in the Torah



נִהְיָ אֶהְבֶּתִּי תוֹרָתְךָ כָּל־הַיּוֹם הִיא שִׂיחָתִי:

Oh how I love thy Torah! It is my meditation all the day long!

EACH WEEK in synagogues all across the world, a portion from the Torah (called a *parashah*) is chanted. Jewish tradition has divided the Torah into 54 *parashiyot* - roughly one portion for each week of the year - so that in the course of a year the entire Torah has been recited during services.

The final reading of this cycle occurs on *Simchat Torah* ("Joy of the Torah"), a Rabbinical festival celebrating both the completion of the year's Torah Reading cycle as well as the start of a new cycle.



During Simchat Torah, the last Torah portion (from Deuteronomy) is read as well as the first verses of the first portion (from Genesis), thereby indicating that *Talmud Torah* - the study of Torah - never ends. The idea that Torah study is cyclical finds expression in the joyous ritual of dancing *around and around* the Torah, known as *hakkafo*.

The Circle of Torah

#	Parashat	Torah	Maftir	Haftarah
54	Vezot Haberakhah	Deut 33:1-34:12	Numbers 29:35-30:1	Joshua 1:1-18
1	Bereshit (partial)	Genesis 1:1-2:3		

Note: For Simchat Torah, only part of *Parashat Bereshit* is read. The full parashah (Genesis 1:1 - 6:8) is read on the Shabbat *following* Simchat Torah.

Visit www.hebrew4christian.com for a complete listing of the weekly Torah portions.



Shavuot and Simchat Torah

Both major holiday periods (the Spring and the Fall) climax with a festival devoted to Torah:

- **Shavuot** (i.e., “Weeks” or “Pentecost”) - This holiday marks the giving of the Torah (matan torah) exactly 50 days after the exodus from Egypt (calculated to be the 6th of Sivan, 49 days after the first Passover on Nisan 15).
- **Simchat Torah** - This holiday marks the completion of the Torah reading cycle for the year. Simchat Torah is based on the “hakhel gathering” (הַחֵל) commanded by God in the Torah: "At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Sukkot (סֻכּוֹת), when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God ... you shall read this Torah before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble (הַחֵל) the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this Torah" (Deut. 31:10-12).

However, even though both holidays center on Torah, the mood of each of these holidays is altogether different. Shavuot is a time to soberly respond to the revelation of the Torah by committing ourselves to observe and study it, whereas Simchat Torah is a time to express our love and adoration for the Torah by rejoicing and dancing with it.

There is a lesson in this for us. *First* we must submit ourselves to the discipline of studying the Scriptures and *then* we can rejoice in the knowledge and comfort they provide us. To put it another way, there is no *d'rash* without *p'shat* - no application without the study of the text. But after we work hard by studying the text, we are given the gift of great joy of knowing the truth of the LORD. שירות מעריב

Three Simchat Torah Services

1. The Ma'ariv Service (שירות מעריב)

Simchat Torah celebrations begin after the normal *Ma'ariv* (evening) service in the synagogue, on Tishri 23. All of the synagogue's Torah scrolls (*sifrei Torah*) are taken from the Holy Ark and various people are given the honor of carrying a scroll during a festive procession called a *hakafah*. There are seven of these *hakafot*, or “circling processions,” that occur, and it is customary dance about and “kiss” the scrolls as they pass by touching a Siddur (prayerbook) to the scroll and then kissing the book.

After the seventh circling, the scrolls are returned to the Ark, though one is left on the *bima* (Torah reading stand) to read the last Torah portion of the cycle. This is the only time of the year that the Torah is recited during an evening service.

There is often an oneg following the reading of the Torah portion in anticipation of the *Shacharit* (morning) service.



2. **The Shacharit Service** (שירות בוקר)

The morning service also includes *hakafot*, but the focus is more on the actual reading of the Torah itself. The last verses from Deuteronomy are read by the *Chatan Torah* - the “Groom of the Torah” - a person selected to close the year’s Torah reading, while the first verses from Genesis are read by the *Chatan Bereshit*, the “Groom of Genesis” - the person selected to begin the new year’s Torah reading. In this way the service shows that we begin right where we end: with the Torah as the center of our thoughts.

- ***Everyone does Aliyah***

It is customary that all adults present at the Simchat Torah morning service be given an *aliyah* - or “call to bless the Torah.” Normally this is done by having the same verses (exerpted from Deuteronomy 31:1-26) recited over and over again (to facilitate this, larger congregations will divide into smaller groups, each with its own Torah; whereas other congregations will call up more than one person at a time).

- ***Kol Hane’arim - “All the children”***

Usually the last aliyah is a special one. Only during Simchat Torah are children called up to recite the blessing for the Torah. A tallit is normally made into a canopy over them and, after they are coached into reciting the blessing by an adult.

- ***Torah Reading Service***

After the dancing around the Torah and the various aliyot are performed, the service turns to the formal Torah readings as delivered first by the *Chatan Torah* (Deuteronomy 33:27 - 34:12) and the *Chatan Bereshit* (Genesis 1:1 - 2:6). [Note that the Chatan Bereshit does not recite the full parashah for *Bereshit*, but only a partial reading (the full reading is performed on the Shabbat *following* Simchat Torah)]. It is customary to spread a tallit over the Torah readers during their readings. As the first chapter of Genesis is read, the congregation recites for each day of creation *veyehi erev veyehi voker*-- “there was evening and there was morning”-- which is repeated by the reader.

- ***Hagbah - the lifting of the Torah Scroll***

At the end of the Torah reading service, a ceremony called *Hagbah* is performed. Hagbah is the lifting of the Torah scroll and displaying it to the congregation. On Simchat Torah, Hagbah is performed in different way. To symbolize turning the Torah back to its beginning, the person lifts the scroll so that it is *reversed* (i.e., so that at least three columns of Hebrew script is seen by the congregation). Hagbah symbolizes the returning to the start of the scroll, and again is a picture of the circle of Torah.



Hagbah Ceremony

Conclusion of the Morning Service

The Simchat Torah morning service concludes with the *maftir* reading (Numbers 29:35-30:1) followed by the chanting of the Simchat Torah Haftarah (Joshua 1:1-18).



3. **The Musaf (Additional) Service**

Like other holidays, there is an additional (*musaf*) service held right after the morning service. The Musaf for Simchat Torah is sometimes given over to additional merriment, with some synagogues allowing tasteful “fooling around” by the children in order to heighten the joy of the day.

Jesus and Simchat Torah

Since Yeshua the Mashiach (Jesus Christ) is *Torah Ha-Emet* - the True Torah - we should likewise celebrate the Joy of Torah in our lives. Yeshua is the Living Torah, the Living Word, written upon our hearts so that we can truly dance and embrace the Truth given from God. Indeed, Yeshua did not come to destroy the Torah but rather to fulfill it in our lives (Matthew 5:17-20). As it is written in the *Tanakh* regarding the New Covenant:

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant (*B'rit Chadashah*) with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law (*Torah*) in their inward parts, and write it (*the Torah*) in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34)



Revealed in Torah

This idea is re-affirmed in the New Testament (see Heb. 8:8-11). Therefore we have greater reason to celebrate Torah, since Yeshua (Jesus) is of course the central message of the Torah -- its inner meaning and incarnation. He is the Torah made flesh (John 1:14), the faithful Mediator of the New and Better Covenant (Heb. 8:6), and He does what Moses and the Sinatic covenant could never do, namely, write the Torah within our inward parts and upon our hearts so that we might truly be the people of God (Jer. 31:31-34). By means of His sacrificial death, the righteous demands of Torah are fully satisfied, and the LORD is glorified as both just and merciful (i.e., the justifier of those who put their trust in Him).

**By means of His sacrificial suffering, we are now enabled to
make hakkafot and to truly dance for joy!**



The Torah (i.e., law) is holy, just and good (Rom. 7:12), but those seeking righteousness based on it's demands will discover the tragic fact that it is powerless to impart righteousness and life (2 Cor. 3:7-18). It is sin within the human heart that condemns people - *not the Torah*. The crucifixion of Yeshua condemned sin in the flesh (again, it did not condemn the Torah) and now the righteousness of God is imparted to those who embrace Yeshua by faith (Rom. 8:3-4). Enabled by the Holy Spirit, with the Torah now written upon our hearts (Jer. 31:31-3; Heb. 8:10-11), we are empowered to fulfill the requirements of the law based on a new covenant relationship with God (Gal. 2:16, 3:2). We no longer seek righteousness by means of maintaining ritualistic or other ordinances (Rom. 4:5, Gal. 2:16) but by receiving the free gift of Mashiach's righteousness imputed to us through our trust (Eph. 2:8-9). Because of Yeshua's victory, we do not strive for acceptance before the Father, we abide within it, *chaverim*.



A Note about *Isru Chag* (אִסְרוּ-חַג)

The day following the closure of the Sukkot season is known as *Isru Chag*, "binding the festival" (from Psalm 118:27). It is observed as a semi-festive day, when the *Tachanun* supplications (normally recited after the weekday Amidah) are omitted from the morning and afternoon services.

אֵל יְהוָה וַיֵּאֵר לָנוּ אִסְרוּ-חַג בְּעֲבֹתִים עַד-קַרְנוֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ:

*The LORD is God; He has given us light; bind the festal offering
to the horns of the altar with cords.*

*El Adonai yaiyaer lanu isru-chag, b'avotim
ad-karnot ha-mizbe'ach.*

During the Temple period, *Isru Chag* was the day when the pilgrims would leave Jerusalem for their journey back home. According to the Talmud, observing *Isru Chag* as a festive day is akin to offering sacrifices upon the altar in the Temple (*Sukkah 25b*).