

# Torah Weekly

ת"בס

September 26 – October 2, 2021  
20-26 Tishrei, 5782

Torah reading: Bereishit  
Genesis 1:1-6:8  
Haftarah: Hosea 42:5-21

Shemini Atzeret

## Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

## Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

## Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center  
5804 Beacon Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217  
412-421-0111  
Fax: 412-521-5948  
www.alephne.org  
info@alephne.org



ALEPH  
INSTITUTE  
No One Alone,  
No One Forgotten.

## Is it True That Jews Dance With Books?

### *On the absurdity of Simchat Torah*

Once a year, at the end of a whole string of holidays, there's something called Simchat Torah. Jews take out all the Torah scrolls in their places of worship and dance with them. In many places, they dance with them through the streets.

It's called hakafot, which means "going around in circles."

Scrolls are books. So, yes, Jews dance with books.

But what you really should be asking is: Is this normal?

Books are for reading. For understanding. For discussing. Dancing? Really? Does anybody else do this?

It goes further. These are G-d's books. Holy scrolls. Divine work.

On Passover night, we ask "Why is tonight different than every other night?"—just because we're crunching on flat bread and dipping a veggie in salt water. On Simchat Torah we're going around in circles, dancing wildly with books, yet nobody asks a thing. Why? Because everyone understands. This is a Jew: Someone who dances with G-d's book.

### *The Eternal Dance*

I met a Jew who told me he had searched for spirituality and Google found it. It came in the writings of a mystic teacher whose lectures opened gates of wisdom for him.

"You have found wisdom," I told him. "But you have not found yourself. You have found a pretty girl, but you

have not found your betrothed wife. That you can find only in our Torah. It is ours, and we belong to it, for our souls have danced with it for three and a half millennia, you and I and all these Jews around us."

That's what it means to dance with a book. It means, as hard as you try, as much as you would like, you can never be divorced from it. You come close, you tear apart; turn face to face, then back to back; around in circles, around and around, like two spinning magnets in constant push and pull towards each other, like two soul-mates locked in a perpetual drama of eternal romance.

So, too, a Jew dances with Torah. A teaching resonates deep within, as though his soul itself were speaking to him. Another teaching he pushes away. There are questions unresolved, issues with which he has yet to make peace.

But it is a bond not contingent on reason or fancy. It is a marriage for which there is no other match, an eternal covenant. The Torah and the Jew, they belong to one another.

### *The Birthright Dance*

After all, Jews are born owning that book. It says so in the book itself, "The Torah that Moses commanded us is an inheritance of every Jew."

The Talmud takes that quite literally:

Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: Anyone who withholds a teaching from a student is as though he robs him of the inheritance of his ancestors, as it is stated: "The Torah that Moses commanded us is the inheritance of every Jew."

That is the first teaching a Jewish child must learn, as the Talmud says:

At what age do you start teaching your child? As soon as the child begins to speak, you teach him, "The Torah that Moses commanded us is the inheritance of every Jew." Then you teach, "Hear O Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is One."

Even before the child learns to say that G-d is one, he learns that Torah is his birthright.

Yet there are different kinds of birthrights. There are heirlooms such as jewelry and silverware. And then there's real estate. In Biblical law, a crucial distinction lies between them. In Biblical law, there is an institution of the jubilee year:

You shall hallow the fiftieth year ... It shall be a jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding (achuzah) and each of you shall return to his family.

Jewelry and silverware belong to their rightful heir until he sells them, gifts them, loses them or abandons them. But real estate always returns to its owner or his heirs in the Jubilee year. He can sell it, gift it, abandon it—but it will return. If not to him, to his children, or to his children's children.

Which is what Rashi, the most classic of commentaries on the Torah writes, explaining the inheritance mentioned in this verse. He calls it an achuzah—"heritage real estate." And as such, it never truly abandons us.

And Rashi continues: We never truly abandon it. As far as we may distance ourselves from it, when we return, it is as though we have

never left.

### ***With Whom Do You Dance?***

All said, the question still remains: It is a book after all. A wisdom. A teaching. We don't dance with any of those. We dance with a living being, not with a book.

This I can answer best with a story.

In the gas chamber of Auschwitz stood a group of young boys, stripped of their clothes, awaiting their final demise. One boy sprang up and shouted: "Brothers! Today is the holiday of Simchat Torah. Before we die, let us celebrate Simchat Torah one last time."

"We do not possess anything," the boy continued. "We do not have clothes to cover us, nor a Torah scroll with which to dance. So let us dance with G-d Himself before we return our souls to Him."

They danced with G-d in the gas chamber. We dance with Him in the synagogues and in the streets.

For that is a Jew. One who embraces the Author within the book, the Teacher within the teaching, G-d within a scroll.

And it is with Him that we dance.

*By Rabbi Tzvi Freeman*

**Stuffed Cabbage** (some families eat stuffed cabbage on Simchat Torah) There are a number of reasons for eating stuffed cabbage on Simchat Torah:

#### **Day of Blessings**

The day Diaspora Jews celebrate as Simchat Torah is actually the day after the holiday in Israel. On that day, after inaugurating the First Holy Temple, King Solomon blessed the entire nation. As such, it is customary to bless one's friends as well as the entire congregation on Simchat Torah. (In fact, the day's Torah reading begins with the words *vezot haberachah*, "and this is the blessing.")

What does this have to do with cabbage? Well, the Hebrew name for the food is כְּרוּב (*keruv*), which has the same letters as בְּרוּךְ, "blessed."

#### **Cherubim**

Over the Ark of the Covenant, which held the two tablets and the Torah, stood two cherubs. The Hebrew word for "cherub," *keruv*, is a homonym that is spelled and pronounced exactly like the word for "cabbage." So our eating cabbage on Simchat Torah recalls the [cherubs](#) that stood over the Torah in the Temple.

#### **Torah for Everyone**

Despite its murky origins, the most commonly given reason for eating rolled cabbage on Simchat Torah is that two rolls side by side resemble the closed Torah scrolls with which we dance on Simchat Torah.

I would suggest that it's appropriate that the Torah is depicted rolled. After all, the Torahs are rolled tightly shut on this special day. The chassidic masters point out, albeit not in relation to the custom of eating cabbage, that the

reason we don't celebrate the completion of the Torah by studying its holy words, but instead by dancing with the rolled-up scrolls, is because the celebration encompasses every Jew, no matter his or her level of scholarship. The Torah is the heritage of every Jew, and every Jew is equally entitled to celebrate on this special day.

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

**Sunday, September 26, 2021 --- 20 Tishrei, 5782**

### **Passing of R. Heshel of Cracow (1663)**

R. Heshel was a Polish scholar known for his sharpness and depth of knowledge. Although most of his writings are not extant, his influence is greatly felt until today, as many of the classic Halachists of his day were his students, such as [R. Shabtai Katz](#) (the Shach) and [R. David HaLevi](#) (the Taz). Many stories are told about his quick-wittedness even as a young child.

**Monday, September 27, 2021 --- 21 Tishrei, 5782**

### **Prophecy of Haggai Encouraging the Building of the Second Temple (353 BCE)**

On this day, the prophet [Haggai](#) received a divine message to pass on to "[Zerubavel](#) son of She'altiel ruler of Judah, Joshua son of Jehozadak the High Priest, and the remnant of the nation" (Haggai 2:1). He was instructed to encourage them to continue their efforts to build the [Second Temple](#), whose construction had been halted some seventeen years prior:

Who among you is left, who saw this house [the First Temple] in its former glory? As you see it now, is it not as nothing in your eyes? Now, be strong, Zerubavel, says the L-rd; and be strong, Joshua the son of Jehozadak the High Priest; and be strong, all the people of the land... I will fill this House with glory, said the L-rd of Hosts... The glory of this last House shall be greater than the first one, said the L-rd of Hosts; and in this place I will grant peace (Haggai 2: 3-9).

**Tuesday, September 28, 2021 --- 22 Tishrei, 5782**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe Suffers Heart Attack (1977)**

While celebrating the joyous holiday *hakafot* with thousands of chassidim in the central Chabad-Lubavitch synagogue in Brooklyn, NY, the Rebbe suffered a massive heart attack. In spite of the tremendous pain, the Rebbe remained calm and insisted on continuing the *hakafot*, and only after they concluded did he depart the synagogue. On the following day, the Rebbe requested that the chassidim celebrate the Simchat Torah festivities with the same joy and fervor as all other years, and so it was. After the holiday ended, the Rebbe addressed and reassured the anxious chassidim from his office (which was hastily converted into a cutting-edge cardiac unit) via a public address system. The Rebbe remained in his office in Lubavitch World Headquarters under medical supervision for several weeks. He returned home five weeks later on the 1st of Kislev, a day designated by chassidim for celebration and thanksgiving.

**Wednesday, September 29, 2021 --- 23 Tishrei, 5782**

### **Passing of R. Chanoch of Cordova (1014)**

As a youngster (in c. 960), R. Chanoch was captured by pirates, along with his father R. Moshe and three other great Torah scholars. R. Moshe and his son were ransomed by the Jewish community of Cordova, Spain, where R. Moshe opened a yeshivah for Talmudic studies. When R. Moshe passed away, he was succeeded by his son. These events marked a turning point in Jewish history. Until then, the primary centers of Torah scholarship were located in the great and ancient Jewish communities of Babylonia, and Jews throughout the Diaspora depended on their leaders for guidance. With the opening of the yeshivah of R. Moshe and R. Chanoch in Spain, Jewish leadership shifted westwards, and European Jewry slowly became independent of the Babylonian community. Thus began the golden age of Torah scholarship in Western Europe, where it flourished for the next five hundred years.