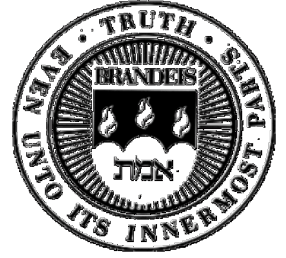




תורת אמת



A Weekly Brandeis Orthodox Organization Publication

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SHMINI ATZERET & SIMCHAT TORAH

Sukkot in a Hut!

- The Torah reading for *Shemini Atzeret* is the same as for the eighth day of *Pesach* from *Devarim* 14:22 to 16:17
- It begins with the *mitzvah* of *ma'aser sheni*, taking a tenth of your produce to eat in *Yerushalayim*.
- Some laws of *shemittah*, the sabbatical year, follow
- We are commanded to treat the seemingly less fortunate well, to always extend a helping hand
- Laws of the *shalosh regalim*, the three pilgrimage festivals, follow
- The Torah reading for *Simchat Torah* is from *Devarim* 33:1-26
- This is *parshat Vezot HaBracha*
- We finished reading the Torah! But there's always more Torah to learn, so we immediately start it again! Have no fear, there will G-d willing be many more Torat Emets in the future :)

Enjoy these last days of sitting in the Sukkah!

Chag Sameach!

Birchot HaTorah

By Rabbi Kaplowitz

The question is often asked: "What exactly are we celebrating on *Simchat Torah*?" Clearly we are not commemorating the giving of the Torah; for this we have the holiday of *Shavuot*. Nor is there an obvious connection to the holiday of *Sukkot*. The fact that we mark the completion of the Torah reading cycle does not appear to be essential to the day – the Rabbis could have set up our Torah reading cycle differently. Rather on *Simchat Torah* we celebrate our relationship to the Torah. We express our joy over having been given the gift of the Torah and our commitment to the Torah.

There are many ways that we show our love for the Torah. We stand up when it passes by, we dress it in beautiful garments and we store it in the holiest of locations. We dance with the Torah fervently and express our love for it in the joyous songs that we sing. Of course, our love for the Torah is not limited to the physical Torah scrolls in the *Aron Kodesh*. We also demonstrate our love for the Torah by learning Torah and by living a life committed to the *mitzvot* and values found in the Torah.

Another way in which we demonstrate our love for the Torah and the respect we have for it is the *Halacha* which requires us to say a *bracha* before and after reading the Torah. On *Simchat Torah*, when everybody receives an *aliyah* to the Torah we have an opportunity to recite these *brachot* and thus have another way of demonstrating our love for the Torah. The Sfat Emet develops a beautiful idea explaining the need to recite a blessing on the Torah before and after reading from it. He compares this to the requirement to say *brachot* over the food we eat. Here too we must say a *bracha* before and after partaking in the activity. The Sfat Emet

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued on page 3)

Rejoicing in the Torah

By Noah Fields '12

Simchat Torah is a time of renewal. At the end of a holiday packed month we reach - not the winding down, but rather the climax; The catharsis of the month. After nearly two months of repenting and resolutions we are exhilarated at the new chances that G-d has provided for us. We are ebullient with - hopefully - a new devotion to G-d and his commandments. Since *Simchat Torah* specifically deals with renewal of our cycle in Torah reading, it seemed fit to discuss individual Torah study -- and its renewal.

For many of us, despite our recently created lofty goals of self improvement, school seems to get in the way of Torah study. Homework, jobs, labs, and mundane commitments all seem to take up time that many of us could use to study. Honestly, though, how much time do we spend a day wasting time on the internet (facebook, especially) or playing games. How much time do we use to spend with friends, or 'eat', or devote (or shermanize) to clubs? These also conflict with our 'work', 'study', 'eat', 'sleep' schedule, and yet we manage to fit them in. So why not Torah study? To be fair, socializing is not a bad thing. But why not use some of that time to 'socialize' over a text of *Gemara* or *Mishna* (or even the *Tanach*)? Even without making compromises, it is possible to make time though. According to a Talmudic saying, a stomach always has room for delicacies. (If you've ever eaten ice cream on a full stomach - you may know this.) Similarly, if Torah is truly sweet, then we can always fit it into our busy schedules.

This assumes, though, that we find Torah 'sweet'. Though this may be the gist of the biblical *pasuk*, "and it will be sweet in your mouth", many of us are turned off by Torah study. The times we've dedicated to Torah study are diminished simply by disinterest. So what do we do about this? It is hard to believe that Torah

(Noah Fields continued on page 3)

Simcha on Simchat Torah

By Zahvi Glasenberg '11

The Sfot Emet writes that the amount and quality of “*chiyut*” or vitality that the world will receive is decided on *Rosh Hashana* but in fact only flows out to the world during the days of *Sukkot*. However, a distinction is drawn with regards to the nature of this vitality: That released during the first seven days of *chag* is the driving force for the physical world, while the vitality that flows on *Shmini Atzeret/Simchat Torah* serves as the driving force for the spiritual world.

The Sfot Emet explains that when it comes to the physical world, we are at risk for mistaking Hashem’s presence and actions as the simple nature of the world. Therefore, during this period where vitality flows to the physical world, we need to step outside our secure boundaries and experience the instability of life in the *sukkah* in order to fully appreciate Hashem’s involvement and protection in our lives. The *sukkah*, as the Zohar writes, serves as a “*tzila di’meheimenuta*”, our “shade” of *emunah* and affirmation of Hashem’s presence that protects us. However, on *Shmini Atzeret/Simchat Torah*, this vitality is expressed through the Torah and our completion of the yearly reading-cycle. There is something different about this expression that is enough for us to experience the world without the aid of the *sukkah* or a physical reminder; through Torah and the *simcha* we experience at the time of its completion we are able to draw our own picture of our relationship with Hashem and His presence in the world.

Perek 19 of Sefer Tehillim states: “*Pekudei Hashem yisharim, misamchei lev*”; the statutes of Hashem, *divrei Torah*, bring us to the ultimate state of *simcha*, happiness. The *Gemara in Masechet Erchin* points out that the *avodah* of Torah is referred to as “*misameach*”, bringing joy, but not as “*meitiv*” or making the heart “good”. Chazal generally characterize this concept of “*tov lev*” as one who is “*sameach bechelko*”, one who has the ability to feel content with one’s lot. The reason that *divrei Torah* lack this quality of “*tov lev*” is because *Talmud Torah* is an ongoing process that never ends and therefore we can never be fully content or satiated with the amount of Torah we have studied, instead, we are motivated to search for more. This motif is evident on *Simchat Torah* in the practice of beginning from *Bereishit* almost immediately upon the completion of *V’zot HaBracha*. Because of the nature of *Simchat Torah*, we are motivated by our *simcha* to seek out more Torah, and it seems that there is no other day of the year that it is so easy for us to feel Hashem’s presence; sitting in the *sukkah* on this day would be unnecessary. As it says in *Masechet Shabbat* (88b), the Torah preceded creation itself; Torah is at the root of everything in the world, and on *Simchat Torah* we rejoice over the role the Torah plays in our lives.

However, it is only after the Torah’s completion that we are truly able to see the huge presence and impact the Torah has on the world. This is very similar to the message of *Shirat Haazinu* that we recently read, where Moshe says “*zchor yemot olam, binu shnot dor vador*”, remember the days of old and understand the years of the generations to come. Only after having had the sufficient exposure, experience, and understanding of the big picture pieced together through the past and the future can Bnei Yisrael reach a level of *shira* as high as that of *Haazinu*. But on *Simchat Torah*, we get a brief glimpse of this big picture—we finish the Torah and finally we see and understand what we were unable to in the past. This fills us with such *simcha* that we must express ourselves through song and dance; the *divrei Torah* are indeed “*misamchei lev*”.

Tosfot writes regarding *Daf 11 of Masechet Erchin* that *simcha* is only an indirect result of learning Torah, and that it is really instead a product of the *Yirat Shamayim* that comes from learning and understanding the significance of Torah. However, this *simcha*, though indirect, is something very powerful and personal, as its words are “*misamchei lev*”, they affect our heart. The Rambam writes that only the great sages and the righteous persons of that time conducted the dancing of the *Simchat Beit HaShoevah* of *Sukkot*. Conversely, *Simchat Torah* is a day of mass celebration, when every individual is able to experience the *simcha* of the day. The Torah is read until everyone receives an *aliyah*, and the entire community takes part in the singing and dancing of *hakafot*. As we each absorb the words of Torah in *shul*, each of our hearts is touched with the *Yirat Shamayim* needed to bring us to the ultimate level of *simcha*. It is this *simcha* that is an expression of the spiritual vitality described by the Sfot Emet.

May we all have the *zechut* to reach the highest level of *Yirat Shamayim* through the words of the Torah and thus celebrate this year’s *Simchat Torah* with the ultimate level of *simcha*.

According to what she recently learned in Psychology, Zahvi is disorganized and very stressed.

What’s the Deal?

By Eitan Mosenkis '13

The Netivot Shalom asks why it is that in the *Talmud*, *Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah* (henceforth referred to as *Shemini Atzeret*) is called a festival of its own, and yet it is still known as the eighth day (of *Sukkot*). Furthermore, *Shemini Atzeret* is never explained in the Torah. *Pesach* is about the exodus from Egypt, *Shavuot* is about the first fruits, and *Sukkot* is so that it will be known that Hashem caused the children of Israel to dwell in *sukkot*. *Shemini Atzeret*, on the other hand is given no explanation. In answer to all of this, the Slonimer rebbe writes that wherever there is an eighth of something in the Torah, it invokes an aspect of the extra-worldliness. On the eighth day of the inauguration of Aaron and his sons as priests in the *Mishkan*, Hashem’s presence filled the *Mishkan* with a light from beyond this world and on the eighth day, baby boys are filled with the extra-worldly holiness of the covenant. So too the festival of *Shemini Atzeret* is from beyond this world. *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, and *Sukkot* are all holidays of this world, but *Shemini Atzeret* is from beyond, which is why it is not explained in the Torah – while the joy of all the other holidays is rooted in celebrations of things past and present, only the joy of *Shemini Atzeret* is from the future redemption and perfection of the world. The Slonimer rebbe also points out that *Yom Kippur* also contains certain aspects of the extra-worldly eighth. The high priest sprinkles the blood one and seven times before entering the holy of holies and he is separated from his family and resides in the temple complex for seven days before *Yom Kippur*, the eighth. The difference between this aspect of the extra-worldly eighth in the two holidays is that on *Yom Kippur*, the attempt is made to reach this height through prayers, repentance and fasting, while on *Shemini Atzeret*, it is through rejoicing that we lift ourselves up from this world towards Hashem. May you have a *chag* filled with holy *simcha*.

Eitan looks exactly like Ben Sacks and J-Chat. Maybe they are his long lost siblings?

M O D A O T

- **Don't forget there are communal Hakafot! Enjoy the dancing with the Torah! Chag Sameach!**
- **Sponsor Kiddush!** Speak to Mimi Cooper or email her at mfc621@brandeis.edu if you, a group of your friends, or even better - your parents would like to sponsor kiddush in honor of someone's birthday or another special occasion. Special requests for food and decor will be considered.
- **Want to write for Torat Emet?** Do you love your *Bar/Bat Mizvah parsha*? Do you love Torah? Do you love writing? If you're interested in writing for Torat Emet and sharing your words of Torah please contact Lauren (lkirsch@brandeis.edu) or

Ronit (rbroekma@brandeis.edu)! Long and short articles are both appreciated. We are still looking for writers for the rest of the semester.

- **Lost & Found** If anyone lost a black Northface raincoat outside of International Lounge on Sunday night, please contact Alex Marder at amarder@brandeis.edu.

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued from page 1)

explains that the blessing we say prior to eating is over the food itself – the physical food we are about to enjoy. The *bracha achronah* (blessing after eating) is over the strength the food gives us and the energy which sustains us. This is why the *halachah* allows us to recite a *bracha achrona* as long as we are still digesting the food and still satisfied from the food we have just eaten.

The Sfat Emet explains that the same distinction is true for Torah. The *brachah* we say before reading the Torah is over the Torah itself. Just as we say a *brachah rishonah* over the food we are about to eat, we say a *brachah* over the Torah from which we are about to read. He suggests that this *brachah* is akin to the holiday of *Shavuot* on which we celebrate the Torah itself. The second *brachah*, said after reading from the Torah parallels the *brachah achronah* we say on food. This blessing is not over the physical thing we have just enjoyed, but is over the sustaining power. Just as the food we eat sustains us and gives us physical energy to function in the world, so does the Torah we study sustain us and give us spiritual energy to function in the world. This second *brachah* corresponds to the holiday of *Simchat Torah*, on which we celebrate our relationship with Torah and our connection to it. We recognize that we could not function in this world without the *halachic* instruction, moral guidance and spiritual energy that the Torah provides on an ongoing basis.

This understanding of the Sfat Emet explains why *Simchat Torah* comes at the end of the intensive holiday season of *Tishrei*. As we leave the period of the calendar in which we experience heightened religious inspiration and spirituality, we recognize that we can maintain our spiritual connection through the sustaining power of the Torah. And so everyone is called to the Torah to recite a *bracha* before and after its reading. We recite these *brachot* with the hope and understanding that by maintaining our relationship with the Torah we will continue to nurture and sustain our spiritual well-being.

Chag Sameach!

Rabbi Kaplowitz Fun Fact: Rabbi Kaplowitz has 23 siblings.

(Noah Fields continued from page 1)

would be uninteresting, despite its many forms (*Tanach, Talmud, Mishna, Aggadah*, commentaries, etc.). Although read a couple of weeks ago, the *pasuk* "it is very close to your hearts" may come to mind. This suggests that, even though on the surface Torah study may not be appealing, when we truly take our time to appreciate and engage ourselves in it we can truly connect to Torah. Tana D'bei Eliezer seems to make this same point in a story:

Eliyahu Hanavi was wandering from place to place when he passed a Jew who lacked in study of Torah and Mishna. When the Jew scoffed him, Eliyahu questioned him, "My son, why do you not dedicate yourself to studying Torah". The Jew simply replied, "G-d has not given me the knowledge to study Torah". Eliyahu further inquired, "What is your occupation?". The Jew replied, "I am an animal trapper". "And how did you come to learn all that is needed to be an animal trapper?". "This knowledge - the knowledge to trap, kill, and sell animals - G-d gave to me". "If G-d gave you this knowledge, then how is it you do not have the knowledge to study Torah, of which it is said, 'it is very close to you, in your heart'?" (*Seder Eliyahu Zuta*; 14:1)

Achieving this intimate connection, though, is no easy task. Some of us may find the texts of *Aggadah* more than that of strict *Halacha*. This does not mean that we should not study what we don't like, rather, by studying what we connect to we will come to study and connect to other forms of Torah. By engrossing oneself in the stories of the B"SHT, or the allegories of the *Mishna* we will become inspired to seek out the more Halachic roots (or visa-versa).

The most important factor of this endeavor, though, is dedication. In the heat of midterms it may be hard to set aside our mundane studies, but this becomes true dedication to Torah study. At any point where we are faltering, where we say that "I can't learn now" or "I do not have time to learn now", it may help to recall the words of Hillel: "One should not say 'I shall study when I am free', for Torah and expect others to support us?! Rather, we must create a delicate balance between our devotion to Torah and our struggles in the mundane. We may find that a commitment of an hour, or so, a day (or even a week) may propel us to a higher level of observance. This, in turn, may revitalize and rejuvenate our experience in mundane tasks.

In summary, We all can connect to Torah study. We can all make time to do so. It is my wish that this holiday of *Simchat Torah*, propels us to these lofty goals. After all, Torah leads to good deeds.

Chag Sameach!

*Noah taught Lauren the word for pumpkin in Hebrew—
"dela'at"!*

For Love of the Torah

By Becca Sturgis '11

Simchat Torah is about LOVE. It is about the most daunting, terrifying, exciting, wonderful, joyful, and holy emotion that we are capable of feeling. *Simchat Torah* teaches us to open our hearts, to welcome in the feelings we hide from, and to rejoice in our closeness.

Often, unfortunately, we fall into ruts. We take things for granted and forget to appreciate the beautiful aspects of our lives. This applies to the Torah more than most of us would like to admit. We begin to perform *mitzvot* out of rote, dutifully but unfeelingly and thoughtlessly. We do the same to the people we love: our parents, our siblings, our friends, and our girlfriends, boyfriends, and spouses. We stop noticing when they take time out of their busy schedules to help us, because we simply expect it to be that way. We forget to say thank you, and we say "I love you" out of habit, without considering the meaning of those wonderful words. *Simchat Torah* opens our eyes and illuminates everything that we have to be thankful for. We celebrate the Torah with the kind of joy that accompanies deep love. It teaches us that the best parts of our lives are always present; we just need to stop and concentrate in order to fully appreciate them.

Simchat Torah gives us opportunities that we don't normally have – the same opportunities that a warm, loving relationship offers. For once, we are able to let our guard down. We dance and sing freely and energetically, though we would be far too embarrassed to do so in most settings. We have a chance to express ourselves, to demonstrate how in love with the Torah we are. We feel safe, surrounded by our community, performing rituals that are repeated year after year all over the world. We release our fears and our perceptions of vulnerability, and for once we confront our emotions face to face.

Simchat Torah draws our attention to a phenomenon that far too many of us are afraid of: closeness and intimacy. We hide ourselves in our work, take pride in self-sufficiency, and refuse to close the distance between us and the rest of the world. Why? We are afraid of being hurt, and perhaps even more afraid of the damage we might cause. On *Simchat Torah*, we challenge this fear of closeness. On any other day, we treat the Torah with awe and reverence, but we keep our distance. Those of us who do approach the Torah during *davening* touch it lightly with a *siddur* or a *tallit*, and many of us simply look on from our seats. On *Simchat Torah*, although we feel the same awe and reverence as always, we finally allow ourselves to move close to the Torah, both physically and spiritually. We hold it, hug it, and dance with it. We spin around in circles, sing to it, and lift it higher in the air. We realize that we are strong enough to be close to the Torah without dropping or damaging it.

Last year on *Simchat Torah*, I watched a girl dance with the Torah in her arms. She was crying, and she had an expression of ecstasy on her face. She was so wrapped up in that intimate moment with the Torah that she forgot about everyone else in the room. We should all learn from her: we should have those moments every day. Whether or not we are physically close to the Torah, we should concentrate on being spiritually and emotionally close. We should do the same with the people in our lives. For a moment, think about the people who mean the most to you. Focus on how much you love them until everything else fades away... Then call them and tell them (or better yet, show them) how much you love them.

We're only human. It's natural to feel vulnerable and scared, and even to push away from others as a result. It's natural to hide our emotions. It's even natural to take others, and the Torah, for granted. *Simchat Torah* provides the gentle push we need to confront our fears and let love and *simcha* into our lives.

Becca is getting married in 312 days!

SHORT VORTS

Renewing the Torah

By Daniel "DK" Kasdan '13

The *Gemara* in *Megillah* (31a) prescribes the Torah reading for *Simchat Torah*: "We read *V'zot HaBracha*, and we read the *Haftorah* of *Vaya'amod Shlomo*." Accordingly, the *Haftorah* we should be reading this Sunday comes from *Sefer Melachim*, and is the prayer King Shlomo recites at the *Chanukat HaBayit*, in which he beseeches the Almighty for the general welfare of Bnei Yisroel.

Tosafot note, however, that there is a prevalent custom to substitute the passage of *Va'Yihee Acharei Mot Moshe* as the *Haftorah*. Confused as to how a mere custom could disregard an explicit *Gemara*, they are quick to point out the seeming lack of logic in reading the first chapter of *Sefer Yehoshua*, and thus strongly discourage the practice.

Yet, contrary to such a decision, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules in favor of *Va'Yihee Acharei Mot Moshe*, which we do indeed use nowadays as the *Haftorah* on *Simchat Torah*. But why? What connection could there possibly be between the opening of *Sefer Yehoshua* and the holiday of *Simchat Torah*?

Some commentators explain that the passage is indeed appropriate for the day, for it mentions the passing of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Since we just finished the Five Books of Moses, the *Haftorah* is seen as a homage to him and all that he did for us.

But there is something deeper.

In explaining the practice of restarting the *Sefer Torah* with *Breishit* immediately after concluding it, Chazal note that "The Torah is beloved to us like a new object and not like an old command which a person does not submit to. It is like a new one towards which everyone runs" (*Sifre Va'eichanan*). In a word, the theme of the day is the renewal of the Torah.

With this in mind, it is quite clear why we read *Va'Yihee Acharei Mot Moshe*. The first *perek* of *Sefer Yehoshua* is about renewal. Moshe is dead. The *Dor HaMidbar* is all but extinct. The days of wandering through the desert are coming to a close. It is a time of changing roles for Bnei Yisroel. With Yehoshua taking over as leader, the Jews must adapt to their new status as G-d's warriors, whose every want and desire doesn't simply fall from the sky each night. Yet, at its core, their mission remains the same: "To observe, to do, according to the entire Torah that Moses My servant commanded you; do not deviate from it to the right or to the left... contemplate it day and night" (*Yehoshua* 1:7-8).

It is our job to remember that in this time of renewal—when, free of sin, we begin the year and the Torah once more—we should not lose focus of what's really important in life. We should remain committed to the Torah and *Avodat Hashem*, "for then you will make your way successful, and then you will act wisely" (*Yehoshua* 1:8).

DK wrote his own byline: "Hailing from Teaneck, NJ, Daniel Kasdan enjoys long walks on the beach, a moist Reese's for breakfast, and a nice shtickle Torah at bedtime. This is his first contribution to Torat Emet." We're not sure why he didn't trust us to do the job...

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